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POLITICAL THEOLOGY AND THE CHURCH

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I confess to being behind the times in most things. I don't use the latest social media very much—I've never Twittered or tweeted, at least to my knowledge—and my knowledge of popular music stopped with the arrival of my first child in 1988. I haven't seen any of the most popular current movies, whether made in America or anyplace else.

It seems that this quality carries over a bit into my academic work as well. When I reflect on what seems to me to be important in thinking about "political theology and the church"—my assigned topic for today—I'm afraid I continue to concentrate on concerns that many people think are long settled, resolved, and old news. Nothing to see here, move along please.

To be more specific, I continue to believe that being a follower of Jesus Christ means we shouldn't kill people, especially in the organized, structured practices we call politics and war. I don't think Christians should kill anyone, but I think it's especially scandalous that Christians continue to kill other Christians as if the bonds of sacrament and church matter not one bit.

I continue to be amazed by the ease with which members of so-called Christian nations slaughtered members of other so-called

Christian nations in the 20th century. As I said, I think Christian nonviolence means that Christians ought not kill anybody—but the wholesale phenomenon of Christians killing one another with impunity remains a huge, perhaps insurmountable, obstacle to any sort of Christian credibility in the world. Why take seriously—whether in interreligious dialogues or anything else—anything coming from a religious movement whose members are willing to kill one another by the millions? And this coming from a movement that invites the world to embrace a Prince of Peace, calling for reconciliation and forgiveness rather than revenge and domination.

There are many ways to get into a topic like this—for example, one could discuss yet again the ethics of warfare, the endless debates on the so-called just war—but today I'd like to raise another set of concerns. More specifically, I'd like to raise anew the question of Christians and lethality as a question of inculturation gone wrong, and of processes of political vs. ecclesial formation of human affections, priorities and dispositions.

To say the least, inculturation remains a major concern in Catholic circles worldwide. One theme highlighted usefully in recent years concerns the recognition that inculturation is an ongoing process rather than a once-and-for-all phenomenon. It is not a finished work but one that requires ongoing renewal, rearticulation and recommitment as host cultures and the Church both change; in this respect, it remains a constant both for churches in Europe and North America as well as for those in the Philippines and elsewhere.

In all of this, it remains important to recognize that much damage was done to countless human beings, and to the witness of the Gospel, by the forcible insertion of Christianity into human cultures during various eras of the past. This sort of inculturation at sword's point, suppressing pre-existing peoples, beliefs and communities in favor of a Christianity armed and aggressive, created a cultural milieu of a most particular sort. No one, least of all leaders of the Catholic Church, seeks a return to any processes of inculturation that ally themselves with violence and death-dealing.

It is this last point that provides something of a jumping-off point for me today. Much of the past 75 years has been spent coming to terms with the legacy of inculturation that comes by way of force, coercion and power—in missiology, in the anti- and post-colonial movements, in the renewal movements surrounding the Second Vatican Council, and much more. How might the Church be true to its best self, how might it be a herald and foretaste of the Kingdom of God without tying itself to forms of cultural and political habitation that presuppose the legitimacy of violence and coercively regulated norms of order, belonging, and loyalty?

In our time, to repeat, the Church rejects the ambition of being an institution capable of structuring human affections and identities through force or by recourse to violent means. In this, may God be praised as room is made for a vision of religious liberty rooted both in individual conscience and a robust communal sense of discipleship and mission.

And yet, a blind spot of some significance remains, an area of political theology that merits attention and consideration—in some respects, a reconsideration of past accommodations once thought settled but, in my view, in need of revisiting and revision. More specifically, I think the Church worldwide needs to visit anew the conflict between state-based identities (nationalism, citizenship, ethnopolitical movements) and being a member of the Christian Church, that worldwide community of believers joined by baptism and Eucharist and the claim that Jesus is Lord. For much of the so-called modern era, for imperial and colonial/postcolonial regions alike, perhaps the most powerful processes and ideologies of identity and belonging—of culturation and inculturation alike, if you will—have been those that seek to form peoples, nations, states and homelands. The claims of such, usually and perhaps eventually, tend to become overreaching and thus represent a form of cultural construction incompatible with the radical demands of the Gospel and the eschatological nature of discipleship. What makes these overreaching, to be specific, is that they require Christians to kill and die for them as a matter of course.

