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A COMMUNITY OF VISION:

TOWARDS AN ECCLESIAL SOCIAL IMAGINATION.

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INTRODUCTION

Theology is always faced with the task of re-articulating the Gospel on behalf of the community (church) which is called to live by its vision. As such, it is imperative that theology be culturally and historically grounded, not speaking from a detached vantage point but in its human context. This does not mean that we interpret the Gospel in terms of our worlds. But Christians are called upon to live by the envisioned world of the Gospel, a world that is an "already but not yet." This itself may require a radical re-ordering of the material basis of our usual/normal world of discourse and intercourse.

One temptation for the Church is to emphasize the "not yet" side of the eschaton, paying no more than lip-service to the fact that the kingdom of God is a definite reality here and now. Christians must be formed to enter into truthful conversation with the reality of our social and material existence. As David Tracy warns, refusal to face the complexity of the social reality "may prove damaging as an earlier generation's refusal to face historical consciousness."[1]

In our time theology must face the challenges of increasing economic imbalances, and, particularly, the phenomenon of war and violence which has turned many into anonymous, voiceless, and faceless, indeed tarnished images of God. Particularly, this phenomenon of violence relates to the nation-state *mythos* which assumes an original state of violence and individuality. The story is that human beings are by nature chaotic. As such, they must be kept under check by the greater threat of violence. It is this ontology of violence that the church must counter with an ontology of peace. This counter-ontology assumes a primordial peace and unity

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[1] David Tracy, The Analogical Imagination (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 12.

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of creation. Though this peace and unity was disrupted by Adam's sin, it has been restored in and through Jesus Christ who has re-written and re-membered us into God's story. This re-membering calls on Christians to be a people of peace, and elaborates an ethic based on two theological affirmations, namely, that we are all created in the image of God, and that our existence is dependent on God's gracious election. These affirmations constitute Christians into a people of peace, a people who cannot do violence to others without forfeiting their very identity. For in Christ Jesus, all barriers that had come to divide us are broken. Neither race nor nationality, not even our religious differences, can sanction the use of violence. Even more, God's gracious election sets us free from the violent defense of either land or nationality. We must rather be the beachhead of God's peaceable kingdom.

But this ethic belongs to Christian practice. It is by embodying a life of peace through its convictions and practices that the church will concretely witness to what difference it makes to be a people formed and informed by God's story. The world needs to see the gospel message enacted in the Body of Christ. This embodied existence will itself provide responses in particular historical, social, and political situations. In all this, imagination is a *sine qua non* as an antenna both theology and the church must employ if they are to posit new visions of human possibility and new forms of communal life as alternatives to the violence and dispossession that has come to characterize many people's lives.

This work endeavors to show that imagination can and does serve as a horizon for the genuine and meaningful conversation with the world. But as Sabina Lovibond notes, "any imaginative conversation may involve an exchange of the 'familiar objects' of discourse for the

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other novel object."[2] To be able to see and accept the novel object is a skill gained through

training into the practices and way of life of a particular community. For Christians there is no

better vision and community-forming practice than Eucharistic performance. This performance,

we shall attempt to show, not only diffuses the false nation-state soteriology, it shapes and

transforms our Christian vision making us capable of peaceful politics. But before we tell both

the nation-state's story and the church's story, we need to explore the concept of imagination,

insisting on its social nature, for it only shows promise within a network of practices fostered

within a community. This is the task of the first chapter.

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[2] Sabina Lovibond, <u>Realism and Imagination in Ethics</u> (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 192.

1.0 THE GRAMMAR OF IMAGINATION:
Beyond Idealism and Realism.

There is a tension that affects almost every discipline of intellectual discourse and cultural life. This tension is evident within such opposed schools of thought as relativism vs objectivism, idealism vs realism, theory vs praxis, thought vs action. Philosophical and theological discourse has tended to move within these polarities with the resultant effect of dualistic theologies and philosophies; body vs soul, material vs spiritual, worldly vs heavenly. As Richard Bernstein notes, one voice tells us that "there is a world of objective reality that exists independent of us and that has a determinate nature or essence that we can know."[1] Another voice brushes this off as humanly degrading and instead assures us that reality is dependent on our consciousness. As Bernstein continues to note, "even the attempts that some have made to break out of this framework of thinking have all too frequently been assimilated to these standard oppositions."[2]

The task of exorcizing these tensions lies beyond the scope of this chapter. Rather we shall attempt to move the discussion of imagination beyond these traditional extremes and their pervasive either/or (e.g, either one is an idealist or a realist). This move is necessary in our discussion of the grammar of imagination for mainly two reason: first to avoid any lingering temptation to place our treatment of imagination within these traditional polarities. Second to emphasize the social nature of imagination which is given lip-service by both idealists and realists. The mistake by both idealists and realists, we shall attempt to show, is that they fail to

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[1] Richard J. Bernstein, <u>Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and</u> Praxis (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 9

[2] Bernstein, 1.

see the self communally, and so fail to see the faculty of imagination in its rightly light, namely as socially and historically constituted. Our task then will be to give a constructive communal account of imagination free from the entrapments of idealism and realism both of which almost have no place for communal practices, habits, and stories which make us the kind of people we happen to be.

1.1 Idealism and the Self.

Idealism is a very wide concept that we can hardly discuss exhaustively, and neither is this our intention. We shall discuss it in as far as it presents temptations to treat of imagination in an idealist point of view, and also in as far as it presents a picture of the self that is disembodied. In general it is a theory of reality that attributes to consciousness/mind a primary role in the constitution of the world. As such, all reality is mind-dependent and can have no existence apart from the mind that is conscious of it. As a theory of knowledge idealism "posits a specific inner capacity of forming concepts which is solely dependent on the spontaneous creative faculty of spirit/reason." This faculty does not originate from experience "but that experience is spiritually permeated and rendered intelligible by it."[3]

Temptations to associate this faculty with imagination are abounding. Immanuel Kant, for example, in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, sees imagination as "a transcendental productive power providing a priori schemata that makes possible the application of the categories of sense."[4] As Rudolf Makkreel goes on to note, in *The Critique of Pure Judgement*, Kant extends

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[3] Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, 91.

[4] Rudolf K. Makreel, Imagination and Interpretation in Kant (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 1.

the powers of the imagination in relation to reflective judgement and reason. "[He] ascribes to the imagination the power of aesthetic comprehension, and also the capacity to create aesthetic ideas by which it can present *rational* ideas to sense"[5] (emphasis added).

In associating imagination with reason/ mind Kant was being consistent with his conception of reason as the only stable foundation for our knowledge. However, he was not the first, for Descartes, in the 16th Century, had seen reason as the stable rock upon which we can rest assured against the vicissitudes that constantly threaten our being. But why this emphasis on reason?

1.2 Quest for an 'Archimedian Point'

The answer to the above question lies in what Richard Bernstein has called the 'Cartesian Anxiety' which he admits did not begin with Descartes. The anxiety led Descartes to a systematic quest to find "an Archimedian point upon which we can ground our knowledge."[6] In the first Meditations Descartes sets out the reasons for which we may doubt about all things. In his process of self-discovery he decides "to consider that the heavens, the earth, the colors, figures, sound, and all other external things are nought but the illusions and dreams."[7] After a series of doubts he finds that at least one truth remains even though he may be deceived about everything else-- the truth of his own existence. But what was the ground of his new found truth? "To speak accurately," he tells us, "I am not more than a thing which thinks, that is to say, a mind or a soul,

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[5] Makreel, 1.

[6] Bernstein, 13.

[7] Elizabeth S. Haldane, The Philosophical Works of Descartes, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 148.

or an understanding, or reason,...a thing which thinks."[8]

The self that Descartes defines in terms of consciousness is one that is self-reliant, self-conscious, and all-responsible whose true identity lies hidden behind the veil of his body, feelings, emotions. For Descartes, " I can consider myself as having no hands, no eyes, no flesh, no blood, nor any senses."[9] And I shall find, in the end, that I am essentially a thing that thinks. This 'Archimedian point' was to become a favorable point of departure for what has come to be termed as the 'Enlightenment Project'. Fergus Kerr has noted that it is Kant, above all, "who has produced the most influential variation on the Cartesian paradigm."[10]

Like Descartes, Kant was anxious to find a universal and stable ground not only for knowledge, but also for moral agency. He rejects both Hume's and Diderot's attempts to ground moral agency in desire and the passions respectively. It is in reason that Kant finds this secure foundation, for as noted by Alasdair MacIntyre, Kant insists that " it is of the essence of reason that it always lays down principles that are universal, categorical and internally consistent. Hence a rational morality will lay down principles which both can and ought to be held by all men, independent of circumstances and conditions, and which could consistently be obeyed by every rational agent on every occasion."[11]

It is no wonder that this should be called the most influential variation on the Cartesian

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[8] Haldane, 152.

[9] Haldane, 148.

[10] Kerr Fergus, Theology after Wittgenstein (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1986), 5.

[11] Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 40

paradigm. By positing reason as the only stable ground for moral agency, Kant like Descartes,

had invented an *eterna humanum*, one that is beyond any contingent and historical

determinability. Iris Murdoch, in *The Sovereignty of Good*, beautifully describes the self that both

the Cartesian and Kantian anxiety has imposed on us:

> How recognizable, how familiar to us, is the man so beautifully portrayed in the
> Grundlegung, who confronted even with Christ turns away to consider the judgement of
> his own conscience and to hear the voice of his own reason. Stripped of the exiguous
> metaphysical background which Kant was prepared to allow him, this man is with us still,
> free, independent, lonely, powerful, rational, responsible, brave, the hero of so many
> novels and books of moral philosophy. The *raison detre* of this attractive but misleading
> creature is not far to seek. He is the offspring of the age of science, confidently rational
> and yet increasingly aware of his alienation from the material universe which his
> discoveries reveal.[12]

Yes, this man is still with us displaced and disembodied. He is a man who discards and scorns

traditional boundaries provided by the community, and a view of human life as ordered to a

given end. Unfortunately this same self is found disguised in many theological works, and to this

self we now turn.

1.3 The Mental Self in Theological reflection.

The self that the Cartesian legacy had freed from any seemingly restrictive connections

found itself in the work of many theologians too. Perhaps this self is no better displayed than in

Timothy O'Connell's "onion-peel view of the self." For him,

> In an appropriate if homely image, people might be compared to onions. Like onions they
> are comprised of myriad layers beginning at the surface and moving to the center. None
> of these layers can stand by itself, and yet each has its identity. At the outermost layer, as
> it were, we find the environment, their world, the things they own. Moving inside we find
> their actions, their behavior, the things they do. And then the body, that which is the

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[12] Iris Murdoch, <u>The Sovereignty of Good</u> (London: Routeledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1985), 80.

"belonging" of a person and yet also is the person. Going deeper we discover moods, emotions, feelings. Deeper still are the convictions by which they define themselves. And at the very center, in that dimensionless pinpoint around which everything else resolves, is the person himself or herself- the I.[13]

The individual that emerges out of O'Connell's peeling off process both resembles and differs from the one generated by both Descartes and Kant. It is too a self that lies hidden behind its body, emotions, environment, feelings, etc. But the paradox is that (and here lies the difference) what remains after peeling off all these is a 'dimensionless pinpoint'-- in other words, the self has fled! O'Connell is quick to recognize how paradoxical the kind of self he has generated is. He writes:

> Although we are driven to assert the existence of the human person within activity,...nonetheless it remains true that personhood is the one thing about human beings which we cannot see. In a process of reflection I seek to discover myself. I hold up to the eye of my mind the experiences that I have. But who looks at those experiences? I do, the person that I am. So I look deeper, at my emotions, my feelings, my attitudes. I reflect upon those things that characterize the way I live. But who does the looking? I do, the person that I am...Repeatedly I attempt to gaze upon the very center of myself. But I always fail. For the real person that I am always remains the viewer, and can never become the viewed.[14]

Things become even more confusing, a gulf is created between the human person as a *be-er*, and the human person as *do-er*. As a *be-er*, the person is unchangeable, but as a *do-er*, the self is changeable. However, such a conception of the self has its complications primary among which, as Emmanuel Katongole has noted, "is the assumption that the self's real identity(... the I) lies

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[13] Timothy O'Connell, <u>Principles for a Catholic Morality</u> (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978), 59

[14] O'Connell, 59

outside its history in a self-defining stance or decision."[15] Even more, accepting the distinction between self as *be-er* and self as *do-er* already invents a bifurcated self whose actions have no logical connection to what he/she is.

It is this very bias against history, the tendency to regard the self's concrete manifestations and engagements as limits to be transcended if the self is to define itself as a person, that must be overcome if our discussion of imagination is to be fruitful. Unless this is done we too may come out with a view of imagination that is not only disembodied but also floats over history and community. O`Connell's own understanding of imagination may serve as an illustration. He sees imagination as a mental faculty endowed with the power to create images through programming. He embraces Gallway's understanding of the human mind as "a computer that works through images rather than ideas."[16] For Gallway, within each one of us there are two selves. In the game of playing tennis, for example, self 1, as the conscious teller, provides a running commentary on how things are going, while self 2 as the unconscious doer plays the game.[17]

O`Connell wants to apply this same image to the world of moral living "In this world", he says, "if it is true that moral sensibilities are rooted in experience, it is also true that this experience takes place in two locations; "out there" and "in here".[18] Here we are again with the

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[15] Emmanuel Katongole, <u>Beyond Universal Reason: The relationship between Ethics and Religion in the works of Stanley Hauerwas</u> (Notre Dame?: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 40.

[16] O`Connell, <u>Making Disciples,</u> 110.

[17] O`Connell, 110.

[18] O`Connell, 111.

be-er/ doer distinction that we encountered earlier. What is intriguing, however, is the fact that even though O`Connell realizes that imagination is rooted in experience, he still empowers it with the capability to create its own experience. Whether this creation is *ex nihilo* or from somewhere over and above historical contingency is a question that remains unanswered. Unfortunately, it is this very ambiguous power of imagination that he thinks is instructive for moral training.

1.4 The Theistic Gambler

O`Connell is not alone among theologians with a mentalistic conception of the self. Hans Kung, in his massive work *'Does God Exist? An answer for Today'*, argues that man's experience of freedom places him in a situation where he only has to trust the existence of reality independent of his consciousness. Nothing can destroy this freedom, and "all secular dependencies and biological processes of evolution affect what might be called the material of man, not man himself...[for] any knowledge of man if absolutized and understood as knowledge of man as a whole, causes freedom to disappear."[19] All this, for Kung, is because man's freedom is neither a property of his willingness nor merely of his action, but of his own being.

Equipped with such freedom, the individual must decide for himself/herself what fundamental attitude to take towards reality. This is because, though reality demands a reaction, its certainty remains inconclusive, and as such "it can be interpreted in the sense of being or not-being" (439). The self then, is at liberty to say No or Yes to this uncertain reality. This Yes or No is "the enforceable and unprovable trust or mistrust in the reality of the world and of my own

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[19] Hans Kung, <u>Does God Exist? An answer for Today</u> (Garden City: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1980), 435.

self" (439). What applies to reality also applies to God. "As there is no logically conclusive proof for the reality of reality," Kung concludes, "neither is there one for the reality of God. The proof of God is no more logically conclusive than is love. The relationship to God is one of trust" (575).

Kung's individual turns out to be whatKerr has called a "theistic gambler"-- one who simply decides to "trust the reality of other people (and God) and all the rest of the rich tapestry of life."[20] But such a conception requires that the individual finds a neutral ground from which to view the world. This self, in the end, is not only disembodied but a loner, one to whom the community with its practices, habits, traditions all depend on the mercy of his/her trust and fundamental attitude.

