

If You Render Unto God What Is God's, What Is Left for Caesar?

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I must begin by expressing my deep appreciation to Paul Rowe for bringing my work on theopolitics before a different audience than the ones to which I am accustomed and for bringing his own expertise in political science and political theory to bear on my writings. The depth and incisiveness of his critique provide me an opportunity to rethink and clarify my ideas. It also gives me the opportunity to prove that I do not deserve being mentioned in the same sentence as Che Guevara and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi!

To a political scientist, I grant that I must appear as an odd figure, a Catholic theologian mounting a critique of the basic political structures of Western society, based on theological resources. If I am taken as trying to reconstruct the world political system to be based in the Christian church, then my project would seem absurd and antiquated, like a member of the Flat Earth Society mounting an assault on the current state of geography. For this reason, I must clarify my audience from the outset. I am a Christian theologian, and I write in the first instance for other Christians. My principal concern is to help Christians to be realistic about what they can expect from the powers and principalities of the present day, especially the nation-state and the market, and to urge Christians not to invest the entirety of their social and political presence in these institutions. My goal as a Christian theologian is to help the church be more faithful to God in Jesus Christ. In the present day, I think that faithfulness means taking a hard look at political and economic structures many Christians take for granted. Rowe criticizes me for providing “no general model for temporal management” of global civil society, but I am not in the business of setting forth models for a new global order. I tend to think such global models are inherently problematic. If my work, therefore, seems rather too parochially Christian, it is not because I think non-Christians are unworthy of consideration; it is rather that I do not consider myself competent to tell Muslims and Jews and others what the ideal polity would look like. Christians and Muslims and Jews and others do have plenty to say to each other and can cooperate in creating alternative social spaces. But a true pluralism, I believe, consists in each community being more, not less, faithful to its own traditions. My work can be understood as an attempt to mine what is good in the Christian tradition for the purpose of resisting some of the idolatries of the modern era and thus contributing to a more just and peaceful world.

Whether my work contributes to such a world or provides ammunition for some of the unsavory characters Rowe mentions in the introduction to his essay depends on whether my analyses of political structures hold water. After introducing my work, Rowe criticizes my views of the state, civil society, and the church. I will respond to each of these in order.

State

Christians in the modern era have tended to take the state as a permanent and natural feature of God's creation for granted. Scripture is read through a modern lens so that Jesus' statement about rendering to Caesar is read as a theory of church and state. Some things belong to God—spiritual things—and some things belong to Caesar—temporal things. The eventual separation of church and state in the modern era is thus seen as the final outworking of the Christian liberation of the spiritual from the temporal, or religion from politics. Implicit in this common view is often a Whiggish Protestant narrative of history—Christ's kingdom that is not from this world (John 18:36) and Martin Luther's Two Kingdoms are the liberation of the spirit from both Jewish and Catholic legalism and entanglement with temporal affairs.

I have tried to show that the state is a modern idea, as are the binary categories of religion/politics and spiritual/temporal. Neither Jesus nor the writers of Scripture would have had any conception of the state as we know it, nor would they have dreamed that God's concerns could be cordoned off into a distinct *spiritual* or *religious* category of life. Contrary to what Paul Rowe implies in several places, I am not against the separation of church and state; I think it is an advance from the church's point of view to rid it of access to coercive power. I am, however, opposed to the separation of religion from politics, if that means the privatization and marginalization of the church's public witness.

Rowe questions my genealogy of the state, claiming that "ancient empires *were* nation-states in that they created an embryonic notion of the nation" and that ancient Greece with its city-states was similar to the United States of America divided into states. Rowe cites Hadrian's Wall and the Great Wall of China as examples of markers of ancient territorial sovereignty. But Rowe is able to use the term *nation-state* for ancient empires only by stretching the term to mean any type of translocal government. I have no doubt that translocal governments existed before the modern era, but they are not what political scientists call nation-states. The governments of ancient empires had very little regular administrative access to the lives of ordinary people outside centers of power; most people in conquered territories were not citizens; most conquered peoples did not identify themselves as members of, for example, the nation of Rome, but maintained local identities; and ancient empires, as Anthony Giddens says, had vaguely defined