To the extent that Christianity in general and Catholicism in particular has sought to become "at home" in the various cultures of the world by embracing the norms of nationalism and citizenship that predominate, to that extent has the Church adopted a defective sort of inculturation. In its embrace of nationalism and its claims on identity and allegiance, I suggest, the Church again opts for another sort of inculturation at sword's point, in which Christianity mutes its call for peacemaking and reconciliation as it attempts to gain acceptance and incorporation among the diverse and varied cultures of the world. Such represents another variant on the now-discredited agenda of inculturation by coercion, albeit one in which in most cases the violence is wielded on behalf of a non-Christian ideology to which the Church serves in a subordinate, not defining, role.

Given time constraints, I can only outline the argument I have made in extended form elsewhere[1] and hope to deepen in the future. For now, let me offer a few thoughts on the following:

1. The fundamental violence of national citizenship and the sectarian nature of "nationhood";
2. 2. The limits of Catholic social thought regarding nationalism and citizenship;
3. A brief description of a neglected aspect of Christian theology that might help the Church resituate the relative value of citizenship and national identities with reference to the unity of the Church formed in baptism, eucharist and ecclesial practice.

1. The Violence of Citizenship

The literature on political citizenship, especially in the liberal traditions of the West, is built on the assumption that secular, national citizenship is the solution to the irremediably violent nature of religious (and specifically Christian) notions of identity, allegiance and belonging.

[1]Michael L. Budde, *The Borders of Baptism: Identities, Allegiances and the Church* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011).

Our colleague Bill Cavanaugh has done pathbreaking work on much of this, and I commend his most recent book to you as essential reading. His survey of Western political thought is a helpful overview of the extent to which political, nation-oriented citizenship is largely assumed to be the antidote to sectarian violence and coercion.

Political theology, to the extent that it presumes the normativity of such a view of political citizenship, perpetuates a blind spot with significant consequences for the Church, for human association, and for understanding the trajectory of life in modernity in its many expressions. Indeed, that the churches themselves have subscribed to such a narrative explains in no small degree their own inability to name the violence and coercion built into most notions of citizenship, nationhood and state sovereignty.

As a category of membership which ascribes rights and duties, citizenship by necessity is selective and exclusionary. In the modern era, where citizenship came to assume primarily a national character (being "German" was to have the rights associated with German state citizenship; being "Nigerian" was to be recognized as a politically empowered and recognized member of the polity called Nigeria), authentic nationhood found expression in the foundation, governance or recognition of a sovereign state.

Anthony Marx is one among many scholars to remind us how unnatural and how coercive such notions of nation and citizenship have been. The power to exclude certain groups from national or political recognition should not be seen as an occasional or transitory phenomenon in political history, says Marx; rather, "exclusion is structural rather than fixed or tangential to nation-building."[2] As he notes:

> The term "nation-state" implies some convergence of an institutionalized polity and collective allegiance to it, with "nationalism" defined here as such bounded solidarity and allegiance to a state. The nation is that group viewed as the legitimate owner of the state; the collective sentiment of such ownership (that is, nationalism) is what gives the state

[2]Anthony Marx, "The Nation-State and Its Exclusions," *Political Science Quarterly* 117:1 (2002).

> legitimacy. This connection can be established in more or less either direction: state first, building national loyalty, or a national community creating a state, though often these processes occur together.[3]

More contemporary scholars are, like Marx, willing to disagree with earlier notions of pre-existing social groups giving rise to state formations; more commonly, it is a project advanced by actors within already established states, for whom constructing political identities and loyalties requires state action. And this action, as Marx and others notes, is by its nature coercive, exclusionary, and powerful.

> [N]ationalism is often purposefully exclusionary, with such exclusions emerging in fits and starts but encouraged or encoded to serve the explicit requirements for solidifying core loyalty to the nation. Rather than diversity precluding cohesion, diversity and selective allocations of nationalism and related rights may be the tools for building cohesion among the core that is included and demarcated.

In addition,

> [M]uch prior analysis has assumed that the imperative for encouraging national unity should be inclusive, but often this is not possible …. State elites make deals en route to nation building, selecting who to include, reward, and encourage loyalty from as the core constituency. To identify and consolidate the core, elites manipulate established antagonisms against some other group thereby excluded. And the core constituency so demarcated and reinforced may itself change over time according to shifting challenges and allegiances.[4]

The politics of definition looms large in all of this, inasmuch as warring definitions of states, nations, ethnicities, and more show no signs of abating. For many purposes, nationalism may still be best understood according to the definition offered by Arthur Stinchcombe nearly forty years ago, as

> a wish to suppress internal divisions within the nation and to define people outside the group as untrustworthy as allies and implacably evil as enemies …. It is on the one hand … a love of compatriots …. But it

[3]Marx, "The Nation-State and Its Exclusions."