It is such an autonomous and almost self-creating individual that we want to avoid in our discussion of imagination. Our treatment is to embrace the whole person, one who finds himself/herself amidst historical contingencies, one who is the bearer of a particular tradition, and as such, is a member of a particular community. For as MacIntyre reminds us, "what I am...is an essential part of what I inherit, a specific past that is present to some degree in my present. I find myself part of a history and that is generally to say, whether I like it or not, whether I recognize it or not, one of a bearer of a tradition."[21] It is the community that provides us with both possibilities and limitations to see the world in a certain/particular way. But to say this is already to anticipate what is to yet to come in our discussion of imagination as a social act. Before we do this we need to make it clear that not only idealist but also realists fail to present us

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[20] Kerr, 15.

[21] MacIntyre, 221.

with a good framework in which one can offer a fruitful explication of the grammar of imagination.

1.5 Realism: Reality as given.

Realism too is a wide concept whose thorough exploration goes beyond the task of this work. We shall be content to look at its basic assumptions and explore these in the way they make our imaginative task impotent.

It is immensely hard not to fall into the naive assurances of realism. Realism in general postulates the existence of an objective world independent of the individual's experience of it. The realist tells us that the world of fact is independent of our knowledge of it. This independence is not only between the individual and the world out there as such, but also between individuals themselves. The nature of the gulf that divides the independent beings from one another is peculiarly indicated, and in fact typically exemplified, by a certain separation that is discoverable between knowledge and its material objects. To all this common sense bears witness , for it is self-evident that "while notoriously isolated from one another, as our failure to read the ideas of neighbors proves, [we] can still know the same outer object."[22] But appeal to common sense is based on a common fallacious analogy with the realist's own case-- that reality appears to everybody else in the same way that it appears to him/her. Moreover, in the ordinary world of experience, it is assumed, common sense knows many instances of difference and independence not only among objects but also among human beings. But as Josiah Royce insightfully notes, "common sense also knows that often empirical objects which have been

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[22] Josiah Royce, The World and the Individual (New York: MacMillan & Co., Ltd., 1899), 102

called mutually and even totally independent turn out to be, in other aspects, very closely linked."[23]

1.5.1 Theological Realism.

The assumptions of realism have found a way into theological discourse, though with some variations. Here realism is contrasted with utopia in the understanding of human affairs. Unlike theological idealists, like Kung who accords the individual with the license to impose meaning on reality, theological realists assume that reality is a given, " an 'out there' which may not be altered simply by wishful thinking, or evaded by circumvention of human imagination."[24] As such, then, theological realism calls for coherency between our knowledge and experience. This coherence, as Robin Lovin notes, "is not a matter of wishful thinking about how things might work together, but of steady inquiry into the interactions that are really there."[25]

Realists, therefore, must face squarely and candidly the given facts of experience, and pay attention to the social-political realities of human experience for it is only through this realistic assessment that we are enabled to posit alternatives to the given. Walter Marshall Horton beautifully summarizes the task of theological realism:

> [The] word realism suggests to me, above all, a resolute determination to face all the facts of life candidly, beginning preferably with the most stubborn, perplexing, and disheartening ones, so that any lingering romantic illusions may be dispelled at the start; and then, through these stubborn facts and not in spite of them, to pierce as deep as one may into the solid structure of reality, until one finds whatever ground of courage, hope,

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[23] Royce, 107.

[24] Tyron Inbody, The Constructive Theology of Bernard Meland: Postliberal Empirical Realism (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 221.

[25] Robin W. Lovin, Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 46.

and faith is actually there, independent of human preferences and desires, and so cast anchor in the ground.[26]

This task of a realist perhaps is no better vigorously pursued than in the works of Reinhold Niebuhr whose realism is based on his rather pessimistic Christian view of human nature. For Niebuhr human beings are caught up in the dialectics of creatureliness and transcendence, finitude and possibility. As creatures they are finite, contingent, in fact subject to 'all the necessities of their embeddedness in nature and their place in history.' But at the same time they are endowed with the capacity for self-transcendence, that is, "the capacity to stand beyond their world, time and society."[27] This capacity for self-transcendence often leads man into illusions by constantly inviting him to flee the limitations of history while at the same time seeking to find security in the myths and illusion of limitlessness which society offers him. But accepting the temptation to flee limitations is to forget that no human society evades historical contingency and sin. For, in Niebuhr's words, "where there is history at all, there is freedom, where there is freedom, there is sin."[28]

For Niebuhr, then, a perfect society is an illusion. This is the idea that he vividly expressed in *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* where he writes: "The conclusion most abhorrent to the modern mood is that the possibilities of evil grow with the possibilities of good, and that human history therefore is not so much chronicle of the progressive victory of the good

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[26] Lovin, 46.

[27] Larry Rasmussen, <u>Reinhold Niebuhr, Theologian of Public Life</u> (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1988), 30.

[28] Reinhold Niebuhr, <u>The Nature and Destiny of Man</u>, vol. 2 (New York: Charles Schibner's Sons, 1943), 80

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over evil, of cosmos over chaos, as the story of an ever increasing cosmos, creating ever increasing possibilities of chaos."[29]

Human sinfulness must always be at the back of our mind not only as we engage in society but as we propose solutions and alternatives to human problems. To put it bluntly, we have to be "realists". Such realism requires that we "take all factors in a social and political situation, which offer resistance to established norms, into account, particularly the factors of self-interest and power." Citing Machiavelli, Niebuhr continues; "the purpose of the realist is to follow the truth of the matter rather than the imagination of it; for many have pictures of republics and principalities which have never been seen."[30]

Two conclusions may be drawn from the above citation: first imagination for Niebuhr is no different from fantasy, in fact it generates illusions. This point we shall discuss later. Second we have to accept things as they are if we are to be realistic. For sure we cannot assume a neutral stand point and pretend to be dealing with reality. But this does not mean that we should uncritically take these realities as givens before which we have to bow. It is interesting to note how this appeal to be realistic was a foundational *mythos* for the development of liberal political and social theory, which assumes violence and individuality as basic to human nature. As we shall see in the next chapter, classical political theorists such as Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau all begin with a 'realistic' reading of man in his original position. Hobbes for one, finds human nature to be fundamentally chaotic and therefore in need of a sovereign power to keep it under control with the greater threat of violence. This sovereign power is not only the embodiment of

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[29] Niebuhr, <u>An Interpretation of Christian Ethics</u>, 2.

[30] Niebuhr, <u>Augustine's Realism, in The City of God, a collection of Critical Essays</u>, 119.

individual wills, but holds an exclusive right over the means of violence. And this exclusive right over the means of violence becomes a unique characteristic of modern sovereign states.

The call "to take all factors into account" then, may sometimes sanction the use of violence. Because the world is seen as set by the forces of violence and power, and sin is taken as one of the realities, use of coercive force to bring men's sinful tendencies under control may sometimes be the remedy. In fact, for Niebuhr, as Rasmussen has noted, violence may be required "in defense of a better order, improvement of a reformable one, or a revolution against a hopelessly unjust, recalcitrant one."[31]

Niebuhr, and realism as we have described it, assumes a given state of nature in the face of which we are rendered impotent to imagine alternatives. In the face of an absolute given reality external to our human selves we can hardly but typically be submissive, uncritically respectable, and conservative. As Katongole notes following Stanley Hauerwas , appeals to realism "are sometimes nothing more than the assertion of the facticity of the status quo and its necessary acceptance...[This] uncritical acceptance of the status quo very often means that we remain captured by the self imposed necessity of violence."[32] But violence cannot be accepted as one of the givens, at least not by Christians, a people called to and disciplined by the witness of the messianic peace which itself issues a challenge to our imagination. We are called to envision a time in which "the wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fabling together, and a little boy shall lead them" (Isaiah 11:6). What an image of peaceful coexistence between naturally opposed forces, indeed an invitation to go beyond our

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[31] Raumussen, 301.

[32] Katongole, Beyond Universal Reason, 225.

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'normal' and 'usual' ways of seeing!

1.6 Beyond Idealism and Realism: The Community.

Thus far we have presented the presuppositions of both idealism and realism, sometimes arguing against them. We have noted that both idealists and realists agree on the reality of the outside world, but differ in their description of it. For idealists reality is mind-dependent, and our knowledge of things is as they appear to us. Said differently, the self of an idealist is an internal entity. Realists, on the other hand, describe this same reality as objectively set and given, and as such we cannot make it what we like simply by re-imaging it. But we have found both descriptions to be deficient for they both picture the individual as a lonely monologue struggling to describe the world almost *ex nihilo*. Wittgenstein is very instructive when he notes;

> What I want to say is that it is remarkable those who ascribe reality only to things and not to our ideas move about unquestioningly in the world as idea and never look outside it; That is: how unquestioned the given still is. It would be the very devil if it were a tiny picture taken from an oblique, distorting angle. The unquestioned- life- is supposed to be something accidental, marginal, while something which I never normally puzzle at is taken as the real thing.[33]

Both realists and idealist are concerned to describe reality whilst forgetting that description itself is a skill that requires training into a community's way of life. Yet the community is left on the margins. We must, therefore, as Kerr advises, "call back the detached self and the passing scene into the community which has been the only given." This is because, as he continues to note, "our very existence as rational beings, never mind our masterly of techniques of depiction, depends upon our being bound together as participants in innumerable vital activities."[34]

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[33] Ludwig Wittgenstein, in Fergus Kerr, 133.

[34] Kerr, 135.

We cannot depict the world from a detached point of view. Rather, this very depiction is caught up within particular historical and communal practices. This is precisely because the individual is an embodiment of the stories, traditions, and customs of a particular community. As Katongole notes, "At birth the self already finds itself placed by and within wider stories not of its own making but which offer not only possibilities but also limits to what the self can be."[35] Thus our 'selves', descriptions, and depictions of the world are partly those of the communities which nurture us through the various stories, customs, habits, and traditions. These imprint on us an indelible mark such that whether consciously or not we are the kind of people they have formed us to be.

The 'given', then so emphasized by "realists", is not so much the world but life which consists in shared practices and day- to-day activities. We are not passive observers in the world nor do we have absolute licence to impose whatever meaning we want upon reality. Rather our depictions of the world depend on the interplay between nature and nurture. "There is no getting hold of anything in the world," says Kerr, "except by a move in the network of practices which is the community to which we belong."[36] Put differently, our depictions of the world depend on the way we have been trained to see it. To use Wittgenstein's classic example of the 'duck-rabbit', to be able to see a rabbit as such or a duck as such, only makes sense within certain linguistic practices. The very names 'rabbit' and 'duck' presuppose a particular community's way of naming.

The foregoing argument lays the ground for our claim that imagination is a social act. The

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[35] Katongole, 112.

[36] Fergus, 104-5.

very grammar of imagination, (we shall discuss this shortly), only makes sense within certain linguistic practices. "To understand a language," says Wittgenstein, "means to be master of a technique."[37] Such technique can only be achieved within a communal way of life. Just as for Wittgenstein the very idea of a private language is incoherent, so is the idea of private imagination. It is within communal practices that we are enabled not only to see what already exists, but also to bring about what may exist. In other words, the way of life in which we are brought up to participate can equip us with the imagination that may transcend the range of concrete experience that may be had within that community. As such, even what may be appear to be the fruit of individual insight presupposes participation into communal practices. A portrait of the Pieta, to take an example, may be unimaginable to one who has not been formed by the Christian story of the passion and death of Christ. This is why Hauerwas is on target when he notes that imagination "is not a power that exists somewhere in the mind; but a pointer to a community's constant willingness to expose itself to the innovations required by its convictions."[38]

Our emphasis on particularity calls for pointing to a particular community whose way of life forms our imagination truthfully. This will be the task of the next chapter. But we must take leave now to explore the meaning of imagination as a concept in the way that we want to employ it.

1.7 The Grammar of Imagination.

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[37] Ludwig Wittgenstein, <u>Philosophical Investigation</u>, trans. G. E. M. Enscombe, 3rd ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968), 81

[38] Hauerwas, in Katongole, 92.

Despite its frequency in everyday linguistic discourse, imagination remains an elusive concept. It is often associated with creativity, spontaneity, unique genesis, insight. We call writers of fiction, painters, poets, imaginative because they create fabulous worlds not limited by the usual and the normal. Understood this way, "the imaginative is often the province of disillusioned individuals isolated from society."[39] But this is misleading, for we often call imaginative those who display insight and vision in pointing to the good of society. This only shows how ambiguous a concept imagination is, and therefore, in need of explication in the way we want to employ it.

Garret Green in *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* advises that "a good way to approach such a concept is to follow the recommendations of ordinary language philosophy and pay particular attention to the range and pattern of meanings...and its family of related terms in typical nontechnical use."[40] We find Green's description helpful, and therefore, we shall follow his advice. Related to imagination one finds such terms as fantasy, illusion, image, imagery. Common to all these terms "is an image or picture representing some object that is not directly accessible to the imagining subject" (62). This very understanding presents ambiguities, for the object of imagination may be both real and illusory. For Green, the use of the term imagination moves between these two poles. He notes two illusory uses of the term; the first he calls *fantastic* "since it produces what is commonly known as fantasy, and includes the various imagery activities for the human spirit" (63). The second, which he calls *deceitful*,

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[39] Hauerwas, <u>Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society</u> (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 51.

[40] Garret Green, <u>Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination</u> (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 62

"includes all attempts to falsify, distort, or misrepresent reality with the purpose of misleading oneself or others" (63).

Realistic use of the term imagination, on the other hand, deals with real objects to which we have no direct access due to either temporal or spatial non-presence. Imagination may team up with memory not only to recall 'social or collective history', but also to present "future reality by means of extrapolations from past experience, anticipation of new developments, and hypothesis about future states of affairs" (64). Spatial non-presence refers to objects to which one has no direct access due to one's place in relation to the object.

After charting out these various distinctions between illusory and realistic uses of the term imagination, Green goes on to discuss the way imagination is pertinent to theology. Here he notices three basic levels: first is the transcendental level where imagination refers to the "conditions necessary for there to be any experience at all" (65). Second is the level of perception which helps to grasp whole patterns of atomistic sense data. The third and highest level is interpretation which presupposes the first two. Here "a subject that is not available to direct observation is mediated by selective and integrating images, which are themselves of necessity drawn from our experience of reality that is immediately accessible, that is, from the ``mesocosmic`` world of present everyday experience— what can be directly seen, heard, handled, felt" (66).

Though Green helpfully teases out the distinctions between illusory and realistic uses of the term imagination, we still find his description deficient. It appears to be an individual's epistemological achievement possible without training within a community's habits and practices. Such a disembodied imaginative achievement remains a definite possibility, but more

often than not it will fall under what he calls illusory and fantasy. In contrast, we must emphasize that imagination can only show promise within an organic grouping of persons who are participants in a common mode of activity. For, as Hauerwas notes, "it is not so much something we have in our minds, [r]ather...a pattern of possibilities fostered within a community by the stories and correlative commitments that make it what it is."[41]

Hauerwas's insight is instructive in as far as it locates these possibilities within a community's practices, habits, and vision. It is these that discipline the individual's vision, and provides him or her with a framework for rightful vision. In an idealistic conception of the self, such situating of imagination in the community sounds not only strange but offensive. For idealists seem to suggest that the individual can float over historical engagements and manifestations which are seen are restricting one's ability to see beyond the usual and normal. Moreover, the reality outside one's mind remains at the mercy of individual decision and trust. Likewise, a naive "realism" is equally unhelpful. For as long as the world is accepted as a given, our imaginative efforts to alter this reality will be no better than mere manipulation. Perhaps we have to emphasize Hauerwas's reminder that "the world is not simply there ready to be known, but rather is known well only when known through the practices and habits of a particular community constituted by a truthful story."[42]

Talking about 'a community constituted by a truthful story' forces us to ask, what community? Which story? Our focus will be on the church, a community which has been graciously called and covenanted to share in God's own story. This is a call to and in freedom

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[41] Hauerwas, Against the Nations, 12.

[42] Hauerwas, In Katongole, 92.