frontiers, not borders.¹ In feudal Europe, law was defined by fealty, not by territoriality, and overlapping loyalties at the local level kept power largely decentralized. The Holy Roman Empire was an extraordinarily complex and weak ideal in which civil authorities had to contend with ecclesiastical authorities for power. The advent of the sovereign territorial state at the dawn of modernity was not just a new twist on the same old thing. The further transformation from state to nation-state depended on the creation of heretofore unknown national identities; as patriot Massimo d'Azeglio said in 1860: "We have made Italy, now we have to make Italians."² Even the scholars who give the earliest origins for nationalism (Adrian Hastings³ and Liah Greenfeld⁴) only find antecedents in late medieval England and France. One can only suggest that the nation-state is ancient by distorting the term beyond recognition.

The reason I think the newness of the nation-state matters is that it allows us to reconsider the naturalness and inevitability of the nation-state. Today devotion to one's country is often considered within the churches as a Christian virtue with biblical roots. But as Rowe concedes, borrowing from Kenneth Waltz, loyalty to nation and state replaced loyalty to the church in the early modern period. As Rowe acknowledges, "It is also clear that the state arose in many ways to justify the very secular power of royal factions, republican revolutions, and military dictatorships rather than to seek the common good." But, argues Rowe, just because the state arose in this fashion does not mean it continues to function this way today. Rowe argues that we have moved from Hobbesian to Lockean states, that "the state's ambitions were tamed," that it no longer substitutes for the church and can, in fact, be used to promote the common good.

It is, of course, true that the nation-state continues to change and is not the same as it was several centuries ago. I am willing to grant, as I do in one of the articles that Rowe cites, that nation-states can and do provide useful services and protect and promote a certain order. I agree that certain forms of ad hoc cooperation with nation-states can be laudable.⁵ Nevertheless, I find the standard progressivist narrative to be inadequate to empirical fact and also inadequate to deal with the theological insight that idolatry is a constant

¹Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 35–60.

²Quoted in E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1760: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 44.

³Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion, and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁴Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

⁵William T. Cavanaugh, "Killing for the Telephone Company: Why the Nation-State Is Not the Keeper of the Common Good," *Modern Theology* 20, no. 2 (April 2004): 266–67.

temptation. One version of the progressivist narrative begins in the so-called Wars of Religion and sees the rise of the state as our salvation from the violent fanaticism of *religion*. The story of these wars serves as a kind of creation myth for the modern state, because it indicates that the modern state was born as peacemaker between warring religions by relegating religion to private life and uniting people around loyalty to the sovereign state. In my new book, I demonstrate by examining the historical record that the very creation of religion was at stake in the wars, and that the rise of the sovereign state was a cause, not solution, of the wars in question.⁶ Although Rowe does not accept the Wars of Religion narrative, he nevertheless tells a progressivist story of the “process of evolution” of the modern state, the taming of its ambitions, and the ever-expanding inclusion of citizens in the social contract. I think there are good reasons to be wary of such a happy story. Not only has the sheer size of the state continued to increase, but the nation-state as repository of sacred value and loyalty still provides a temptation to idolatry. As E. J. Hobsbawm has pointed out, ours is an unliturgical age in most respects, with one enormous exception: the public life of the citizen of the nation-state. Citizenship in secular countries is tied to symbols and rituals that have been invented for the purpose of expressing and reinforcing devotion to the nation-state.⁷ The extensive work that has been done by Robert Bellah and others on civil religion makes clear that, from a Christian point of view, the replacement of the church by the nation-state is not a phenomenon of the early modern era alone. According to Carolyn Marvin and David Ingle, “nationalism is the most powerful religion in the United States, and perhaps in many other countries.”⁸ For Marvin and Ingle, the transfer of the sacred from Christianity to the nation-state in Western society is seen most clearly in the fact that authorized killing has passed from Christendom to the nation-state. Christian denominations still thrive in America, but as optional, inward-looking affairs. They are not publicly true, “[f]or what is really true in any community is what its members can agree is worth killing for, or what they can be compelled to sacrifice their lives for.”⁹

⁶See William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), chap. 3.

⁷Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 12.

⁸Carolyn Marvin and David Ingle, “Blood Sacrifice and the Nation,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 767. It is worth noting that Marvin and Ingle wrote this before the surge in patriotism following the attacks of September 11, 2001. This article is a brief synopsis of Marvin and Ingle’s fascinating book *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁹Marvin and Ingle, “Blood Sacrifice and the Nation,” 769.