[4]Marx, "The Nation-State and Its Exclusions."

> is on the other hand a spirit of distrust of the potential treason of any opposition within the group and a hatred of strangers.[5]

While it might be comforting to assume that the process of willful exclusion is but a transitory matter, part of the labor pains of state- and nation-building to be superceded by a progressive incorporation of outside groups and former outsiders, such comfort might itself be transitory. Former outcastes may well be incorporated, provided they change themselves in accord with nationalist dictates and narratives, but other groups by necessity often become the objects of exclusion, definition-by-contrast, or similar binary negations. Such may be the fate of immigrants and refugees in our time, as well as other groups who by stipulation can be placed outside the parameters of accepted identity-description (terrorists, extremists, ethnically unassimilable communities, etc.).

Such is emphasized by Adrian Oldfield in his reflections on civic republicanism in the modern world. As he notes:

> Citizenship is exclusive: it is not a person's humanity that one is responding to, it is the fact that he or she is a fellow citizen, or a stranger. In choosing an identity for ourselves, we recognize both who our fellow citizens are, and those who are not members of our community, and thus who are potential enemies. Citizenship cuts across both religious and secular universalism and involves recognizing that one gives priority, when and where required, to one's political community.[6]

While such does not always require unremitting hostility to others, to Oldfield "[i]t simply means that to remain a citizen one cannot always treat everyone as a human being."

It means that states must retain the right, according to Peter Schuck and Rogers Smith, "to refuse consent to the membership of those who would disrupt their necessary homogeneity," however defined, in the

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[5]Arthur Stinchcombe, "Social Structure and Politics," in Fred I. Greenstein & Nelson W. Polsby, eds., *Handbook of Political Science* Vol. 3 (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1975), 600–601.

[6]Adrian Oldfield, "Citizenship and Community: Civic Republicanism and the Modern World," in Gershon Shafir, ed., *The Citizenship Debates* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 81.

interest of national unity.[7] As a political phenomenon, citizenship is distinction backed by force.

Rhetorical celebration of multiculturalism and the richness of multinational states notwithstanding, there remains much political energy behind the processes of political homogenization and exclusion in the contemporary world. With reference to the so-called advanced industrial world, Jerry Muller notes that:

> whereas in 1900 there were many states in Europe without a single dominant nationality, by 2007 there were only two, and one of those, Belgium, was close to breaking up. Aside from Switzerland, in other words—where the domestic ethnic balance of power is protected by strict citizenship laws—in Europe the "separatist" project has not so much vanished as triumphed.

He adds that,

> In short, ethnonationalism has played a more profound and lasting role in modern history than is commonly understood, and the processes that led to the dominance of the ethnonational state and the separation of ethnic groups in Europe are likely to reoccur elsewhere.[8]

By most measures, much of the rest of the world is a long way away from the sort of ethnic cleansing/homogenization conducted in contemporary Europe. As one commentator notes, "the overwhelming majority of the world's states have a plurality of ethnes/nations. In many of these multi-national or multi-ethnic states one nation or ethne is dominant."[9] The notion of nation developed, promulgated and institutionalized in most multiethnic states usually reflects the

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[7]Peter Shuck & Rogers Smith, *Citizenship Without Consent: Illegal Aliens in the American Polity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 28. Quoted in Sanford Levinson, "Symposium on Law and Community: Constituting Communities Through Words that Bind: Reflection on Loyalty Oaths," *Michigan Law Review* 84 (June 1986), sec. 1446.

[8]Jerry Z. Muller, "Us and Them: The Enduring Power of Ethnic Nationalism," *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2008).

[9]Dewey Hughes, "Following Jesus as His Community in the Broken World of Ethnic Identity," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 31:4 (2007): 331–332.

interests and outlook of a dominant group or coalition; alternative pictures of identity and allegiance are neglected, suppressed, co-opted or depoliticized as they are labeled inappropriately sectarian, divisive, tribal or regressive.

The putative homogeneity of many European states may itself prove to be a transitory phenomenon, in which "globalization" proves to be a disruptive force with many implications. On the one hand, increased migration of various sorts may start to challenge some of the previously constructed notions of national and political identity forged via violence and exclusion in polities around the world. On the other hand, globalization can and often does generate heightened levels of instability and uncertainty as people's sense of who they are comes into question.