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and peace to embody the coming reign of God, and thus to be a visible sign of God's redemption. This community's vocation then, is to live out while at the same time awaiting the messianic peace in which, as Isaiah envisions, "the wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fabling together, and a little boy shall lead them" (Isaiah 11:6). This is neither a utopian call to live out an impossible ideal, nor must we passively listen to it in awe and adoration. It is a challenge to the church to live out God's peaceful reign in her very life, her practices, her politics. Such a politics plays the double duty of disciplining the church's own vision and of presenting an alternative to the violence and unjust habits of the world.

Speaking about violence brings us squarely with yet another story, the story of the nation-state which, by assuming a primordial state of violence and disunity, has tended more towards violence than peace. It is this story that we want to read *vis a vis* that of the church which, as we shall suggest, offers the possibility of peace.

1.8 Conclusion.

We have laid a case against both idealism's attempt to make reality solely dependent on the thinking subject, and realism's conception of an objectively given reality. We have argued that idealism's mental conception of the self displaces and disembodies the individual, for it attempts to place the individual over and beyond any historical contingencies and determinability. Realism participates in the same error in so far as it pictures the world as a "given", so separating the "self" from it as merely a solitary onlooker. In contrast, our view of the individual is of one who is a participant within a common mode of activity. For good or for worse, we are the kind of people that our communities have formed us to be. It is through the

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disciplining resources of the community that individuals are enabled to see and respond imaginatively to the challenges their way of life presents. It must however be emphasized that the self conceived independent from the world will lead to a failed understanding of imagination, seeing it neither as communally formed, nor as practical, nor as capable of opening up genuinely new possibilities for description and action. Our attempt has been to present a communal account of imagination that opens up new possibilities as a result of the disciplining resources of a community. We shall now consider two communities, the church and the nation-state, whose foundational *mythoi* form people to construe the world differently.

2.0 IMAGINING THE CHURCH:
Church Soteriology Vs State Soteriology.

Imagination, so we have suggested, is dependent on shared historical and communal practices. Our description and depictions of the world are largely those of the community which nurtures and trains our vision through the power of its traditions, stories, and habits. It is through these that a community seeks to bind its people together and to direct them towards a certain conception of the good. For individuals can hardly name the good except as participants in a socially embodied way of life. This is precisely because such notions as "the good", "truth", "salvation", "justice", and "peace" are not givens but only historically learned and employed within a particular social form of life. All this points to the fact that the world will constantly be differently described, narrated, framed, and constructed by particular communities. Thus, our participation within a particular community draws us into a particular vision of the world. The challenge for the community is to shape the imagination of its members so that, without the practices, stories, habits, and traditions associated with that particular community, members have no way of 'seeing' and 'knowing' what, say, "peace", "salvation", "justice" are.

This chapter contrasts two communities, the Church and the Nation-State, which are both imagined. By this I do not mean that they are not real, only that the interaction between their members goes beyond face to face contact. One understands oneself as communing with others other than those one meets, sees, or talks to. Yet these are communities with different stories and visions. We shall treat the Church story and the State story as parallel accounts of salvation from chaos to peace through the enactment of a social body. The Christian story is one of a primal unity and peace which were lost through the sin of Adam. Ecclesial soteriology then, reclaims

the original unity and peace of creation. And this has been achieved through the Body of Christ. The State story, on the other hand, imagines a natural state of individuality and violence which can be overcome by individuals bonding together to form a social body. This Nation-State soteriology, we shall attempt to show, is a false one. For though is attempts to unify people through the enactment of a social body, this body, as William T. Cavanaugh has noted, "is a monstrosity of many separate limbs proceeding directly out of a gigantic head."[1] Moreover, this body can hardly be held together without coercion and violence. For violence is almost intrinsic to the very creation of the modern state. We shall draw on Cavanaugh's plausible argument to show that while the state may claim to limit violence-- and sometimes it may--the modern state is actually based on violence in so far as "it establishes human government not on the basis of a primal unity, but from an assumption of the essential individuality of the human race."[2] For once individuality has been assumed, then violence becomes a valuable instrument in keeping self-interested individuals from each other.

Beyond this story of violence stands the church's story which is capable of an alternative form of politics. Such an alternative politics may be variously articulated. But for our case, we shall base it on two key theological affirmations, namely, that all humanity is created in the image of God, and our existence as church is dependent on God's gracious election. These two, we shall attempt to show, articulate a different form of politics that diffuses any discriminations based on color, race, sex, nationality, or even social status. Even more, it sets us free from the violent assertion of our wills over others for, it is not we who choose to bundle together, but God who chooses to write us into God's own story.

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[1] William T. Cavanaugh, "'The City": Beyond Secular Parodies,' Radical Orthodoxy (London: Routledge, 1999): 193.

[2] Cavanaugh, 186.

For this alternative vision to become a reality, however, there are two challenges that need to be overcome: First, the church must capture the imagination of Christians so that their Christian identity takes precedence over the national or tribal one. These two seem to be deeply engraved in people's imagination to the extent that even Christians, unfortunately, find it no shame to take up arms against other nations or peoples in defense of their nations' cause, while still seeing themselves as part of Christ's Body. Second, the church must avoid becoming another state. Sometimes the church has tended to let push its vision towards a capitulation to nationalism. This is the mistake of the Constantinian church or Christendom for that matter. This is a mistake precisely because, as a people founded on God's gracious election, Christians need to defend neither land nor nationality to be a people. What this means is that the church's mission cannot become a matter of civil prosecution. Thus the alternative to the politics of the nation-state cannot mean for the church a new form of Christendom, but a witness through its own practices. We shall draw on Cavanaugh to show how Eucharistic performance, the Church's most determinative form of politics, can and , in fact does, offer an alternative and transforms our imagination.

2.1   Imagined Communities.

In *Imagined communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson notes that "all communities larger than the primordial villages of face to face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined."[3] Members will never know, meet or even hear about most of their fellow members, "yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion" (6). For Anderson the most vivid example of such communities is the nation which is imagined as an inherently limited and sovereign political community. It is limited precisely

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because "even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries beyond which lie other nations" (7). And it is imagined as sovereign because "the concept was born in the age in which the Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm" (7). Lastly, according to Anderson, a nation is imagined as a community because "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each," there exists a "deep horizontal comradeship." "Ultimately," he continues, "it is this fraternity which makes it possible...for so many people, not so much to kill, as willing to die for such limited imaginings" (7).

Killing or dying for the nation lies at the very core of what we may call 'nationalist imagination.' Importantly, Anderson sees this emerging especially in Europe as the imagined Christendom dissipates. For throughout the middle ages the Church was the strongest imagined community. It held to this position through a series of relationships. These included, among others, the medium of a sacred language which linked to a 'superterrestrial' order of power, and the privileged position of the clergy as the bilingual intelligentsia in a widely illiterate world. However, the explorations of the non-European world and the demotion of Latin as a sacred language saw the weakening of Christendom's grip on the lives of people. Even of more significance was the primacy of capitalism which laid the ground for national consciousness. This was possible in three ways: first, it a saw the emergence of a new "language-of- power" of a kind different from the older administrative vernaculars." Dialects closer to the print-language now became elevated to a "new cultural-political eminence" while others were simply assimilated (45). Second, it unified "new fields of communication below Latin and above the spoken vernaculars." Print connected speakers of a variety of dialects making it possible for

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[3] Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities:Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism (New York: Courier Companies, Ic., 1991), 6.

people to imagine millions of others in their "particular language field". And "these readers, formed in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community" (44). And third, it gave a new fixity to language which in the long run "helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation" (44). Many languages now developed a stability and would remain so for generations though with some modifications (44).

One other crucial factor that accounts for the rise of the nation was a change in the apprehension of time. "Christendom," notes Anderson, " assumed its universal form through a myriad of specificities and particularities: this relief, that window, this sermon, that tale, this morality play, that relic" (23). These helped to establish simultaneous relationships between two events which are linked neither temporally nor casually. "[T]he medieval Christian mind," he continues, "had no conception of history as an endless chain of cause and effect or of radical separation between past and present. With the development of the secular sciences, this simultaneity came to be replaced with "the idea of a 'homogeneous empty time', in which simultaneity is, as it were, transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfillment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar" (24).

Anderson has helped us to note the main characteristics of an imagined community: 1. Comradeship--a love and care for each other which may sometimes call for sacrificing one's life for others; 2. Communion-- a profound sense of unity and receptivity which exists among the members; 3. A relationship that goes beyond face to face contact among members. However, it is important to note that the imagination which exists within the community as Anderson describes it, seems to arise not from the community as a corporate whole, but from individual members who decide to *see* themselves and others as part of this community. We have emphasized that

imagination is a skill gained through participation in a socially embodied way of life. As a member of a community, I can imagine myself with others precisely because I have been trained to do so. This is what makes a difference between such a community as the National Association of Teachers, and such communities as the Church or the nation. The National Association of Teachers, to continue with our example, may not be different from what Robert Bellah has called "a life-style enclave" which "brings together those who are socially, economically, or culturally similar, and whose chief aim is the enjoyment of being with those who share one's life style."[4] Such a description can hardly fit the Church and the nation because, not only do these communities celebrate the interdependence of both public and private life and the different callings of all, but the common norms, standards or right and wrong, obligations, and their *telos* may not be changed from time to time simply for the enjoyment and comfort of some members.

With regard to the nation, we have already learned from Anderson how essential territoriality, comradeship, and sovereignty are in imagining the nation. One more factor deserving mention is that the nation is imagined as an *interestless* community. For Anderson, the nation is a natural community, and "in everything natural there is always something unchosen." "In this way," he continues," "nation-ness is assimilated to skin color, gender, parentage...all those things one cannot help." And these natural ties precisely because they are not chosen, "have about them a halo of disinterestedness" (143). And it is precisely for this reason that a nation can ask for sacrifice. This is a vital point for Anderson and, in fact, explains the logic behind the great wars which have persuaded "'colossal numbers' to lay down their lives" in defense of their nations. There is a "moral grandeur" to dying for the nation which because, unlike other associations, the nation is no community one can join or leave at easy will (144).

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[4] Robert Bellah, et al., <u>Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life</u> (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 72.

The irony however, is that though the modern state has claimed to save us from the violence and disunity of tribe, religion, or any other 'lesser' divisions, for the larger part we are yet to see this salvation. What we see is disunity and violence brought, not by these lesser divisions--though sometimes they do--but mostly by the nation itself. This is why we want to question the very *mythos* on which the nation-state is built. It is only then that we will scratch at the very cause of the problem. Then we will begin to see not only that the unity within these nations is fundamentally built on shaky grounds, but that violence is an intrinsic part of state soteriology. In fact Cavanaugh has convincingly argued that violence is intrinsic characteristic of the modern state. Drawing on Charles Tilly, he shows how "the process of making states was inseparable from the pursuit of war."[5] Emerging states struggled to eliminate or weaken other competitors by attempting to secure regularized access to money and the bodies of their subjects, through creation of standing armies (which increased their power to eliminate rivals), and the claim to offer protection to the governed. Ironically, as it turns out to be, state protection is often from the very violence that the state itself creates. "The state," argues Cavanaugh, "is involved in the production, not merely the restraint of violence. Indeed the modern state depends on violence, war and the preparation for war to maintain the illusion of social integration and the overcoming of contradictions in civil society."[6] For Cavanaugh, monopoly over the means of violence within a specified territorial boundary becomes the primary defining characteristic of nationhood. This politics of violence and exclusion needs to be challenged by a different politics based on neither territoriality nor the containment of violence through violence.

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[5] Cavanaugh, "'A Fire strong Enough to Consume the House": The Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State,' Modern Theology 11:4 (October 1995), 414

[6] Cavanaugh, "A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House," 414.

But where is the alternative in which this violence of the nation-state can be, and in fact is called into question? Where is the story, the community, which can ensure peace without coercion and violence? The Church presents such an alternative story and politics . This is the politics that Jesus invites his disciples to embrace; "you know that among Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers load it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all" (Mark 10:42-45). This is the new form of politics, a politics of non-violence which the church must embrace and witness to.

Like the state, the church is an imagined community in that many a Christian will never know the names of more than a handful of her fellow Christians, yet she has complete confidence in their communion. This communion is not limited to the present members but to all fellow members past, present, and future. As we have noted, two theological affirmations are essential to such a communion, and in fact enable the Church to present a different form of politics than that of the nations: These are the church's conviction that, 1. all humanity is created in the image of God; 2. The church is founded and is dependent on God's gracious election.

As Cavanaugh notes, "that the entire human race is created in the image of God is the basis of a truly catholic church into which all people regardless of nationality are called."[7] Creation in the image of God is the primary link between humanity and God. Through the image of God we participate in both God and one another. Even more, our religious differences too cannot divide us anymore. This is what St. Paul strikes at when he talks about the renewed image of God in Jesus Christ. "In that renewal," he says, "there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scynthian, slave or free; but Christ is all and in all"

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[7] Cavanaugh, The City, 183.

Colossians 3:10-11. Thus the image of God breaks all those walls that have come to divide humanity. In the Image of God, we are enabled to see the 'other' not as a stranger or an enemy, but as a brother or sister to be welcomed other than neglected or eliminated.

If Stanley Hauerwas is right in calling politics "the conversation necessary for a people to discover the goods they have in common"[8], then creation in the image of God is the starting point for such a conversation. We do not relate to each other as complete strangers but as a people with a common brotherhood. This is not to make all particular differences irrelevant, rather it questions the modern emphasis on difference which breeds indifference. For who cares in the Rwandans, Sierra Leoneans, Palestinians, or Afghans are dying? What has the dying of Iraqi people to do with 'us'? We can only watch whatever is going on from the comfort of our sitting rooms as these tribal/religious fanatics die. Our common nature seldom comes into the picture to the extent that many a man is more concerned about the welfare of his dog than with the life of a fellow human being who happens to be different. That this does not strike us as odd shows how urgent is the task to find an alternative form of politics that makes us re-vision our relationships. Building its politics on the fact that we are all made in the image of God allows the church to witness to the kind of social life possible for those formed by God's story.

Second, and equally important, the church is a community founded on God's gracious election. This is in sharp contrast from what Hugh Seton-Watson says constitutes nationhood. According to him, "nations exist when a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to form a nation, or behave as if they formed one."[9] In contrast, the church is not a

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[8] Stanley Hauerwas, In Good Comapany: The Church as Polis (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1995), 6.

[9] Hugh Seton-Watson, Nations and States: An Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism (Boulder: Westview Press, 1977), 5

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people deciding to come together, rather it is God that chooses to call a people to himself. And as Scott Bader-Saye notes, God's election is unconditional. This unconditionality, he tells us "reflects simply the conviction that election is God's work...it is the pure grace of the irresistible and loving grace of God."[10] Even more, this gracious election gives the Church a distinctive political identity. Not only is it freed from any attachment to land or nationality, it does not need to defend these in order to be a people. Thus it is election rather than territory that constitutes the peoplehood of Christians and as such "God's presence with them as well as God's jurisdiction over them extends beyond any boundaries."[11]

Constitution by God's gracious election sets the church as a contrast society to the self-aggrandizing politics of the nations. The state is often caught up in the struggle between freedom and peace. Individual freedoms sometimes threaten to encroach on the freedom of others. Such struggle often leads to violence. "The commendable goal of modern democratic polity," notes Bader-Saye, "is its attempt to forge a middle way such that freedom and peace alike can be maintained, even if always in an unstable tension. On the one hand, the maintenance of peace comes at the const of limiting freedom and thus countering violence with the greater threat of violence. On the other hand, the preservation of freedom comes at the cost of peace, just in so far as freedom in liberal polity names the freedom to pursue one's interests through competition with others for scarce resources."[12] In contrast, a people constituted by God's gracious election are called upon to set their energies on the inauguration of God's peaceable kingdom which, as such, is the very defeat of violence.

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[10] Scott Bader-Saye, <u>Church and Israel After Christendom: The Politics of Election</u> (New York: Westview Press, 1999), 35.

[11] Bader-Saye, 35.

[12] Bader-Saye, 118.