Violence is clearly one of my central concerns about the modern state, though not the only one. Rowe attempts to allay my concerns about the violence of the nation-state by arguing that “[i]n Western societies, the state has shed much of its coercive apparatus and become a service provider.” Of the recent adventures of the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq, Rowe claims “there might even be reason to believe it to be a temporary development.” Outside the United States, Europe, Latin America, and Canada are said to have largely demilitarized; South American states have not gone to war in a century, excepting the Falklands War. Rowe even suggests that “the state may someday get out of the business of warfare entirely.” Again, I find good empirical reasons to be wary of such progressivist cheer. It may be possible to find reason for optimism in Europe where peace has reigned over the last few decades, with the notable exception of the breakup of Yugoslavia. In Latin America, the calm is more recent and comes after a brutal century of countries using their bloated militaries not against each other but against their own people. Elsewhere, Rowe offers no hard evidence that militarism and military spending is on the wane, nor could he. Although Rowe claims that we have more to fear regarding nuclear weapons from non-state actors than we do from states, it remains the case that states are the only actors so far that have developed, tested, and used nuclear weapons, and their number is growing.

The case of the United States concerns me most as an American, and I find it very difficult to accept the idea that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are merely recent, temporary aberrations. The myth of America as reluctant superpower has been shown by Andrew Bacevich to be false. Bacevich’s book *American Empire* shows the continuity between the foreign policies of Bush I, Clinton, and Bush II, on the one hand, and the expansionism at the heart of American foreign policy since the late nineteenth century, on the other.¹⁰ Contrary to Rowe’s notion of the inherent peaceableness of liberal democracy, Bacevich has shown that American expansionism is based on the necessity to spread liberal notions of open markets and open societies. This is Woodrow Wilson’s idea that the peace and prosperity of the world depends on the extension of liberal principles of government—along with open markets—to the entire world. Liberals are opposed by realists in American foreign policy debates, but Americans tend to favor military action, as Colin Dueck says, “either for liberal reasons, or not at all.”¹¹ Despite the frequency with which the Bush Doctrine is seen as a radical departure from traditional American foreign policy—especially for its apparent expansion of the idea of preemptive war—many scholars emphasize the

¹⁰Andrew J. Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

¹¹Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 26.

continuity between the foreign policy of George W. Bush and the Wilsonian tradition.¹² As Bush said, “Every nation has learned, or should have learned, an important lesson: Freedom is worth fighting for, dying for, and standing for—and the advance of freedom leads to peace.”¹³ I think there is very good reason to be wary of this missionary imperative in liberalism.

As we witness Pentagon budgets soar past the half-trillion-dollar mark annually, it is clear that American militarism is not on the wane.¹⁴ In the American case especially, but by no means exclusively, I think there is good empirical reason to reject Rowe’s presentation of the modern nation-state as bland and benign service provider. It has a dual aspect, on the one hand, as bureaucratic provider of services that, as Alasdair MacIntyre says, “is always about to, but never actually does, give its clients value for money;” and, on the other hand, as repository of sacred value for which citizens are sometimes asked to kill and die. As MacIntyre quips, “It is like being asked to die for the telephone company.”¹⁵ To maintain social coherence in a liberal social order, and to get people to be willing to kill and die for a bureaucratic service provider, the liberal nation-state must provide a sense of transcendent meaning, a civil religion of freedom or love of country. The kind of utopian eschatology that Rowe suggests, following Fukuyama and others, in which liberalism is just about to vanquish war for good is an important element in this kind of civil religion. From a Christian theological point of view, such civil religion is a temptation to idolatry. Liberal eschatology is a substitute for the real thing. Carl Schmitt was right when he wrote: “All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development—in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver—but also because of their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts.”¹⁶ From my point of view, if you’re going to have a utopian eschatology, you might as well have

¹²See for example, *ibid.*, 1–2; Bacevich, *American Empire*, 198–244; Robert Singh, “The Bush Doctrine,” in *The Bush Doctrine and the War on Terrorism: Global Responses, Global Consequences*, ed. Mary Buckley and Robert Singh (London: Routledge, 2006), 13.