As political psychologist Catarina Kinnvall puts it:

> Globalization challenges simple definitions of who we are and where we come from …. As individuals feel vulnerable and experience existential anxiety, it is not uncommon for them to wish to affirm a threatened self-identity. Any collective identity that can provide such security is a potential pole of attraction. It is a war of emotions, where world leaders and other paramount figures are seeking to rally people around simple rather than complex causes.

She adds later that

> Globalization has made it more difficult, but not less desirable, to think in terms of singular, integrated, and harmonious identities as individuals constantly turn their actions to an increasing number of others and issues. The fact that individuals search for one stable identity does not mean, however, that such identities exist.[10]

Silvio Ferrari adds that "Globalization, by reducing any particular culture to a regional custom, engenders a sense of alienation and disorientation and fosters the need of a common identity. Today's states,

[10]Catarina Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity and the Search for Ontological Certainty," *Political Psychology* 25:5 (2004): 742, 747.

however, are rarely in a position to provide an answer to this need."[11] Taken together, ongoing state interests in creating, re-creating or reinforcing nationalist loyalties—even as such becomes more difficult or complicated—suggests that the formation of limited, bound-by-exclusion-and-inclusion identities and allegiances will continue unabated into the future.

Some states and political actors continue to build on cultural, racial or ethnic understandings of nation in building state power. Others, representing another element of the modernist approach to statecraft and statebuilding, have sought to strengthen states and the claims of political citizenship by suppressing ethnic and other differences in favor of a more abstract notion of allegiance to a political project and sovereignty. One variant of this has been the so-called civic republican tradition, which argues for the superiority of allegiances and loyalties built upon shared commitments to ideas like political participation, representation, civil rights, and the like.

In many respects, the ethnic vs. civic divide is a largely arbitrary one. First, the difference between them in practice is often hard to discern: states building on an ethnonationalist base nowadays appeal as well to civic and rights-based language, and the rationalism of so-called civic approaches is often suffused with notions of peoplehood that are no less emotional or impassioned than those more explicitly rooted in ethnicity. Secondly, both presume the right to build political community and order by way of violence and exclusion, and both elevate the desired end state—a sovereign state, people or movement—to the highest claimant on human allegiances, identities and loyalties. To accomplish the superiority of national identity however constructed, thirdly, Christianity in general and Catholicism in particular must be domesticated, fragmented, subordinated, and rendered incapable of providing an alternative or competing sense of belonging, allegiance or identity.

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[11]Silvio Ferrari, "Nationalism, Patriotism and Religious Belief in Europe," *University of Detroit Mercy Law Review* 38 (2006): 626.

While all of this plays out differently in postcolonial contexts and former or current imperial centers, some of the problems are the same. States continue to construct, by inducement and violence, populations capable of sustaining and perpetuating the states and their ambitions.

While one could draw upon many examples, Uganda stands, in the words of one scholar, as

> a fairly typical example of a post colonial state established on the basis of modernist political philosophy under which ethnic identity is considered, at best, a nuisance to be tolerated and English, the language of the former oppressor, has become the language of the state.

This is so because

> [F]ifty ethnes or nations in four major divisions are represented in Uganda. The largest division is the Bantu of the southern half of the country who make up over 60 percent of the population and represent almost half the ethnes in the country.[12]

Given this, the postcolonial project in Uganda was one in which modernist ideas of nation and state building were dominant in the postcolonial period (at least at the level of theory—practice remained a very different matter). As Hughes writes:

> The elimination of ethnic diversity was believed to be altruistic. Diversity was believed to be a hindrance to the development of a democratized and industrialized society that would lead to greater prosperity and happiness for a greater proportion of citizens.
>
> [Behind the move to eliminate ethnic identity or diversity was] the conviction that people's primary needs are physical and that once people receive the material benefits of uniformity they would be more than happy to jettison their ethnic identity …. This modernist political creed in its left and right manifestations confidently predicted the demise of ethnic identity in the wake of material prosperity …. This was the political creed on which the post-colonial states of the twentieth century were established and that came to dominate the political philosophy of the nineteenth century post-colonial states as well. So Uganda's

[12]Hughes, "Following Jesus as His Community in the Broken World of Ethnic Identity," 332.