2.2   Ecclesial Soteriology and Politics.

The salvation brought by Jesus Christ can be understood against the background of a

unity lost in the story of humanity's fall in Genesis 3. In the fall, man distorted his essential

likeness to God and to one another. We lost the ability to imagine each other as images of God,

that is, we lost the ability to imagine how it would be like to live in conformity to God's will, and

to live in harmony with each other. As Augustine shows, human beings and other living creatures

were created differently. While God commanded the former to come into being in large numbers

at once, God preferred to multiply the human race from one, meaning that humanity was created

for peace and concord. He notes;

> Among those creatures of earth man is pre-eminent, being created in the image of
> God...man was created as an individual; but he was not left alone. For the human race is,
> more than any   other species, at once social in nature and quarrelsome by perversion.
> And the most salutary warning against this perversion or disharmony is given by the facts
> of human nature. We are warned to guard against the emergence of this fault, to remedy it
> when once it has appeared, by remembering that first parent of ours, who was created by
> God as one individual with this intention: that from that one individual a multitude might
> be propagated, and that this fact should teach mankind to preserve a harmonious unity in
> plurality.[13]

Man disobeyed God, and thus took a disastrous road. Cain's fratricide, the wickedness of

Noah's generation, the scattering at Babel, and the selling of Joseph into slavery are all signs of

the disruption of a primordial unity and communion. This disruption reaches its zenith in the

enslavement of the Hebrews, and Pharaoh's attempt to annihilate 'them'.

In this connection, Cavanaugh rightly notes that "the effect of sin is the very creation of

individuals as such, that is, the creation of an ontological distinction between individual and

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[13] Augustine, <u>City of God</u>, trans. Henry Betterson (New York: Penguin, 1972), XII, 28.

group,"[14] This distinction as Augustine emphasizes, was a concomitance of sin. [M]an was willingly perverted and justly condemned," says Augustine, "and so begot perverted offspring. For we were all in that one man, seeing that we all were that one man who fell into sin...We did not yet possess forms individually created and assigned to us for us to live in them as individuals, but there already existed the seminal nature from which we were to be begotten. And of course, when this was vitiated through sin, and bound with death's fetters in its just condemnation, man could not be born of man in any other condition."[15]

But to this condemned state came God's salvation through Christ Jesus. Yet the salvation wrought is necessarily ecclesial. Through Christ, there is no more distinction between Greek and Jew, slave or free. Rather humanity is once again restored to its primordial unity through Christ's body. Christ's body here is to be understood as both the church and the Eucharist. As Cavanaugh notes commenting on I Cor 12:4-31, "in the body of Christ...the many are joined into one, but the body continues to consist of many members, each of which is different and not simply changeable."[16] This unity in difference already downplays the emphasis on nationality and race that was the concomitance of sin. For it is after the fall that we begin to witness both oppression and attempts to eliminate others. No other story better expresses this than the story of the Israelites in Egypt. "Look," said the Egyptian king, "the Israelites people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them or they will increase and in the even of war, join our enemies and fight against us" Exodus 1:10.

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[14] Cavanaugh, 184.

[15] Augustine, XIII, 14.

[16] Cavanaugh, 184.

In Christ, these differences and the wars they incite have lost their hold. Once again humanity is enabled to realize its common brotherhood. We can now imagine each other not as aliens precisely because the walls that used to divide us are now broken. The restored unity is epitomized in the shattering of barriers between Jews and Gentiles. "He is our peace," says St. Paul, "in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments, and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two (Ephesians 2:14-16). This reconciliation of Jew and Gentile, as Cavanaugh notes, "is an anticipation of the eschatological gathering of all the nations to Israel, in whom all the nations will be blessed...Such eschatological gathering is neither an entirely worldly nor an entirely other-worldly event, but blurs the lines between the temporal and the eternal. The individual soul is indeed promised eternal life, but salvation is not merely a matter of the good individual's escape from the violence of this world. We await rather a new heaven and a new earth which are already partially present."[17]

At the head of the church then, is Christ who graciously re-writes this community into God's story. As such the church maintains no identity independent of Christ its head. Rather, its unity, ministry and organization all subsist in him. As Oliver O'Donovan notes, the shape of the church before the many institutional structures that we have today "is the shape of the Christ-event itself in its four moments of Advent, Passion, Restoration and Exaltation" which constitute a community that "continually gathers, suffers, rejoices, and speaks."[18] Thus the church's existence, identity, and mission are completely dependent on Christ who constantly invites and welcomes new members into this community through the Holy Spirit. Its authorization by the

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[17] Cavanaugh, 185.

[18] Oliver O'Donovan, The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 171.

Spirit gives legitimacy to its existence, effect to its mission, and right to the various relations it comprises. It "represents God's kingdom by living under its rule. It recapitulates the Christ-event in itself and proclaims the Christ-event to the world. [This] Christ-event, then is the structuring principle for all ecclesiology, holding the key to both the church's spontaneous existence and its formal structure."[19]

All this points to the fact that the politics of elections is not only a politics of power or dominion, but a politics of total dependence on God, and a politics of dispossession into exile. For first, the Christian vocation is to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). And on this mission the disciples (Christians) are to "take no gold or silver, or copper in [their] belts, no bag for [their] journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or staff" (Matt. 10:9-10). They will totally depend on God and fellow human beings, who will welcome and care for them. Unlike the Jews, whose vocation is to the promised land, the Christian vocation is one of exilic existence. It is precisely as aliens that Christians will influence the world and be its leaven. "Brothers," writes St. Peter, "I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. Conduct yourselves honorably among the gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge" 1 Pt 2:11-12. Importantly, the Christian call is not to withdraw from the world into a spiritualism. Rather they must seek and pray for the peace of the city while at the same time awaiting God's peaceful reign. Thus they are called to neither an identification with nor a complete detachment from the state. Rather, as Bader-Saye says,

> [l]ike Esther, Joseph, and Daniel, the Church is called to participate in the powers of the
> world insofar as this can bring a blessing to the nations. But just as Esther courageously
> claimed her Jewish identity and thwarted the king's planned pogrom, just like Joseph
> resisted the advances of Potiphar's wife that he might not sin against God, just as Daniel

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[19] O'Donovan, 175

prayed openly to the Lord in defiance of king Darius, so the Church must actively maintain its identity and mission even if this brings it into conflict with the powers and threatens partnership. For if the Church's service in and with the world does not have this ad hoc detachment, it will quickly revert to the role of chaplain to the civil order.[20]

And if it plays the role of chaplain to the civic order, the church may also lose sight of its own mission especially when tempted with power. This is what happened during what came to be known as Christendom, to which we must now turn.

2.2.1 Christendom.

In Christendom we see a concrete example of how God's gracious election and our creation in the image of God, once lost sight of, may lead to a false ecclesial imagination and missiology. Christendom here names that era in which the truth of Christianity was taken to be the truth of secular politics, and the consequent seizure of alien power by the Church. Alien power here calls attention to any power other than that accorded to the church by Jesus Christ. The church allied with the sword to sustain itself and its mission through coercion and violence.

Those sympathetic to Christendom often argue that it was mission not coercion at the heart of Christendom. As such, we should stop short of accusing Christendom of failure. Indeed as Jacques Ellul notes,

> Christendom is not a religious society emerging from primitive religious impulses which translate themselves into social forms, but the outcome of a conscious and voluntary operation. How is society to be rendered Christian? Or: how can the Christian faith be made to impregnate every level of life, private and collective? What these Christians wanted, in fact, in their gradual creation of Christendom was a "social ethic"; but they took that more seriously than we do, courageously addressing the task of applying the ethic and transforming the structures effectively to correspond to what they understood as goodness and truth. And they succeeded.[21]

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[20] Bader-Saye, 147.

[21] Jaques Ellul, quoted in O'Donovan, 196.

Ironically, this apparent success went hand in hand with a loss of vision. The church was concerned with ensuring its existence and mission to some degree forgetting that this is the work of its master-- Christ. This could not but diminish its ability to imagine itself as a community founded and sustained by God's gracious election. Even the ability to imagine peaceful coexistence with others was lost sight of. And by understanding itself principally in relation to the state the political character of the church's salvation was greatly suppressed. As John Milbank notes, a church that understands itself thus cannot but "mimic the procedures of a political sovereignty, and invent a kind of bureaucratic management of believers."[22] This is the sort of politics that marked Christendom when the church struck so fateful a transaction that it now became an ally in arms with the state.

Bader-Saye in *The Politics of Election: Church and Israel after Christendom*, insightfully sees Christendom trapped in a politics of supersessionism. He tells us that the compromise with Rome in the fourth century can be understood as "the triumph of supersessionism" (57). The church, which was at this time predominantly Gentile, was increasingly convinced that it had replaced Israel and consequently inherited its blessings and promises. The Jews, it was believed, had fallen out of favor with God, the tide had changed and the Kingdom had been taken away from them and given to the people that produce the fruits of the kingdom (Matthew 21:33-43). This supersessionist posture is evident in many New Testament writings. In fact, alleges Bader-Saye, "the context of Matthew's gospel as a whole pushes toward an allegorical reading in which the vineyard (the kingdom of God) is the fruit of God's election, the displaced people are the Jews, and the new people are the church" (53).

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[22] John Milbank, Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason (London: Blackwell, 1990), 408.

Perhaps the biggest mistake in this supersessionism was the assumption that "if God's election and promises belonged to Christians who believed and followed Christ, they could not also belong to Israel that did not" (53). Either the 'new' covenant through and by Christ was a replacement of the 'old' one with Israel or, the former was a continuation and consummation of the latter though with a new form and a new people. Israel's role in God's economy was thus pushed to the margins, it was a precursor and as such had to give way to the Church which was now God's chosen and covenanted people.

This de-Judaizing of election and redemption presented a big problem to the church. "Election had been understood by the Jews as a carnal matter, residing in the flesh. As such, it could no more be transferred to someone else than could one's own body" (54). These, therefore, had to be re-conceived; election was now seen as a spiritual matter concerned with knowledge and beliefs, and Israel's carnality now became the locus of its rejection (54-55). As for redemption, three different re-configurations were given: 1. That it was visible but not present 2. that it was present but not visible; 3. that it was visible and present and located in Rome (57-58).

From the foregoing discussion Bader-Saye helps us to note two points. First by discarding Israel through its supersessionist tendencies the Church ironically became disembodied. As earlier noted, both election and redemption for the Jews are carnal matters hardly separable from the material existence of the chosen people. This is because their election is not based on virtue or any spiritual criterion, but rather "on God's choice of a people in *the flesh*" (32) (emphasis added). Likewise, redemption is not simply a spiritual doctrine, but a visible change in the social and political life of the redeemed. And it is in their very material existence that they are to witness to what it means to be a people under God's rule. But "as the church lost its grounding in Israel's stories and Israel's hope, as Rome tempted Christians with

power and dominion, the redeemed life of peaceful communion between Jew and Gentile was lost sight of. It proved far easier to spiritualize God's reign or to abdicate responsibility to those with power to enforce a new social order through violence" (110). Moreover, the church acted as though it was beginning a new life *ex nihilo*, that is, a life not located in God's continuing story of salvation. But we must emphasize that there is no way to locate God's encounter with God's people outside the story of Israel. For Israel is not simply a precursor but she stands at the very center of God's economy of salvation. Second, through its supersessionist posture towards Israel, the church laid the ground for modern political claims to national election (chosenness), and the consequent containment of the church by the state. We must consider this in some detail.

3. National supersessionism and Soteriology.

The church's partnership with Rome and its claim to have replaced Israel had ironic consequences. For the same claim of replacement was turned against the church itself when modern states began to claim chosenness and the capacity to save. "The drama of modernity," says Bader-Saye, "remains interestingly indebted to the supersessionism in earlier Christian teaching and practice...As long as the church and the Empire shared dual authority over a unified Christendom, they could also share the claim to being a chosen and redeemed people of God. But as the body and soul of Christendom came apart in modernity, the church and the state both laid claim to election" (60). This claim to national election went hand in hand with the claim to salvation. The state now began to lay claim to being the means of true salvation. The church's former claim '*extra ecclesia nulla salus*' now became a slogan of the state with one but significant change: '*extra respublica nulla salus*'!

Bader-Saye helpfully traces the roots of national supersessionism from Spinoza and Thomas Hobbes who respectively displace the church by spiritualizing Christianity, and by

deferring Christ's political relevance until the eschaton (61). "Spinoza's Christ," notes Bader-Saye, "shuns politics since he came only to teach the universal moral law in a way that would not offend or threaten the temporal order." In Spinoza's own words, "Christ taught only universal moral precepts...His sole care was to teach moral doctrines, and distinguish them from the laws of the state" (61). For Hobbes, on the other hand, Christ's message was virtually spiritual, and as such Christ's kingdom will not begin till the second coming.

Even more notable in both Hobbes and Spinoza is that they both place religious beliefs and practice at the service of the state. "No one can rightly practice piety or obedience to God," so claims Spinoza, "unless he obeys the sovereign power's commands in all things" (62). The church now becomes an instrument of the state, while its beliefs are to be policed according to their usefulness in serving the state. We see here the roots of modernity's attitude towards religion as a set of beliefs extractable from the practices and convictions of the church. In other words, religion is no longer part of a lived Christian practice, but is limited to the private realm.

Further, both Hobbes and Spinoza democratize election: no longer is it a political description of the people of God, but a divine sanction for the nation-state (62). Once election was snatched away from both the Church and Israel, it was up for grabs for any nation. Further still, it was no more understood as God's gracious choosing to write a people into God's own story, rather it was now the nation choosing God to be its head. The result, as Bader-Saye notes, was that God's covenant with Israel and the Church came to be understood in terms of a social contract. For Spinoza the fear of a greater evil or the hope of a greater good drives people to compact together. Likewise for Hobbes, arising from his ontology of violence, there is a mutual transferring of right for the purpose of securing greater good for oneself (63). Thus as a contract, "the covenant no longer serves to constitute human identity or to direct a person to the good of

life. Rather identity and the good must be determined prior to one's participation in the covenant since one's participation is based on the judgment that this will serve one's individual interest" (63).

The claim to national election went hand in hand with the claim by the state to holding the means of salvation. This claim to salvation, as Cavanaugh has convincingly argued, was a mimicry of the Christian story of salvation. Drawing on classical theorists of the modern state, he shows how the state's story "establishes human government not on the basis of a primal unity, but from the assumption of individuality of the human race."[23] Rousseau's claim that humanity was born free but is everywhere in chains' is but a claim of our freedom from each other. This is in sharp contrast with the Christian story in which "true human freedom is participation in God and each other." Hobbes posits a natural condition of war of all against all which can only be overcome by individual entrusting themselves in the hands of a Leviathan. For John Locke the natural state of humanity is one of perfect freedom for men to order their actions and "dispose of their possessions as they think fit...without asking leave or depending upon the will of any other man."[24] Overcoming this individualism, the theorist agree, requires that individuals enter into a social contract. Thus, "as in the Christian story, salvation from the violence of conflicting individuals comes through enacting of a social body." For Hobbes, the Leviathan becomes the embodiment of all individual wills. This Leviathan, notes Cavanaugh, is the new Adam, now of human creation, which saves us from each other.[25]

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[23] Cavanaugh, 186.

[24] Cavanaugh, 186.

[25] Cavanaugh, 188.

This soteriology of the modern state, however, "is incomprehensible apart from the notion that the church is the primary thing from which the state is meant to save us."[26] Cavanaugh dismisses as bogus and misleading the view that the modern state arose out of the " Wars of Religion" of the 16th century to keep peace between warring religious faction. For these wars were not simply a matter of conflict between fanatical Protestantism and Catholicism, "but were fought largely for the aggrandizement of the emerging state over the decaying remnants of the medieval ecclesial order."[27] Thus the so-called Wars of Religion were not the events that necessitated the birth of the modern state, they were rather the birth pangs of the modern state. Even more notable note is the emergent view (from the wars of religion) that the church has to be contained if the state is to achieve and maintain true peace. For Hobbes, Leviathan must subsume the church whole in order to maintain peace. Locke, on the other hand, is more liberal and allows religion to exist provided it remains a private affair. Nevertheless, his principle of tolerance eliminates the church as a body that rivals and critiques the state. What is worse is that he redefines religion not only as a purely private affair, but as a set of beliefs extractable from the bodily practices within the church. Perhaps one of the reasons for containing the church is that it claims to be a body that transcends national boundaries. Because Christians claim that their citizenship is located beyond any earthly boundaries, it is argued, they cause divisions beyond the body politic. Moreover their fellow citizens, they say, are determined by neither territoriality nor ethnicity. Rather all those past, present and future who embrace Christ's lordship.