> independence was premised on the elimination of ethnic diversity and its failures are often blamed on its ethnocentrism or tribalism.[13]

For many postcolonial states, in other words, ethnocentrism and modernist state-building continue to co-exist, despite their purported antagonism. As Hughes notes,

> Ethnocentrism is at the root of the modernist nation states. That is why even in a country like Uganda the state can function only by retaining English as an official language because it finds the residual ethnocentrism of the colonial oppressor more palatable than the ethnocentrism of any one of the Ugandan ethnes.[14]

For some people, the notion that modern citizenship is a coercive and—at least sometimes—violent phenomenon is difficult to accept. Both the imaginative power of social contract theories and the past-tense (or off-stage) nature of much of the explicit violence of political formation and reinforcement makes citizenship (especially in its liberal democratic form) seem pacific rather than martial.

Max Weber, among others, argues that the West's elevated notions of citizenship and democracy are rooted firmly in the martial nature of the Greek polis. One commentator summarizes Weber's view as follows:

> Weber locates the impetus toward the development of citizenship in the military dimension of the Greek polis. The city-state is based on the association of those who can afford to purchase their own weapons and military equipment first for the protection of the city and later for conquest and the acquisition of land and booty (a venture Weber terms political or military capitalism). Equal access to arms led to the demand for the granting of effective citizenship rights to the armed plebians …. The identity of soldier and citizen was firmly established

[13]Hughes, "Following Jesus as His Community in the Broken World of Ethnic Identity," 332–333.

[14]Hughes, "Following Jesus as His Community in the Broken World of Ethnic Identity," 338.

> in the polis, and participation in the military became the foundation for ancient freedoms.[15]

Weber himself adds that "[c]hronic war was therefore the normal condition of the Greek full citizen.[16]

Closer to our own time, and more directly relevant to the project of political theology, stands the work of Harvard political philosopher Stephen Macedo. In contrast to those of his liberal democratic allies who defend liberalism as a doctrine without social ends—seeing it instead as something of a path of neutral adjudication among competing visions of the good—Macedo is forthright about the aggressive and forceful nature of sovereignty and citizenship in liberal democracy. He speaks primarily in the context of the United States, but some of his ideas may have wider relevance.

Early in his book *Diversity and Distrust: Civic Education in a Multicultural Democracy*, Macedo notes that "[t]he original problem of normative diversity is the original problem of modern politics."[17] Like other champions of the modern state, he sees that citizenship requires a certain set of beliefs, loyalties and priorities—namely, to the liberal project of state and nation formation and maintenance. "The project of creating citizens is one that every liberal democratic state must somehow undertake," says Macedo,[18] adding that "[t]he success of our civic project relies upon a transformative project that includes the remaking of moral and religious communities."[19]

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[15]Gershon Shafir, "The Evolving Tradition of Citizenship," Introduction, in *The Citizenship Debates* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 5.

[16]Max Weber, "Citizenship in Ancient and Medieval Cities," in Gershon Shafir, ed., *The Citizenship Debates* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 48.

[17]Stephen Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust: Civic Education in a Multicultural Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 28.

[18]Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust*, ix.

[19]Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust*, x.

What makes Macedo so helpful as a philosopher is his willingness to be forthright in his objectives. While liberal notions of citizenship often wrap themselves in the gauzy language of freedom and diversity, he is unapologetic in pointing to the restrictive and authoritarian nature of liberal citizenship.

> Not every form of cultural and religious diversity is to be celebrated, and not all forms of what can be called "marginalization" and "exclusion" are to be regretted or apologized for. Profound forms of sameness and convergence should not only be prayed for but planned for without embarrassment.[20]

Much of this important book is a defense of the forced transformation of Catholicism in the United States, especially but not exclusively through compulsory public schooling and civic indoctrination. Throughout he explains and defends the extent to which Catholic truth claims and practices were forced to accommodate rival understandings of public and private, reason and revelation, ecclesial vs. nationalist identity, and more—all in service to a notion of political citizenship that exercised hegemonic power through state coercion and ideological warfare, public and private. At the end of all this, sealed by a particular reading of the Second Vatican Council, Macedo celebrates the complete and total Americanization of Catholicism in the United States—which means, in a quote by Sanford Levinson that Macedo cites with approval, that Catholics "have effectively been forced to proclaim the practical meaninglessness" of their religious convictions as a condition of participation in American life.[21]

2. The Church and Nationalist Claims

In a comparative context, nationalism often presents itself as a powerful and sometimes hard-to-cage beast—a lubricant to ordinary state operations, with the potential to wreak havoc in ways seen and unseen. The power of a nation's stories and heroes, memorials and

[20]Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust*, 2.