Despite these claims, and domesticated by the modern nation-state, the church has in many cases been pressed into the role of a voluntary organization. Religion is allowed to exist as

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[26] Cavanaugh, 188.

[27] Cavanaugh, <u>A Fire Strong enough to Consume the House</u>, 399.

a private system of beliefs provided these beliefs do not interfere in or challenge state programs. As Bader-Saye puts it , "It is granted dominion over the mysterious and the marginal, whereas those issues at the center of society's life are shielded from religious interference."[28] But once religion is conceived as a system of beliefs, the church becomes no better than a voluntary organization, indeed a life-style enclave in which like-minded individuals gather to share, discuss their beliefs, and encourage one another. And as a voluntary organization the church exists entirely on the free choice of free individuals who decide to be part of it, and who retain the prerogative to quit at will. Interestingly, we may note in passing that the Non-Governmental Organization Bill soon to be tabled in the Ugandan parliament names the church as one of these organizations. There is no official position from the church regarding this state of affairs. Perhaps this is an indication of the uphill task that the church in Africa faces today.

The warning from both Cavanaugh and Bader-Saye is the same: once the church accedes to this role of a voluntary organization it loses not only its ability to resist and challenge state violence, but also "its grounding in the story of God's calling and choosing a people to be a witness to God's reign."[29] The church must, therefore, resist the state project of violence and counter its false soteriology. This is no call, however, for the church to take on the sword once again; this would be a defeat of its own mission and calling to be a place where sword are beaten into ploughshares, animals and humans live in harmony-- indeed the very presence of God's kingdom.

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[28] Bader-Saye, 13.

[29] Bader-Saye, 14.

4. Towards a Eucharistic Politics.

Those who are unaccustomed with associating politics with the church, and who think the best way to remain faithful Christians is to keep away from the dirty game of politics, may find the following contention scandalous: The holiest of the church's practices, the Eucharist, is not only its most determinative form of politics, but also a practice whose performance diffuses the false state soteriology, violence, and unity. It is through Eucharist performance that Christians are constituted into a people (church), indeed the very Body of Christ. This performance is the very act of gathering and transforming a divided people into the oneness that Christ prayed for: "...that they may be one" (Jn 17:20). As Cavanaugh puts it: The Eucharist is an anamnesis of the past; Jesus commands his followers, 'Do this in memory of me (Lk 22:19)' If we understand this command properly, however, the Eucharist is much more than a ritual repetition of the past. It is rather a literal re-membering of Christ's Body, a knitting together of the Body of Christ by the participation of many in his sacrifice.[30]

This anamnesis, we must emphasize, is not simply any kind of action, but a specific action, an acclesial imagination in which re-membering performs or constitutes a particular community--a visible body of believers, the Body of Christ. What is significant here is that this people is constituted neither by territory nor by its own choice to bundle together, but by God, who through God's own choice re-members a people scattered by sin, greed, gender, violence, despair, injustice, war, even death into the Body of Christ. This is the significance of our invocation:

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[30] Cavanaugh, <u>Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ</u> (Malden: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1998), 229.

Re-member your people...
Re-member those gathered here before you...
Re-member your children scattered all over the world...
Re-member the dead, those who have gone before us marked with a sign of faith...
And all those whose faith is known to you alone.

Being re-membered in the Body of Christ means that our tarnished image of God is restored. We are once again made to participate in God and one another, and "our separateness is overcome precisely by participation in Christ's Body."[31] What this means is that the scattering of humanity as a result of Adams's sin is now overcome in the Body of Christ. Christ is the new Adam, but one who gathers the scattered children of God. This gathering is more concretely present at the Eucharistic table where a community celebrates the reconciliation of God with humanity and of humanity itself. This reconciliation of humanity is more visible in the redefinition of who our fellow citizens are. Territoriality, an essential factor in nation-state imagination, can no more define a people constituted by God. For it is God who graciously chooses to write this people into God's own story. The visibility of such a people is made present through Eucharistic performance in which we envision the breakdown of division between Greek or Jew, Tutsi or Hutu, American or African, and all other social division. Once more humanity is reunited, and our fellow members are no more limited to the present members, but to fellow members of the Body of Christ--past, present, and future. This is the significance of re-membering the triumphant church, the suffering church, and the church militant. For we have all been made one in the Body of Christ. And thus every Christian of every nationality can celebrate and be proud of the saints and the martyrs irrespective of whether they are contemporaries or even of the same nationality.

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[31] Cavanaugh, "The City", 195.

The unity realized in the Eucharist enables Christians to witness to the messianic peace and reconciliation brought by Jesus Christ. The church as a Eucharistic community is meant to be a witness to peace and reconciliation. This is why St. Paul does not hesitate to admonish the Corinthians to whom the Eucharist has become an act of disunity (1Cor 11:17ff). For, as Cavanaugh has noted, "where peace is lacking, the Eucharist appears as an eschatological sign of judgment requiring that people reconcile before a true Eucharist can take place."[32] From time immemorial this witness to peace and reconciliation has been underscored by the old-age tradition of Christians exchanging the sign of peace before the partaking of the Eucharist. "This practice," says Cavanaugh, "is a sign of peace which cannot be specified through the formal adjudication of contractual obligations, but can be constructed only in the direct encounter of human beings who consider themselves members of one another and the prince of peace."[33] Thus the Eucharist is the church's public witness (leitourgia) to what it means to live as a community of peace, and a public challenge to the state schemes of ensuring peace through violence. For the Eucharist is the very defeat of violence. It is a re-memberance of one who let violence be done to him rather than do violence to gather a people to himself. As such then, it is not only self-defeating to arise from the Eucharistic table and do violence, it is a defeat of Christ's redemption. This is what John Calvin wants us to see when he says: "we shall benefit very much from the sacrament if this thought is impressed and engraved upon our minds: that none of the brethren can be injured, despised, rejected, abused, or in any way offended by us, without at the same time, injuring, despising, and abusing Christ by the wrongs we do."[34]

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[32] Cavanaugh, 197.

[33] Cavanaugh, 197.

[34] John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed. John T. Mc Neil and trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminister, 1960), IV. 38.

The Eucharist, therefore, constitutes Christians into a people of peace; a people who cannot take up arms against others without forfeiting and tarnishing their Christian identity. For as a community disciplined by the Eucharist, neither race nor nationality, not even the search for justice can sanction the use of violence. This is because in Christ, not only have swords been beaten into plowshares, but the old law, which allowed that we pay an eye for an eye, has lost its hold on us. What we are told instead is; 'do not resist an evil doer. But if any strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well...Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous (Matt. 5:38-45). Inhere is embedded the call for Christians to resist and defy any call by the state to take up arms against others be they Christians or not.

Through Eucharistic performance the church is enabled to re-imagine secular time. Drawing on Zizioulas, Cavanaugh has shown how the convergence of time in the Eucharist both disrupts the secular historical imagination and "overcomes the individuality of historical existence."[35] As noted earlier, the nation-state creates a community that moves linearly from the past to the present towards an endless future. Such time is based on a plan where the past is the basis of both the present and the future. This is not the case with the sort of time Christians are enabled to envision in the Eucharist. For here, time is not marked by clock and calendar, but by God's own plan. And most importantly, as Cavanaugh notes in a passage worth quoting at length,

> in contrast with the secular historical imagination, the Christian story is intrinsically eschatological. Unlike the modern nation-state which, under the influence of the Roman Law, is predicated on its perpetuity, Christian history has an end. Even stranger, it has an end which has already come, and yet time continues. This end of history is Jesus Christ,

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[35] Cavanaugh, <u>Torture and Eucharist</u>, 234.

who announced the kingdom of God as something which awaits final consummation in the future, but is already present in the form of signs. This is the peculiar "already but not yet" character of the kingdom of God.[36]

Thus whenever the Eucharist in celebrated, Christians foretaste what it will be like in their true patria, while at the same time being reminded of their exilic existence. They are reminded that this earthly city is not their true home, and therefore should avoid being at home in the world's time.

Eucharistic performance also overcomes 'the individuality of historical existence.' In the nation-state we bundle together as bearers of individual rights. Thus my rights and dignity are prior to any relationship that I may enter into. The Eucharist disrupts such a conception of self, for "in the eschatological imagination...we first have our being in communion as members of Christ. Individuality is radically overcome by this eternal priority of Christ; Christ in the Spirit contains our destiny, ourselves as we will be. The Eucharist makes present simultaneously our past and our future destiny in communion by incorporating us into the body of Christ."[37] Thus in the Eucharist communion is prior to being or individuality.

5. Conclusion: Taking the Church seriously.

The call for Christians to let their religious convictions structure their entire existence may sound fanatical and dangerous especially to the modern ear which is at home with the distinctions between secular and religious, spiritual and material, religion and politics. The Christian vocation to non-violence and disengagement from national armies, for example, seems an exclusive option for the exceptionally spiritual, and indeed a matter of individual conscience.

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[36] Cavanaugh, 223.

[37] Cavanaugh, 234.

"One reason why the world finds the [Christian] message of peacemaking and love of enemies incredible," says Richard Hays, "is that the Church is so massively faithless. On the question of nonviolence, the church is deeply compromised and committed to nationalism and idolatry."[38] Yet unless our religious convictions become the structuring principle of our lives, we will find it difficult to offer social alternative of concrete peaceful material existence. For what the world needs to see is the Gospel message re-enacted in the Body of Christ. The task of the Church then, is not so much to call the world to non-violence as it is to embody an alternative ethic through its own practices, and habits. It is then that the Church can formulate imaginative responses in particular historical, social, and political situations. Put differently, it is only when the Church lives as a beachhead of God's peaceable kingdom where everyone is welcome irrespective of color, race, or nationality, that it will become "the sphere where the future of God's righteousness intersects— and challenges— the present tense of human existence."[39] And the Church is not without resources. Eucharistic performance, we have suggested, is the basic community-forming action that helps us hear, tell, and live the story of God's call to peaceful existence. But to do so requires that we take it seriously. For only then shall Christians be able to witness to what it means to be a people formed by God's story, a witness that is badly needed in a world that has gotten comfortable with violence, dispossession and hopelessness. This requires detailed analysis, and it will be the focus of the next chapter as we look at the concrete life the African people in their everyday struggles and concerns.

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[38] Richard B. Hays, The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics (New York: HarperCollins Publishing Inc., 1996), 343.

[39] Hays, 344.

3.0 ECCLESIA IN AFRICA:

Towards an Ecclesial Social Imagination.

In the last few years, there has been much allusion to the marginalisation of Africa especially following the end of the cold war era when there has been an expectation that Africa will hold a less strategic place in a world no longer dominated by the ideological rivalries between West and East...what is certain is that in one particular respect...Africa will not be marginalised, and that is the field of Christian and religious scholarship.[1]

3.1. Africa: A Tale of the Two Stories.

There is undoubtedly widespread optimism about the future prospects of the African

continent in general, Christianity in particular. Winds of change are blowing all over Africa.

There is a glimmer of hope in the political, economic, and social infrastructure of many

countries: despite the challenges that remain, we have witnessed, at least formally, an end to

apartheid, a crumbling of many dictatorial regimes (Uganda, The Democratic Republic of Congo,

Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Liberia, etc), and significant progress in areas of social and economic

reconstruction. For example, the Gross Domestic Product of Uganda rose from $ 6.0 billion in

1996 to $6.4 billion in 1999; in Rwanda it rose from $ 1.4 billion in 1996 to $ 1.8 billion in

2000; Nigeria registered the same economic growth within the same period from $ 35.3 billion to

41.2 billion.[2] It appears Africa is at the dawn of a new age, indeed a Renaissance! Perhaps no one

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[1] Kwame Bediako, <u>Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion</u> (Edinburg: University Press, 1995), 253.

[2] The World Bank Group: "<u>A World Free of Poverty</u>", 1996 <http://devdata.worldbank.org/external.CPProfile> (18 March, 2002).

better expresses this hope than Yoweri Museveni of Uganda and Thambo Mbeki of South Africa. For both Museveni and Mbeki, industrialization, increased regional cooperation and trade lie at the heart of Africa's future. Africa's problems, they argue, are due to underdevelopment and poverty. As such, "industrialization and a strong market economy will not only solve Africa's problems, it will give rise to a radically new positive image and identity, away from the classical image of a continent characterized by interminable wars and tribal genocide, and inhabited by pot-bellied, naked, and starving children, prowling about with begging bowls."[3]

But if the signs of an African Renaissance are not convincing enough in the political and economic sphere, at least in one respect they are credible. This one respect, as Bediako notes in the epigram above, is Christianity in general, and the Catholic church in particular. For Bediako, and many others, the massive Christian presence on the African continent points to " a shift in the centre of gravity" of Christianity, indeed to "a new phase of cultural history of the Christian faith, making Africa the new heartland of Christianity."[4] Bediako is not alone. In his 1994 post-synodal exhortation--*Ecclesia in Africa*, John Paul II extends gratitude to Africa for " responding with great generosity to Christ's call"[5] (# 33). Though aware of the groanings of the church in Africa, the Pope does not hesitate to celebrate "the glory and splendor of the present period of Africa's evangelization" manifested in the "splendid growth of the Church in Africa" (# 35). The unprecedented increase in the number of Catholics (# 38), the growth of a native clergy,

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[3] Katongole, "African Renaissance or Another Metanarative?: On Overcoming the Zachaeus Syndrome in African Christian Theology." Journal of Theology for Southern Africa 102 (1998): 30.

[4] Bediako, 253.

[5] John Paul II, Ecclesia in Africa: A Post-Synodal Exhortation, 1995

seminarians and candidates for institutes of consecrated life, the steady increase in the network of catechesis (#38) are but "some of the marvels wrought by God in the course of Africa's evangelization" (# 30).

The Holy Father also lauds the church's "outstanding and meritorious achievements" in the fields of education, health care, and struggles for justice and reconciliation in "a continent full of bad news" (# 39). The signs of vitality of the church in Africa extend beyond the continent. There are increasing numbers of African missionaries all over the world. Moreover, the significant achievements in the field of inculturation are themselves a marvel to the entire Catholic church. In fact the sound of drums and other African traditional musical instruments, the procession of African traditional dances during the opening Eucharistic celebration of the synod, left no doubt that indeed Africa was "the new homeland for Christ" (# 6). Such prospects of Africa as the new homeland for Christ have even led to some inchoate mumblings as to whether this is not the *kairos* for an African pontiff.

But telling as this 'standard' story of Africa may be, it remains an official story that overlooks the 'rough ground' of peoples concerns and struggles in a continent of mainly 'bad news.' In fact, Katongole is right in calling it a 'metanarrative', and, as he notes, the danger with 'metanarratives' is that "in their attempt to claim universal validity or be globally acceptable, they do not account for the particular and contingent, particularly the historically divergent variable. Instead they tend to confirm and perpetuate themselves through a selective sociology of statistics, which not only successfully cover up any contrary indications, but as a

result confirm the story as 'inevitable.'"[6] This is a story that we have to go beyond if we are to unmask the existing contradiction not only within Christianity's story in Africa, but the story of an African Renaissance in general. This is a task which requires that we tell the story of Africa truthfully. To do this, we shall draw on James Scott's distinction between 'public and hidden transcripts.' This assessment will allow us not only to appreciate the social matrix of the contradictions in Africa, but to point to the sort of ecclesial imagination that will name and conceive of alternatives.

3.2. James Scott: Public and Hidden Transcripts.

In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, James Scott, drawing on studies of slavery, serfdom, colonialism, racism, offers a unique display of the power relations between dominant and subordinate groups, which are often dominated by an interplay between public and hidden transcripts. The public transcript includes all those 'libretto' of open discourse gestures, actions, etc. that characterize the "interaction between subordinates and those who dominate."[7] For Scott, this public transcript is "an indifferent guide to the opinions of subordinates" for, often they portray a consent that is only possibly a tactic. As such, it does not tell the whole story because it is in the interest of the subordinates "to produce a more or less credible performance speaking the lines and making the gestures he knows are expected of him" (4). Thus the public transcript, impressive though it may be, is designed to conceal the 'dirty linen' of the actors. But if we wish to move beyond apparent consent and 'grasp potential acts,

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[6] Katongole, "African Renaissance or Another Metanarrative", 32.

[7] James C. Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts (New York: Yale University Press, 1990), 2.

intentions as yet blocked, we have little choice but to explore the realm of the hidden

transcript'(16). This hidden transcript includes all those "offstage speeches, gestures, and

practices that confirm, contradict or inflect what appears in the public transcript" (4-5). The

latter, often disguised, finds open expression through rumors, gossip, folk-tales, jokes, songs,

rituals, codes, and euphemisms. These not only give us a genuine picture of those on-stage

theatrical performance of the subordinates, they often unleash a critique of the dominant power

relations. It is, therefore, only when we pay attention to the discrepancies, tensions and

contradictions between the open and hidden transcripts that we might begin to successfully

understand, read, and interpret "the often fugitive political conduct of subordinate groups" (Xii).

Scott's distinction between public and hidden transcripts paves the way for us to begin to

understand the discrepancies and contradictions not only within Christianity's story in Africa, but

within what John Paul II calls "a continent of bad news." We begin to have a clue to the co-

existence of a massive Christian presence on the continent and such contradictions as the 1994

genocide in Rwanda. This co-existence points to the complexity of the Christian story in Africa,

and cautions any claims to offer a comprehensive treatment of the whole story. For Africa itself

is such a big and varied continent in its customs, politics, cultures, peoples, etc; from Cape Town

to Cairo, from Monrovia to Mombasa, the variety is baffling![8]

By itself the story of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda is enough to bring the celebration of

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[8] This itself should caution us against those standard narratives that have characterized our knowledge of Africa: the *terra nullius*--16th Century; or the Dark Continent--18th Century; or again the Third World--19th Century on.

'God's marvelous works in Africa' to a halt. Close to 1,000,000[9] people were brutally butchered

to death by those brothers and sisters with whom they daily celebrated the Eucharist, held hands

singing the 'Our Father', swinging on the beautiful tunes of their traditional drums. What is

particularly ironic is the fact that many of the massacres took place in or around churches.

Indeed, some of the perpetrators appear to have been high ranking members of the clergy.[10] Is

this not an indication that perhaps there is a 'hidden transcript' that remains to be discovered and

told?

But beyond this ferocity of ethnic hatred in Rwanda lies even a more disturbing part of

the story that gives rise to a deeper mood of 'Afro-pessimism.' For how are we to react to the

irony that a continent where the Church itself, 'the most sustainable social institution in rural

areas', remains divided between hope and despair? Is Jesse Mugambi not on target when he

questions whether the religiosity displayed by many Africans is "authentic and genuine, or it is

superstition arising from despair?"[11] Could it be that the gospel has reached many people in

Africa as bad news? Despite the impressive stories and statistics of economic reforms, improving

microeconomic management, liberalized markets and trade, Africa continues to be the home of

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[9] Gerald Prunier in The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide, says that we will probably never know the exact number of people killed in the genocide. But he puts the estimate at 800,000 Tutsi, and between 10-30,000 Hutu. Thus the total approximate number of death could be placed between 800,000 and 850,000, a loss of about 11% of the population in only three months (265).

[10] The recent capture of Hormidas Nsengimana, a former catholic priest (Rector of Christ-Roi College in Nyanza) brings to five the number of clergymen to be indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. The most senior of these clergy men is Bishop Augustine Misaago, Archbishop of Gikongoro diocese, who has been charged with genocide, crimes against humanity, planning genocide, and failing to help those in danger.

[11] Jesse Mugambi, From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War (Nairobi: East African Education Publishers, 1995), 253.

the world's absolute poor, many of whom live on less than $ 1 a day. Moreover peace remains a dream on this massively Christian continent. Many countries, whole regions, remain locked up in violent revolution after revolution of power struggle: the entire great lakes region endures a war that threatens to spill all over the continent. On the national level, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Angola, Sierra Leone are all experiencing internal unrest. These wars have left Africa with half of the world's refugees, and a food deficit that makes it the most hungry continent in the world. Between 1961 and 1995, notes Paul Gifford, Africa's food production per person decreased by 11.6% . By comparison, Latin America's increased by 31.4% and Asia's by 70.6%. The World Bank predicted that a third of all food requirements would have to be imported from the year 2000 on.[12]

This is a necessary narration of the two stories/faces that have come to characterize Africa; 'necessary', we say, because any meaningful theological and ethical construction must begin with and be sustained by a narrative display of the kind of world in which people are caught up, and their concrete agency in that world. It is only then that we can see the need to go beyond mere celebration of the 'marvels God has wrought in Africa' and examine the nature of Church and "the sort of social and material existence she embodies or ought to embody."[13]

The two stories we have narrated are not disjointed, nor are they external to the Church. Otherwise, how are we to account for the Church's own internal contradiction? Is it possible that Christianity is part of the problem? For as Ali Mazrui charges, "long before the religions of the

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[12] Paul Gifford, African Christianity: Its Public Role (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 7.

[13] Katongole, "Prospects of Ecclesia in Africa in the 21st Century: Mumblings of an Inchoate Nature" Paper delivered at the University of Scranton, 2000. 15.

cross arrived on the African continent Africa was already at worship. Its sons and daughters were at prayer. Christianity came as a complex phenomenon made up of western culture, politics, technology, etc. The Gospel itself was revolutionary, the white man being more than ready to spread it at whatever cost...It is common for one to wear a crucifix, have a Christian name without being deeply Christian."[14] These questions and charges, puzzling as they may be, call for an honest introspection as a first step toward a constructive way forward for the Church, particularly in Africa.

It is important to say, however, that the African situation just described cannot be understood as simply a 'given' in the face of which we must bow. Rather we must seek for alternatives to this story full of contradictions, violence and dispossession. Put differently, we must not let these contradictions blind us to the resources which the Church can provide for social reconstruction. This is where the task of ecclesial social imagination becomes both necessary and urgent. There is need to honestly assess the state of Christianity in Africa today, and offer a sustained display of the anxieties, hopes and frustrations of the ordinary Christians in their everyday struggles. This task, as Katongole has noted, "will require nothing less than a willingness to engage in a conversation of what it means for us Christians to be socially formed, thereby offering alternatives to the current narratives and forms of social formation in Africa."[15] And for this task to become a possibility, "it must involve and, in fact, begin with a critical and thorough-going evaluation of some of the assumptions which have greatly shaped the Church's

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[14] Ali Mazrui, <u>The Africans: A Tripple Heritage</u> (Toronto: Little Brown and Co., 1986), 232.

[15] Katongole, "Mission and Social Formation: Searching for an Alternative to King Leopold's Ghost," <u>Paper delivered at Cambridge</u>, 2001. 8.

social mission generally, in Africa in particular."[16] When the social and the religious, the political and the ecclesial remain distinct spheres of agency, there is hardly any way the church can match the critical challenge of offering alternative visions of human possibility. As we saw in the previous chapter, such a distinction capitulates salvation to the nation-state, leaving the church impotent. For as Katongole insightfully notes, "when left unquestioned, the distinction[s] work to invest the presumably neutral state with the power to define, manage, and determine the particular form the social sphere takes."[17] Unmasking these dominant assumptions will help us not only to see why the church has so far not been that badly needed alternative to the story of violence and dispossession, we shall be able to posit what sort of church is required for social imagination.

3.3. The Face of the Church: Three Paradigms.

Katongole has identified three basic paradigms from which the Church has generally approached the social situation in Africa. These are the spiritual, pastoral, and political paradigms. These paradigms, however, are not 'mutually exclusive' and, therefore, they should not be treated as distinct categories within the Church's general social mission. Nor are they exhaustive in presenting the Church's response to the often distressing and complex social-political situation in Africa.

3.3.1. The Spiritual Paradigm.

This is a trend that is often associated with both evangelical theology and the dominant

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[16] Katongole, "Mission and Social Formation", 8.

[17] Katongole, "Mission and Social Formation", 8.

theologies of inculturation. It sees the mission of the church as essentially "the formation of a Christian spiritual identity."[18] Accordingly Christians are seen as citizens of two worlds, the spiritual and the material. It is the paradigm of a church that has succeeded in saving souls of many, without necessarily saving their bodies as well. Among theologians, Katongole identifies Bediako's theological construction as the most articulate expression of this spiritual paradigm. "Bediako," he notes, "understands his theological task in the quest and demonstration of the true character of African Christian identity."[19] For Bediako, the challenge facing African theology and the Church in Africa is "how to make clear in the religious world which men and women inhabit, and by whose spiritual realities they make sense of their existence, that Jesus Christ, the supreme Ancestor, belongs there as incarnate and Risen Saviour, as Redeemer and Lord."[20] Accordingly, for Bediako, it is by facing this challenge that a truly African Christian identity will emerge. Moreover this spiritual process can and will have serious consequences for the troubled African politics "where a key problem, which has its problem in the ancestral world, is a tendency to sacralize power and authority." And since the roots of sacralization in African tradition [politics] lie in religion, "it is in terms of religion, perhaps another religious principle, that it can be adequately encountered."[21] This principle is the formation of a religious mind/identity which recognizes "that power truly, which is rooted in the Christian theology of power as non-dominating...ennobles politics and the business of government into the business of

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[18] Katongole, "Mission and Social Formation", 9.

[19] Katongole, 9; Bediako, 85.

[20] Bediako, 246.

[21] Bediako, 247.

God."[22] It is, therefore, clear that for Bediako the true Christian identity must not simply remain in the religious sphere, but must imbue politics as well. However, this is something that can be pursued indirectly by Christians. In a way, "it flows over from the primary challenge of the formation of a true spiritual identity."[23]

3.3.2. The Pastoral Paradigm.

This paradigm represents a Church that is not simply a silent observer in a corrupt world, but a healer and servant. This paradigm is no better expressed than in John Paul II's exhortation- -*Ecclesia in Africa*— to which we referred earlier. Despite the trials the African church goes through (the grip of famine, war, racial and tribal tensions, political instability and the violation of human rights) both the Pope and synod Fathers are convinced that the Church can still be "Good News." But how?

> Contemporary Africa can be compared to the man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho; he fell among robbers who stripped him, beat him and departed, leaving him half dead (Cf. Lk. 10:30-37) Africa is a continent where countless human beings, men and women, children and young people are lying, as it were, on the edge of the road, sick, injured, disabled, marginalized and abandoned. They are in dire need of a good Samaritan who will come to their aid (# 41).

The Pope implores the Church to continue "patiently and tirelessly its work of a good Samaritan." Caution must be taken, however, not to consider this statement as representative of the church's otherwise complex response to the social-political situation in Africa. What is undeniable, however, is that it is not only consistent with the church's historical role in

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[22] Bediako, 247.

[23] Katongole, "Mission and Social Formation", 10.

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providing education, health care and other social services, it has often been a measure of the church's success on the continent. The 'outstanding and meritorious achievements in the field of education (# 38), the 'preferential option for the poor' (# 44), works of assistance in health care (# 45) are but some of the achievements which make Christianity a 'success story' in Africa.

What is particularly interesting, as Katongole notes, "is the way in which this paradigm is often couched in terms of 'intervention'-- a response to a crisis [poverty, suffering, instability, etc...]-- situations which are either the direct result of government policies, or the cumulative effect of the breakdown of government services."[24] Thus this pastoral church has been instrumental in repairing the wreckage made by governments; it had healed, taught, fed, housed, bathed, dressed, and comforted the groaning children of Africa. Nevertheless, it has seldom asked them: 'who did this to you?' The pastoral church has gone about binding wounds without doing enough to decry them, it has taught the coming reign of God but only rarely, judged its presence! No wonder then, that the church has increasingly come to understand its social mission in terms of partnership with the state in development and social change.

3.3.3. The Political Paradigm.

"This paradigm," Katongole notes, "reflects a call for the church to play a more explicit role of challenging oppressive political structures and urging political reform."[25] And the church has been outstanding in pursuing political reform. Gifford takes us through some of the attempts particularly in Francophone countries especially in the 1980s.

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[24] Katongole, "Mission and Social Formation", 11.

[25] Katongole, "Mission and Social Formation", 11.

In Benin, Msgr Isidole de Sousa, Archbishop of Cotonou, presided over the national conference...and was the highest authority in the land for the thirteen months leading up to election. In Gabon it was Msgr Basile Mve Engone, Bishop of Oyem. In Togo, Msgr Sanouko Kpodzro, Bishop of Atakpame, presided over the process. In Congo, Msgr Ernest Kombo, Bishop of Owando, presided over the three-month-long national conference and then the entire transitional process. In Zaire, Msgr Laurent Monsengwo Pasinya, Archbishop of Kisangani, was elected in 1991 to preside over the national conference attempting to halt that country's decline into anarchy.[26]

There are many more instances in which the church's involvement had been equally remarkable.

These include, *inter alia*, issuing of both collegial and individual pastoral letters by Bishops

condemning violence and dictatorship, and mobilization of the flock to vote dictatorial regimes

out of power. Again Gifford's examples are helpful: "In Malawi, the process of terminating

President Banda's rule was began by the 1992 lenten pastoral of the Catholic Bishops... And in

Zambia the Churches were among the most prominent local bodies involved in the 1991 transfer

of power."[27]

Katongole notes at least two very instructive assumptions underlying these three

paradigms: first, the political paradigm specifically takes such notions as 'justice', 'democracy',

and 'human rights' as "intrinsic to the social order which is at once human and Christian." [28]

Second, all the three paradigms assume that the nation-state is the primary social/political actor.

He notes:

While the focus on the spiritual identity assumes a clear separation between church and state; the pastoral paradigm responds to the crises arising out of the nation-state's failure or breakdown, by positioning the church as a 'partner in development'; the political

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[26] Gifford, 21.

[27] Gifford, 21.

[28] Katongole, "Mission and Social Formation", 12.

paradigm seeks to make the nation-state more just.[29]

Of course the hope is that the state, given the right policies, implemented effectively, would be capable of rendering the human condition unproblematic. But we have already noted (in chapter two) how the nation-state survives on the perpetuation of violence and the exploitation of difference. Any attempt towards alternative visions of human possibility, therefore, particularly in Africa, must unmask the nation-state mythos which is dependent on the promise of salvation and exploitation of difference. What we need to do here is to show how this is the case in the particular context of the African nation-state.

3.4. The Curse of the Nation-State in Africa: The Politics of Violence and Dispossession.

In fact, the nation-state in Africa is part of the prevailing story of violence, dispossession, and hopelessness that envelops the continent. Its story has been right from birth, one of control and extraction, a lesson it learned so well from its colonial predecessors. For as Gifford rightly notes, "the colonial states had been above all about control: they were essentially about securing the obedience of an alien people. They were hierarchical, with their primary aim being the maintenance of order, [and] they were geared to extracting resources from the domestic economy."[30] The politics of the emerging nation-states then, had to survive on all sorts of lies and the exploitation of local aspirations and difference. In fact Gifford is right in calling it the politics of "*clientelism*" which ensures "a relationship of exchange whereby a superior provides security

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[29] Katongole, "Mission and Social Formation", 12.

[30] Gifford, 4.