[21]Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust*, 136–137.

commemorations, martyrs and dreamers—such are potent and powerful, especially in a world of uncertainties, suffering and oppression.

All of this would be challenging enough for an area of Catholic theology that one could consider to be mature, robust and creative. Such terms, alas, do not describe much Catholic theological reflection on matters of nation and nationalism, patriotism and peoplehood, and what these mean for the life of Christian discipleship.

Instead, according to the Jesuit Dorian Llewelyn, Catholic teaching on nationality, nation, peoplehood, and the like is a confused, vague, underdeveloped and oftentimes frustrating pile of often disparate and disconnected notions. I recommend to you Llewelyn's *Toward a Catholic Theology of Nationality*[22] for a balanced exploration of the topic even in those areas where I might differ from him.

Llewelyn notes that little exists by way of Catholic reflection on these topics.[23] What does exist frequently confuses or eludes distinctions between key terms like states, countries and nationalities.[24] Further, he notes that Catholic theology provides

> no crystalline teaching on nationality, and the faith of the Church requires some considerable mining to find relevant material. Biblical teaching on nationality is fraught with the potential for anachronistic *eisegesis* that reads modern concepts of the nation back into Israelite and early Christian history. It is also rather sparse.[25]

For their part, papal comments and documents have generally failed to make critical analytical distinctions, including that between nations

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[22]Dorian Llewelyn, S.J, *Toward a Catholic Theology of Nationality* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010).

[23]Llewelyn, *Toward a Catholic Theology of Nationality*, 1–2.

[24]Llewelyn, *Toward a Catholic Theology of Nationality*, 7.

[25]Llewelyn, *Toward a Catholic Theology of Nationality*, 10.

and states, which to Llewelyn reflects a Eurocentric bias that makes the nation-state a presumed universal norm.[26] Or, as he puts it:

> Catholic social teaching accepts the real existence of nationality, even if it does not provide a stable definition of what constitutes a nation …. [T]he mono-cultural European nation-state is the implicit norm that underpins papal teaching on the nation.[27]

Finally, he notes that the Catechism of the Catholic Church provides no help either—of its 2,857 paragraphs, only two deal with nationality.

The upshot of all of this is as follows:

1. Many variants of political theology are silent or complicit in the violent and coercive nature of nationalism, citizenship, and the supremacy such loyalties demand over all others, especially those of religion in general and Catholicism in particular.

2. Catholic theological reflection in some respects is underequipped in dealing with these sorts of issues. Given that the challenge of ultimate loyalties is not likely to disappear in the future, Catholic reflection on what "being a Christian" can or should mean in a world of jealous political sovereignties might benefit from new or renewed ideas and perspectives.

Time is short, but let me offer a modest proposal, a notion that I suggest should be incorporated into future Catholic reflection on political allegiances, identities and loyalties. It is something that, for lack of a better term, I call "ecclesial solidarity." In this, I am drawing from a book I published last year entitled *The Borders of Baptism*.[28]

By "ecclesial solidarity" I mean the conviction that "being a Christian" is one's primary and formative loyalty, the one that contextualizes and defines the legitimacy of other claimants on allegiance and conscience—those of class, nationality, and state, for example.

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[26]Llewelyn, *Toward a Catholic Theology of Nationality*, 11.

[27]Llewelyn, *Toward a Catholic Theology of Nationality*, 12.

[28]Budde, *The Borders of Baptism*, 3–11.

Ecclesial solidarity means that the welfare of one's brothers and sisters in Christ makes special claims on one's affections, resources, and priorities. It means that the unity of the churches in visible and tangible ways is a key expression of Christian conviction and vocation, even in the face of centrifugal pressures and the demands of lesser, more partial communities and ideologies. It means that processes of Christian discernment and worship cross the divides of patriotism and other types of tribalism. It means that Christians look with skepticism on processes and institutions that aim to make sectarian political and cultural identities and affections more determinative than those drawn from the priorities, practices and commitments of Jesus. It means that one has special bonds of service, love and mutual support with other members of the Body of Christ, with whom one is called to provide an imperfect foretaste of the Kingdom of God.

Ecclesial solidarity is not in conflict with the love and service that Christians owe their proximate neighbors, those with whom they live and work and interact on a regular basis. Taking care of one's non-local relatives need not, after all, invariably oppress one's next-door neighbors or work colleagues. It does, however, prohibit Christians from harming their non-local relatives on the assumption that one's neighbors always and inevitably present morally determinative claims on Christian allegiance, priorities and actions.

When Christians take ecclesial solidarity as their starting point for discernment—political, economic, liturgical, and otherwise—it makes them members of a community broader than the largest nation state, more pluralistic than any culture in the world, more deeply rooted in the lives of the poor and marginalized than any revolutionary movement, more capable of exemplifying the notion of "E pluribus unum" than any empire past, present or future. Seeing oneself as a member of the worldwide body of Christ invites communities to join their local stories to other stories of sin and redemption, sacrifice and martyrdom, rebellion and forgiveness unlike any other on offer via allegiance to one's tribe, gendered movements, or class fragment.

That the idea of ecclesial solidarity strikes contemporary Christians and others as an idea both foreign and disturbing testifies to the

effectiveness of the modern project to subordinate and domesticate Christianity. For the past five hundred years, political and economic leaders have worked to undermine Christian unity and fragment the Church in the interests of nationalism, capitalism, and individualism. At the same time, the now-fragmented parts of Christianity—its ideas and institutions, liturgy and laity—have been enlisted as legitimation and cultural cement in service to the radical political, economic, and cultural transformations of modernity. So effective have these processes been that most Christians are frightened by what should have been part of their ecclesial life all along; those large parts of the Christian story (in Scripture, theology, and church history) in which something like ecclesial solidarity has existed have been ignored, rewritten or caricatured.

For example, many scripture scholars in recent decades have reminded us that just as Israel was created by Yahweh to be a contrast society set apart to instruct and edify the other nations of the world, so did the followers of Jesus see themselves in relation to the rest of the world.

The disciples of Jesus, those called out from the nations, leave their old identities and allegiances behind by being baptized into the Way of Christ. The claims of the biological family are qualified by bonds to one's brothers and sisters in Christ; markers of status and hierarchy are set aside in a community in which "there does not exist among you Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. All of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

This new type of human community, made possible by the Spirit, creates "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wondrous deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

Over and above the picture of a shared purse described in Acts 2 and 4, the New Testament presumes and recommends a high degree of mutuality, intimacy and bonding among members of the Church. As one example, Gerhard Lohfink offers a brief sampler, which he describes as "far from exhaustive," on the centrality of the reciprocal pronoun "one another" (allelon) as a marker for the quality of real-world

love and mutuality demanded of believers (I'll spare you the 23 verses from the Epistles in which *allelon* features prominently in describing the mutual care and affection believers owe to one another).[29]

Lohfink adds that the early Church, consistent with Jesus' example in the gospels,

> never considered capitulating to naïve dreams of "all men becoming brothers" or of "millions being embraced." In a very realistic manner they sought to achieve fraternal love within their own ranks and constantly made simultaneous efforts to transcend their boundaries. In this fashion an ever increasing number of people was drawn into the fraternity of the church, and new neighborly relations became possible.[30]

The earliest Christians would have found nothing exceptional in the idea of ecclesial solidarity. Early Christians saw themselves, and were seen by others, as more than just a new "religious" group, more than a new idea unleashed in the ancient world, and more than a voluntary club like other social groupings or associations.

As noted by Denise Kimber Buell, early Christians were more often seen as part of a new ethnic group, even a new race of people, in the Roman world. The focus of their worship was so distinctive, their way of life and priorities were so particular, that they were more properly seen as a *genos*, "a term widely used for Greeks, Egyptians, Romans and [Jews]—groups often interpreted as ethnic groups or their ancient equivalents."[31]

Surveying a number of early Christian texts and narratives, as well as the literature of anti-Christian polemicists, Buell explains why early Christians referred to themselves as a distinct ethnic group or people in the world.

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[29]Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 99–100.

[30]Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*, 114–115.

[31]Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2005), 2.

> First, race/ethnicity was often deemed to be produced and indicated by religious practices …. Early Christians adopted existing understandings of what ethnicity and race are and how they relate to religiosity by reinterpreting the language of peoplehood readily available to them in the biblical texts they shared with … Jews, as well as political and civic language used broadly to speak about citizenship and peoplehood in the Roman Empire.[32]

Second, she notes that although ethnicity and race were often used to indicated a fixity of identity, early Christians and their contemporaries also saw them as fluid and changeable categories. Further, that the concept of ethnicity/race was both fixed and fluid meant that Christians could make universal claims for themselves.