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for an inferior, who as a client then provides political support for his patron." As such clientelism "function to mobilise ethnic support."[31]

But perhaps no one has given us a better understanding of this nation-state politics of violence and dispossession in Africa than Basil Davidson in *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State*. The gist of Davidson's argument is that while Africa's crises derive from many upsets and conflicts, the roots of these lie deep within "the social and political institutions within which decolonized Africans have lived and tried to survive."[32] Prominent among these institutions is the nation-state, "Europe's last gift to Africa" whose introduction would be shrouded in myriads of contradictions, none perhaps as centrally problematic and frustrating to Africa's efforts towards peace and stability as the victory of the "national" struggle over the "social" struggle (138). Davidson develops his argument by placing the process of nation-state formation in Africa against that of Europe. For him, nation-states in 15th and 16th Century Europe emerged primarily from the struggle of interests and ambitions, set within a shared history of customs, loyalties, and traditions. In this struggle, the "middle strata", as he calls them, had an important role to play especially by aligning their interests with the needs of the "laboring poor" and their hopes for 'a better life', directing these towards a sense of nationalism. "The rise of nationalism within its nineteenth century context," he notes, "was the outcome of a combination of efforts between the rising "middle classes"...and the multitudinous masses of the 'lower orders'...Indispensable to nation-state's success in all the many upheavals of

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[31] Gifford, 6.

[32] Basil Davidson, The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State (New York: Random House Inc., 1992), 10.

the nineteenth century...were the agitations and uprisings of peasants and urban workers. These were "lower orders" which had until now played no role on the widening stage of statist claims and conflicts" (34). For Davidson then, European nation-state formation is inconceivable except in terms of a process of transformation and adjustment, in which the combined struggles of both the 'middle strata' and the 'laboring poor' would play a pivotal role in shaping the state, and nationalism. In other words, Europe witnessed a bottom-up process of nation-state formation.

In contrast, the process of nation-state formation in Africa was hijacked turning it into a project. This was the case in two ways: first the very drawing of colonial frontiers, later to be turned into national boundaries, were the outcome of the Berlin Conference (1884-85) which partitioned Africa to the advantage of the colonizing states. Africans, for centuries used to living in large numbers of organized communities, now became organized into some fifty nations. By the stroke of a pen, one long phase of history was ended, another began. Second, when the 'scramble out of Africa' came, the nationalist bourgeois successors of the colonial masters formed into what Gifford, following Bayart, calls a "'hegemonic alliance'-- a privileged zone of interpenetration and mutual reinforcement, to produce a relatively homogeneous social group, an elite with western education and well-paid public sector jobs, and often the former colonial residences."[33] This new elite, by virtue of their western education and mannerism, manifested a sense of superiority over the ruled. The ruled in turn looked at them with both scorn and envy, and "they developed a sense of the state as an alien institution, to be feared but also to de deceived and exploited, since it existed on a plane above the people whom it governed, beyond

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[33] Gifford, 7.

any chance of control."[34]

Even more interesting is the fact that during the "peculiar chemistry of nation-state formation" in Africa, the "dynamic element which so decisively transforms the social struggle of the masses into a national struggle" was, on the whole, pushed out of hearing. Or even better, it was intentionally censored under the 'Africa without history' colonial lie (21-51). From the colonial point of view, Africa lacked any experience in social existence, it lacked those customs and traditions which were essential for the modern notion of nation-statism. Africa's local history was then devalued into folklore, while all the rich tapestry of cultures, traditions and social struggles were understood to be no better than "tribalism" and , for that matter, "retrogressive" (99).

One may disagree with some of the assumptions that sustain Davidson's argument. For example Davidson is convinced that if the process of nation-state formation in pre-colonial Africa had not been hijacked, it would have slowly evolved to the standard of their European counterparts. But even nation-state formation in Europe was a more complex and problematic process than Davidson would have us believe.[35] Overall, however, his argument is very instructive in naming the contradictions which underlie both the formation of the nation-state in Africa, and the many problems that have come to haunt the continent. Four of these deserve more attention.

First, the nation-state in Africa was founded on neither a common object of love nor a

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[34] Gifford, 7.

[35] For example, Cavanaugh would strongly argue that nation-state formation in Europe was inextricably tied up with violence.

common agenda. "Nationalists embraced nation statism as the only available escape from colonialism" (99). As such there was no enduring sense of historical adjustments within the local aspirations and struggles. At independence many of these states were unavailable as complete entities, in fact no better than what Gifford calls "shell states", having juridical but not empirical statehood. As Gifford continues to note:

> Western liberal states came into existence because they had developed the machinery of statehood: they controlled all the territory they claimed, could enforce laws, collect taxes, offer protection to their citizens, and repel invaders. As a result, they could demand recognition of their statehood from other states...Africa cannot claim all these...Thus for many African states professed statehood does not derive from any ability actually to do the things that are expected of a state... they are states because the international community chooses to regard them as such.[36]

This is the irony in which many Africa states continue to find themselves even today.

Second, given the top-down type of politics prevalent in many emerging states, an exploitative relationship between the nationalists and the masses and their social struggles was inevitable. The nationalist rhetoric would soon be loud sounding nonsense because it lacked grounding within the concerns and aspirations of the masses. The nationalists would soon *discover* that the masses were indispensable to nationalism's success. Yet as these masses increasingly saw themselves being alienated from the project of nation-state building, the nationalists took steps to recruit them. Davidson beautifully captures the scenario that followed:

> Having formed their parties of national liberation, the educated elite had to chase their voters. And so they did, penetrating places never before seen, crossing rivers never before encountered, confronting languages never before learned, and all this with the help of local enthusiasts somehow recruited. They thus made contact with these "masses" quite often with the assistance of aged Land Rovers able, with their four-wheeled drive, to go where no other wheeled vehicles had ever been, but only just able, and not seldom abandoned by the way (108).

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[36] Gifford, 7.

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The phrase "somehow recruited" is very significant not only for the politics then, but for the

politics that characterizes many African states today. As Katongole instructively notes, "instead

of being a force which shapes and determines national debates, the masses and their aspirations

are only belatedly 'discovered' and only 'somehow' recruited within nationalist politics in an

occasional, token, and exploitative manner."[37] As it were, the masses were found to be potent

political capital to be exploited by the nationalists seeking power. For what else could be done to

such an isolated community as for example, the Karamajong, living far off the shore of

'modernization', "their ancestral charter barely fractured by peripheral colonial rule,"[38] who

suddenly had found themselves written into the nation-state of Uganda? It is no surprise then,

that many politicians are seen by the electorate only at the time of elections. And then, if their

rhetoric fails to win the votes, either money or intimidation will carry the day. This arbitrary top-

down imagined nation state was bound to fail. This is because not only that profound unity and

receptivity so central to a community forced on the people, there was very little comradeship

among them. They could hardly imagine themselves as communing with others beyond their own

ethnic group.

Third, it is important to see how violence is underwritten within the very formation of the

nation-state in Africa. Soon after independence, unresolved tensions of the colonial period,

"sources of myriads of resentments settled by 'pacification', were relaunched within the infra-

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[37] Katongole, <u>Mission and Social Formation</u>, 20.

[38] Davidson, <u>Let Freedom Come: Africa in Modern History</u> (Boston: Little, Brown and
Company, 1978), 290.

African arena."[39] A confrontation between the colonial and pre-colonial heritage ensued. Should the pre-colonial heritage be scrapped except in folklore and sentiment, as many nationalists argued? Or should the colonial heritage be displaced by a return to pre-colonial values? Or again, could there be a creative synthesis between the two? The situation was bound to erupt into chaos. First, the nationalist elite began to elbow not only each other as they scrambled for the strictly colonial cake now turned nation-state, but those who struggled to join the feast. Second, those who managed to get into power found that they had increasingly to rely on violence in order to assert their legitimacy. Many multi-party parliamentary systems (built on the colonial model) now gave way to one-party systems. In all this struggle, the masses would once again be found useful, and hence they were recruited. Recruited, even into militia armies. Here the various 'tribalisms'[40] functioned as bases of the violent schemes of the power-hungry politicians. Many disgruntled groups turned into 'freedom' fighters, and since the mid 1960s the continent has been rocked by coup after military coup. A more serious consequence of all this has been the naturalization of violence within the social order and within individual lives. Voting into power a civilian politician who does not have a strong personal army is considered a great risk. After all, his days are numbered, since he will be overthrown sooner or later.

This story of the nation-state in Africa is often taken for granted. It is seldom told. The church in Africa has largely accepted the nation-state, without critically questioning the story

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[39]Davidson, 294.

[40] Davidson rightly notes that tribalism was a pure invention. Baffled by Africa's plurality of ethnic diversity, the colonialists, for mainly administrative reasons, tried to band together related "ethnic units" into tribes (99). These 'tribes' would also prove useful to the nationalist as they played one group over another for purely political gain.

which informs it. This is perhaps why much of the church's effort is directed towards making African governments more just or democratic. We do not want to say that these are not recommendable efforts, far from that. But as Katongole insightfully notes, "what these approaches may not realize is that by assuming the story of the nation-state, they unwittingly allow the church's own telos to be narrated and defined by this story."[41] As such, the church may be defined as a Non-Government organization which, like others of this nature, must make its contribution to an already 'given' neutral space. Its mission too may become driven by the need to devise adequate strategies to make the religious message relevant to the needs of the people as defined by the state. This is precisely why the church in Africa finds itself in a position of importance and impotence. Though it is the 'most influential and most sustainable social institution', it is yet to fully capitalize on its resources in the area of social transformation. Nevertheless, it is not without resources to do so. This will be the focus of our analysis in the next section.

3.5 Towards an Ecclesial Social Imagination.

Our analysis in chapter one was partly geared toward questioning a naive realism which posits an absolute given reality in the face of which we can hardly but be submissive, uncritically respectable, and conservative. There we argued that there is no 'given' or neutral reality. The 'given' is not so much the reality out there as it is life, which consists in shared practices and day-to-day activities. We also argued against an idealism which accords the individual with the licence to impose upon reality whatever meaning he/she wants. The individual would hardly

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[41] Katongole, "Mission and Social Formation", 22.

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make any description of the world apart from the network of practices fostered within a community. Our description and depictions of the world, we argued, depend on the way we have been trained to see it.

The effect of this analysis in chapter one was to suggest that "reality" is constantly being differently narrated, framed, and constructed by particular communities. As we have suggested in subsequent pages, two prominent communities whose narration has been crucial both in Europe and Africa are the church and the nation-state. We have labored to question and analyze the story of the nation-state which is built on the assumption of individuality and the violent nature of the human race. But if our analysis of the nation-state especially in Africa is correct, then any form of salvation must come in terms of an alternative story fostered within a community capable of peaceful existence through its convictions and practices. This story must provide an alternative way of seeing and describing those everyday struggles which lie at the basis of people's social and material existence. This is the task of an ecclesial social imagination.

a. A Eucharistic Community.

At the end of chapter two we developed the strange claim that the Eucharist is the most determinative form of ecclesial politics. Not only does it diffuse the false soteriology and violence of the nation-state, it gathers, transforms, and re-members a people wounded and scattered by sin, despair, injustice, war, and violence into the Body of Christ. This claim becomes even the more important in the story of Africa which, as we have shown, is a story of dispossession, violence, and disempowerment. It is this story that the church in Africa needs to address especially through its own practices, particulary Eucharistic performance. The church's alternative story of hope and empowerment consists not primarily in the issuance of pastoral

letters or in other church doctrines, but in its embodied existence. This embodied existence will itself be a public witness to what it means to be a church, that is, a people formed and informed by the story of Christ's life, death, and resurrection as found in the scriptures and witnessed to in traditions over time. In this embodied story Africans can locate and narrate their social struggles. There is no better way of doing this than through the Eucharist, the very center of the church's life and mission.

b. The Church as a Social Ethic.

A social imagination rooted in the Eucharist requires that the church re-vision its political mission not as simply providing an ethic for a violent and corrupt world, but as embodying a social ethic within it. As Stanley Hauerwas insists, the church has no social ethic, but is itself a social ethic. As such, "the church does not exist to provide an ethos to democracy or any other form of social organization, but stands as a political alternative to every nation, witnessing to the kind of social life possible for those that have been formed by the story of Christ."[42] What Hauerwas gets to here is that the church's story is its own politics, that is, a conversation which names, narrates, and frames what it means to be socially formed in a distinctive way. And once the church's story is understood as a politics, then the call for an ecclesial social imagination as Katongole notes, " is a call for the church to see that the story of the nation-state is not 'inevitable' Instead, the church can (ought to) embody a different (better) narrative of social existence than the one embodied by the nation-state [especially] in Africa."[43] The Church

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[42] Hauerwas, <u>A Community of Character: Towards a Constructive Christian Social Ethic</u> (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1981), 12.

[43] Katongole, <u>"Mission and Social Formation"</u>, 25.

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therefore cannot afford to simply provide strategies within the political space as defined by the state. Rather, its main political service is to stand as an analogous society that manifests in its practices what it means to be a people formed by God's story of peace, love and charity.

c. Recovering the Materiality of the Gospel

If the church is to avoid being confined to either the sphere of the religious (where religion simply means a set of private beliefs) or to just a charitable organization, it must strive to realize the deep materiality of the Gospel. As Katongole suggests, we must recover the Gospel "as a story whose power to save Christians have come to acknowledge."[44] The salvific force of this Gospel must go hand in hand with its power "to shape the imagination of [ordinary] Christians into recognizing forms of social existence that would otherwise be unavailable to them."[45] For what seems to be at stake, particularly in Africa, is that many people have failed to see how the Gospel relates to the demands of their daily existence. Many have come to believe in a life after death that is promised by the Gospel. But what many are increasingly skeptical about is whether this salvation begins here on earth. In other words, their vexing question is whether there is life before death. As Ela notes, "The essential thing is to take up the Gospel in everyday life reminding ourselves that it should be lived as a message, of human liberation. Only at this price will the Christian message, instead of being hammered out in paralyzing routines or shriveled up in little enclaves, be an energy released for the transformation of Africa."[46] The Gospel, then, must penetrate the warp and woof of human existence. It should become a

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[44] Katongole, "Re-visioning African Christian Theology", 16.

[45] Katongole, "Mission and Social Formation", 27.

[46] Ela, 119.

force that permeates even the simple demands of people's ordinary existence, say of cultivation, pasturing, growing of bananas, etc. It must seek to form Christian communities in which, as Katongole says, "the cultivation of vegetables and the digging of wells; the immunization against malaria and the construction of pit latrines is as much a matter of salvation as the celebration of baptism, the Eucharist and the reading of the Scriptures."[47] We need to underscore the necessity of these small Christian communities, and how they may witness to another way of being church.

d. Churched communities.

Within the church in Africa, there is a commendable drive towards building small Christian communities. These have largely tended to follow the model of the small Christian communities in South America. As Leonaldo Boff envisions, the churched communities contain a new principal of "birthing the church" which rotates not on a "sacramental-clerical axis" but on the "axis of the word and the laity."[48] They question the popular understanding of being church which, as Boff continues to note, by acquiring "an organizational form with a heavily hierarchical framework and juridical understanding of relationships among Christians", has produced "reified inequalities and inequities."[49] These Communities, therefore, are meant to lead the church away from a life of alienating structures towards a life characterized by "direct relationships, by reciprocity, by a deep communion, by mutual assistance, by communality of Gospel ideals, by equality among members."[50] But how do these Christian communities

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[47] Katongole, "Mission and Social Formation", 27.

[48] Leonaldo Boff, Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church, trans. Robert R. Barr (New York: Orbis Books, 1986), 2.

[49] Boff, 2.

[50] Boff, 4.

concretely operate? Life within these communities tends to rotate around prayer, Scripture reflection, faith sharing, and spirituality. Members, as Boff notes, "seek to live the essence of the Christian message: the universal parenthood of God, communion with all human beings, the following of Jesus Christ who died and rose again, the celebration of the resurrection and the Eucharist, and the upbuilding of the Kingdom of God, already underway in history as the liberation of the whole human being and all human beings."[51]

We may laud Boff's vision of birthing the church through churched communities. However, his attempt to de-emphasize the 'sacramental-clerical axis' in favor of the 'word and laity axis' seems problematic. We have suggested that the most vison-forming practice for Christians is Eucharistic performance. This performance then cannot be sidelined in favor of the word or simply to make the laity spearhead the 'birthing' of the church. Also, as we can note, these communities, for the most part, still operate within the spiritual paradigm which, as we saw, is mainly concerned with the formation of a Christian spiritual identity."[52] But this is precisely what we have to go beyond if these communities are to recover the materiality of the gospel. What a witness it would be for such communities to gather not simply to listen to the scriptures but, say, to help a needy member be it with the construction of a pit latrine, a house, or even with the harvesting of her crops! In this direction, the Ganda[53] people offer us with a valuable concrete example. It is customary for the Baganda to join hands in the event of death or some other 'big' celebration. If a family loses a loved one they will gather in their hundreds to

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[51] Boff, 4.

[52] Bediako, 85.

[53] The Baganda are a people occupying the central part of Uganda, East Africa.

stay with the family, rending both material and moral support. Women groups locally known as

'*Munno mu Kabi*' (Friends in Need) supply the food, while the men dig the grave and do any

heavy work required. This pattern of caring is also in times joy such as wedding or ordination

celebrations. This, in my view, is a great political witness to what it means to be a people formed

by another story other than that of the nation-state or even of capitalism. For in this age of

globalization and capitalism, in which almost every service is driven by the market, the Baganda

stand as a witness to the fact that capitalism's domination is not inevitable. It reminds the

Baganda that the story of the nation-state cannot capture what they must love, and what they

share most intimately within their communities.

It is such a witness that the churched communities we are calling for ought to embody.

They must respond and resist the atomization of existence and a general lostness in the cogs of

macro organizations. And this is not new to the Christian community. It is the witness of the first

Christian community as Luke repeatedly presents it in the Acts:

> All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their
> possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as
> they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food
> with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.
> And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. Acts 2:43-
> 47.

And later in 4:32-34, we read:

> Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one
> claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in
> common. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or
> houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold.

It was because of this outstanding witness that the disciples were called Christians (Acts 11:25),

that is, a distinct group of believers distinguishable from any other forms of Judaism. And it is

this witness that the church badly needs, especially in Africa.

e. A critical introspection

The task of social imagination will hardly be fruitful unless a framework is created for a critical introspection within the Christian story itself, particularly in Africa. Indeed, atrocities like the 1994 Rwanda genocide (an 80% Christian country) should lead us to ask with Mugambi whether " this religiosity is authentic, or is it superstition arising out of despair? How are we to explain the apparent contradiction, that contemporary Africa continues to be, perhaps the most religious continent in the world, and yet its peoples remain the most abused in all history...Could it be that irreligion is the key to success, and that religion is the key to backwardness?"[54] What Mugambi's vexing questions call us to realize is that numerical growth in African Christianity should not be an excuse to become uncritical and triumphalistic. Rather these contradictions issue a call for a critical introspection not only to whether the church might be part of the problem, but what sort of church we ought to be. If the church is to move away from a de-materialized and de-politicized stance (as simply operating from a privatized realm of feelings, moods, and beliefs), it must see its very practices, convictions, and habits as the basis of its politics and public witness.

And one area which requires more attention is the area of authority within the church. It is unfortunate that the church sometimes exhibits the same conception of power as that operative within the nation-state. We have noted how power relations within the nation-state are largely based on dispossession and exploitation of difference. There is often a very tactical exclusion of those who may hold different opinions. Within the church power tends to rotate on the clerical

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[54] Mugambi, 33.

axis where the "clergy- know- it- all" mentality dominates. Though church councils headed by the laity are wide spread from parish to diocesan or even national levels, their proceedings, deliberations, and recommendations are always subject to scrutiny by the clergy.

But even worse are the noticeable tactics of "survival" and "belly politics" within the church, not different from the nation-state. Scandalous cases of violent power struggles within the church have greatly affected the church's mission. In the catholic diocese of Kabale in southern Uganda, for example, a violent rebellion in the 1990s ensued including almost half the priests and the laity.[55] These accused the then bishop Halem Imana of tribalism and mismanagement of church funds. The bishop called in government security forces who arrested and allegedly tortured the rebellious priests and Christians[56]. The celebration of Sunday Eucharist became a very tense moment as each group tried to prove their case to those who had not taken sides. Security official had to be present at each celebration of the Eucharist lest violent fights ensue. In the end Rome intervened, relieving the bishop of his duties and installing a care-taker bishop. The question as which party was right or wrong is not what we want to ask here. But how is the church to be the embodiment of an alternative conception and discipline of power when it is riddled with such power struggles? As we already saw in chapter two, Jesus' message to both James and John and the rest of the twelve is; "you know that among the Gentiles those

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[55] The same type of power struggle may be seen within the Anglican church in Uganda, where Bishop Cyprian Bamwoze of Jinja diocese was violently removed from power. And now the same is happening in the Anglican diocese of Rukungiri in western Uganda.

[56] St. Paul would castigate such a move in the same way he does to the Corinthians; "When any of you had a grievance against another, do you dare to take it to court before the unrighteous, instead of taking it before the saints?...If you have ordinary cases, then, do you appoint those as judges who have no standing in the church? I say this to your shame (I Cor. 6:1-5).

whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them...But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be slave of all" (Mark 10:42-45). Jesus here calls the church away from the understanding of power as greatness, (this is for the Gentiles), to a radically new way of seeing and practicing authority in terms of service. The community Jesus gathers around himself is to be characterized not by the pursuit of honor and glory, but by self-sacrificing service. It is this conception of power that the church must always look to. Only then will the church match up the critical challenge of offering an alternative to the story of dispossession, poverty, and violence.

But we are not entirely without grounds for hope. Christ, who has re-membered and graciously re-written us in God's story, remains our hope. His message to all of us is: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppresses go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Lk. 4:18-19). He tells us again: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn. 10:10). After all, he is not far from us, he is with us most vividly when we gather for the breaking of bread.

APPENDIX.

Christian belief belongs to Christian practice, and it sustains its affirmations about God and creation only by repeating and enacting a metanarrative about how God speaks in the world in order to redeem it.[1]

Some will argue that the sort of ecclesial social imagination such as we have suggested belongs to an incredible miracle. Even stranger, our suggestion is not that Christians *provide* a social ethic but that they must themselves *be* a social ethic to and in the world. The former, it appears, would be a more feasible, and indeed down to earth option for Christians. Our call then, for the church to be an alternative to the nation-state in determining the social *telos* sounds not simply sectarian, but a dangerous approach. It sounds as no better than calling Christians out from the world, leaving it to its violent end.

But we must insist, as Milbank, that "Christian belief belongs to Christian practice." It is by embodying a distinctive way of life through their practices and convictions that Christians will concretely witness to what it means for those formed and informed by God's story to live as a people of peace and reconciliation. It is such witness that will disrupt the nation-state's *mythos* which, as we noted, assumes violence to be intrinsic to human nature, and as such, resort to violence as the basis of true peace. Then the church will elaborate a counter-ethic. This counter-ethic, as Milbank suggests, must involve three components; "first, the practice of charity and forgiveness as involving the priority of a gratuitous creative giving of existence, and so of difference. Secondly, the reconciliation of difference as virtue, fulfilling true virtue only through

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[1] Milbank, 422.

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this reconciliation. Thirdly, the treatment of peace as a primary reality and the denial of an always preceding violence."[2] This counter-ethic we find enacted in South Africa's story of peace and reconciliation which, as Bishop Desmond Tutu puts it, "confounds all prophets of doom" and shows how Christian belief and practice does provide a counter-politics based on the Christian ontology of peace and unity.

BISHOP DESMOND TUTU: 'THIS IS A MORAL UNIVERSE'

South Africa's road from the evils of apartheid to peace and reconciliation is a long and arduous one, and, in fact, more complex than we can attempt to narrate. There are many heroes one would talk about, obviously Nelson Mandela, the prisoner turned president, indeed the very embodiment of peace and reconciliation. No wonder, he is so respected a statesman. But we shall as much as possible limit our discussion to Bishop Desmond Tutu, whose Christian vision of peace and reconciliation presents a counter-ethic in a world that is more comfortable with containing violence with the greater threat of violence.

After years of oppression, dispossession, and violence, when many thought that they were hoping against hope, the world saw a "veritable miracle unfold before their eyes"[3] on April 24, 1994--the day of elections in South Africa. It was indeed, as Bishop Tutu movingly describes it in *No Future Without Forgiveness*, a day "of vindication for all of those who had borne the burden and the heat of repression, the little people whom apartheid had turned into the anonymous ones, faceless, voiceless counting for nothing in their motherland." All those who "had been created in the Image of God but their dignity had been callously trodden underfoot

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[2] Mibank, 423.

[3] Desmond Tutu, No Future Without Forgiveness (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 10.

daily by apartheid's minions...just because of an accident of birth, a biological irrelevance, the color of their skin" (6).

Against all odds (the fear that some fanatics would turn this election into the worst episode of violence), the elections went smoothly. For many South Africans, this was not simply a secular political event, but a metamorphosis, a spiritual experience for both blacks and whites. "The black person," recalls Bishop Tutu, "entered the booth one person and emerged on the other side a new, transfigured person. She entered weighed down by the anguish and burden of oppression...she reappeared as someone new." The same was true of the white person. "He entered the voting booth burdened by the load of guilt for having enjoyed the fruits of oppression and injustice. He emerged as somebody new" (7-8). April 27, 1994, Nelson Mandela was inaugurated as the first democratically elected president of a free South Africa. A man "once vilified and hunted down as a dangerous fugitive and incarcerated for nearly three decades," now became the very embodiment of peace and reconciliation.

But a much more challenge lay ahead: yes, democracy had replaced repression, but the horrors of apartheid had left an almost indelible mark on the nation's history as well as on its victims. Nobody would pretend that it had never taken place. The beast had to be faced into the eyes. The all important question then, was "not *whether* but *how* to deal with this only too real past" (19). Two options were immediately presented; first, some wanted to follow the "Nuremberg paradigm" which would seek, as was the case immediately after World War II, to bring to trial all perpetrators of gross human rights violations. But for Bishop Tutu, this was more of a "victor's justice" that could hardly heal the wounds of infant South Africa, making its first steps towards the rule of law, democracy, and respect for human rights (20). The second option

was to "let bygones be bygones" (27). Some suggested a blanket amnesty for all those who had

committed heinous crimes. But again Bishop Tutu rejected this option. For him, blanket amnesty

amounted to national amnesia, which of course would be self-deception. Human experience for

Bishop Tutu is that "the past, far from disappearing or lying down and being quiet, has an

embarrassing and persistent way of returning and haunting us unless it has in fact been dealt with

adequately" (28). Morever, national amnesia would victimize the victims a second time because

they would be denied an opportunity to remember and re-tell the history that had made them who

they are. Even more, the perpetrators too would be denied a chance to acknowledge and confess

their sins publicly.

Bishop Tutu proposed a "third way." He suggested a granting of amnesty to individuals

"in exchange for a full disclosure relating to the crime for which amnesty was sought. It was the

carrot of possible freedom in exchange for truth and the stick was, for those already in jail, the

prospect of lengthy prison sentences and, for those still free, the probability of arrest and

prosecution and imprisonment" (30). This is what the government intended to do by establishing

the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). For Bishop Tutu, and those who came to

believe in this "third way," pursuit of national unity, the well-being of all South Africans, and

peace required reconciliation (45). Such reconciliation itself could hardly be achieved through

retributive justice "whose chief goal is to be punitive so that the wronged party is really the state,

something impersonal, which has little consideration for the victims and almost none for the

perpetrators." Instead what was required was *restorative justice*, whose central concern is neither

retribution nor punishment, but "healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the

restoration of broken relationships, a seeking to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator"

(54-55).

This sort of justice, for Bishop Tutu, was deeply entrenched within the Christian story, and he would draw on Christian resources to insist on peace and reconciliation. For him, the very words "forgiveness," "reconciliation," "reparation," are less of a currency within secular political discourse as they are within the religious sphere. In political discourse, "it was more normal to demand satisfaction, to pay back in the same coin, to give as good as you got, for it [is] more common to have the ethos of "dog eat dog" in the jungle world of [secular] politics" (80). But this is not what South Africa needed. Bishop Tutu resorted to his Christian convictions and practices to lead South Africa towards peace and reconciliation. "When I was challenged about it by journalists," he recalls, "I told them I was a religious leader and had been chosen as who I was...I could not pretend I was someone else...[And this] meant that theological and religious insights and perspectives would inform much of what we did and how we did it" (82). And he did it. Before the commission began its work, Bishop Tutu took it on a retreat "to enhance [the commissioners'] spiritual resources and to sharpen [their] sensitivities" (81). He called for prayer at the beginning and end of every meeting. And in the Human Rights Violation Committee, prayers, hymns, and ritual candle lighting were performed to "commemorate those who had died in the struggle" (81). Even more, he implored the entire Anglican community to pray for the success of the commission.

But all this could hardly take place without Bishop Tutu's theological conviction mainly that "this is a moral universe", and as such, evil cannot have the last word. Such a conviction itself lay on two theological affirmations which we explored at length in chapter two, namely our creation in the image of God, and God's gracious choosing to write us into God's own story. We

argued that our creation in the image of God is what accords us with worth as human beings.

Attributes such as skin color, race, nationality, or sex are irrelevant determinants of human worth

and dignity. It is this Christian conviction that fired Bishop Tutu to fight against apartheid. He

notes:

> The Bible is categorical--that which endowed human beings, every single human being without exception, with worth, infinite worth, is not this or that biological or any other extrinsic attribute. No, it is the fact that each one of us has been created in the image of God. This is something intrinsic. It comes, as it were, with the package. It means that each one of us is a God-carrier, God's viceroy, God's representative. It is because of this fact that to treat one such a person as if he or she were less than this is veritably blasphemous. It is like spitting in the face of God. That is what filled some of us with such passionate commitment to fight for justice and freedom (93).

Even more, Bishop Tutu was convinced that all humanity has been redeemed and graced

by God. Despite the magnanimity of the heinous acts committed by the perpetrators of apartheid,

he was convinced that they had not turned into demons, and therefore, not beyond redemption.

They too were children of God, and despite their sins, they were graced, just as we all are.

Despairing them as demons would relieve them of accountability and responsibility for their

deeds. They had to acknowledge and confess their beastly acts publicly and ask for forgiveness.

"What we are, what we have," says Bishop Tutu, " even our salvation, all is gift, all is grace, not

to be achieved but to be received as gift freely given" (85). This is the unconditional nature of

God's election which Bader-Saye drew to our attention in chapter two. Election is pure grace, it

is God's work. We all share in the sin of Adam and Eve and, just as they did, we all may want to

deny responsibility for our acts. But we are a redeemed people, redeemed by one "who had a soft

spot particularly for sinners." Christ's death and resurrection are the basis of Christian belief in

God's love, which is stronger than any hatred, or darkness, or even death.

This was Bishop Tutu's vision for South Africa. And it worked. Despite the challenges that may remain (reported cases of violence and discrimination still going on), the country has amazingly recovered from the evils of apartheid. Perhaps nations such as Rwanda should have taken the same road instead of instituting a Genocide Tribunal which has largely sought retributive justice for the alleged perpetrators of the genocide.

By refusing to treat his Christian beliefs and convictions as unimportant, Bishop Tutu refuses to talk to the world on its own terms. He issues a challenge to all Christians never to treat their faith as a fad or passing belief equally useful to both the atheist and the Christian. Rather, Christians must witness in their daily lives and engagements to what it means for them to be a people formed by God's story. It is such a witness that will call into question the nation-state's *mythos* of a primordial violence and individuality, while at the same time offering a counter-ontology based on the Christian *mythos* of an original peace and unity.

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