> By conceptualizing race as both mutable and "real," early Christians could define Christianness both as a distinct category in contrast to other peoples (including Jews, Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, etc.) and also as inclusive, since it is a category formed out of individuals from a range of different races.[33]

The idea that one could "change" one's race or ethnicity seems impossible in a culture in which these are the quintessential ascriptive identities, largely unchangeable or immutable; for us, on the other hand, "religion" is a voluntary, changeable and fluid part of identity, since one can "change" religions. But for Christianity in the early centuries, becoming part of the Christian "race" or ethnic community was available to all regardless of their communities or identities of origin—"conversion" was the process of changing races, of joining the peoplehood of Christ. In turn, the radical notion of conversion returns to the fore: it is best seen not as "a private matter of individual conscience resulting in an individual's affiliation with a religious movement, but explicitly as becoming a member of a people, with collective and public consequences."[34] And as she notes,

> saying that Christianity was open to all was not mutually exclusive with

[32]Buell, *Why This New Race*, 2–3.

[33]Buell, *Why This New Race*, 3.

[34]Buell, *Why This New Race*, 46.

> defining Christians as members of an ethnic or racial group. In many early Christian texts, defining Christians as members of a people reinforces rather than conflicts with assertions of Christian universalism.[35]

Seeing oneself as part of a new race or ethnic group had undeniable political implications in the Roman world. Historian Joyce Salisbury, among others, observes that Roman citizens took notice of the distinctiveness of their Christian neighbors, usually with disapproval.

> Christians were perceived by their pagan neighbors to be antisocial in the deepest meaning of the word. They were creating their own society within the Roman one, and their loyalties were to each other rather than to the family structures that formed the backbone of conservative Roman society. Their faith led them to renounce parents, children, and spouses, and Romans believed this actively undermined the fabric of society. In, fact, it did.[36]

While terms like "race" and ethnicity mean very different things today, Buell's research reminds us that for Christians to think of themselves as joined first and fundamentally to one another, and only secondarily or derivatively to other corporate claimants on their affections and allegiances, is not a radical novelty in the Christian experience. Ecclesial solidarity in many respects is simply a more contemporary term for the same assumptions and aspirations—highlighting the sense in which God creates a new people from all existing nations and races, and the degree to which the worship of God and the practice of discipleship requires and keeps this people distinct and bonded to one another. Talk of the Church as its own "polis" or as a "community" in its own right may actually understate the extent to which conversion to Christ made for a new people in a strong sense of the term.

The abandonment of the Church as a distinct race, a people drawn out and set apart by baptism, is a story told with various accents, agents and agendas. For some, the co-optation of Christianity into

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[35]Buell, *Why This New Race*, 138.

[36]Joyce Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs: Unintended Consequences of Ancient Violence* (New York: Routledge Press, 2004), 16.

the Roman Empire marks a decisive dilution of the Church as a community capable of creating and ordering affections, loyalties and identities. Others draw attention to the fragmentation of transnational Christianity at the hands of entrepreneurial state-builders in the early modern period, and the subsequent subordination of the churches (now plural, now competitive) to nationalism and its regimes. Still others point to the role of Christian leaders and thinkers in facilitating these erosions of ecclesial coherence in the name of divine providence (e.g., Eusebius' "Oration in Commemoration of the Thirtieth Anniversary of Constantine"), theological and intellectual humility,[37] church reform and/or the progress and emancipations of the Enlightenment.

However the story is told, in many parts of the modern world the ending is the same. The bonds of baptism are spiritualized and sidelined in favor of the blood-and-iron ties of patriotism and ethnonational solidarity, the dollars-and-cents sinews of capitalism, and the idolatry of the modern and postmodern selves. In such a world, it is unremarkable that Christian Hutus can slaughter Christian Tutsis the week after Easter; that Christian interrogators can torture Christian prisoners with impunity; that a Catholic military chaplain can bless the atomic bomb that destroyed the largest concentration of Catholics in Japan, including seven orders of nuns.

My argument is that the revitalization and reform of Christianity now and in the future will be both incomplete and doomed to irrelevance until it reclaims the integrity and distinctiveness of the Church. Unless the borders of baptism become capable of defining a people that "seek first the Kingdom of God," that sees itself as God's imperfect prototype for reconciled human unity in diversity (with the Sermon on the Mount as its "Magna Charta," in the words of Pope John Paul II), Christianity will become—where it has not already become so—simple window dressing on the more determinative political and cultural formations of violence, division and domination.

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[37]See the argument in John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reasoning* (London: Blackwell, 1990).

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