¹³George W. Bush, “Remarks by the President at the Twentieth Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy.” [Online] Available: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-3.html>.

¹⁴See Andrew J. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁵Alasdair MacIntyre, “A Partial Response to My Critics,” in *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre*, ed. John Horton and Susan Mendus (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 303.

¹⁶Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 36. It should be obvious that I

a real one, a Christian theological one, that is. The problem with the modern nation-state is that it often offers an ersatz version, theology without God.

Civil Society

In the twentieth century, the Catholic Church finally broke off its centuries-long romance with state establishment. Pope Pius XI accepted the terms of formal separation of church and state in Catholic countries, and at Vatican II *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Declaration on Religious Liberty, upheld freedom of conscience for all. One of the architects of *Dignitatis Humanae* was the American Jesuit John Courtney Murray, who had for several decades been trying to make the Catholic Church's peace with liberal democracy, despite opposition from within the church. Civil society was a key concept for Murray because it identified a way that the church could be released from binding ties to the state and yet avoid privatization. Civil society was the public space in which the church could interact with other free associations. Murray applauded the American system because it established a state whose power was limited to vigilance for public order. The state was the creation and servant of civil society. The genius of liberalism was to free the intermediate associations of civil society by limiting the state.¹⁷

Given my emphasis on the independence of the church from the state, I should be expected to embrace Murray's attractive picture of a church that is fully public yet free from the state. Rowe is frustrated with me because I seem to refuse the promise that civil society has to offer, and "rule out the very useful place of organized religious discourse in a civil society." I do so, according to Rowe, based on an exaggerated vision of an all-consuming state that has wholly colonized civil society. Rowe indicates that my criticisms apply to corporatist models such as those that obtain in Scandinavia and other European countries, but not to more pluralist systems, such as that of the United States.

Rowe is right to criticize some of my statements on this question for being overstatements. He is right to say that civil society is a contested field, not a monolithic site of state hegemony. It is also true that there are examples, especially in Africa, of weak states whose power to penetrate civil society is very limited. Even where the state is more powerful, there would be little sense in encouraging the church to help foster alternative spaces if state discourses were so thoroughly dominant.

do not share Schmitt's conclusion that the state should enhance its divine character and marginalize the divisive influence of the Church.

¹⁷See John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1960), 5–24, 45–78.

Nevertheless, I have tried to caution the church not to take Murray's attractive model of free civil society and limited state as a description of empirical fact. Political scientist Michael Budde says of Murray, "No testing of reality seems to have affected his assessment of American political institutions."¹⁸ Talk about the limited state must be qualified by recognition of the fact that the federal budget for the current year exceeds 3.5 trillion dollars, a sum that is difficult to fathom. The current government bailout and partial assumption of ownership of financial institutions and other enterprises make it increasingly difficult to talk of a limited state. With the growth of the state, many have pointed to the atrophying of the intermediate bodies that make up a robust civil society: the decay of unions, the loss of church membership, the fragmentation of families, the decline of civic organizations, and the loss of autonomy of universities. Recognition of the decay of civil society in the United States is hardly idiosyncratic; Robert Bellah and Robert Putnam have documented the trend, Michael Hardt writes of the "withering of civil society," and the Council on Civil Society—including such diverse figures as Cornel West and Francis Fukuyama—was formed to combat the decay.¹⁹ According to Robert Nisbet, the great conflict of modern political history is not between state and individual, but between state and social group, as the state moved to absorb rights and responsibilities formerly belonging to those groups.²⁰ My point, however, is not that an enormous and totalitarian state threatens to crush the organs of civil society. It is rather that state and civil society have become increasingly fused, such that little significant social action takes place wholly outside the funding, direct implementation, or regulation of the state.

Rowe is right to point out that the church in the United States is not as subject to direct government involvement as is the church in Sweden, for example. Nevertheless, the social presence of the church is often diminished. Sometimes this happens through the direct intervention of the state. For example, the social action of the churches on behalf of the poor has been largely either assumed by the state or made subject to state funding and regulation. Likewise, the once extensive church-related hospital system is threatened with disappearance, having also been made subject to state funding and regulation; whether church-related hospitals may legally refuse to perform procedures they deem morally repugnant is currently in question.

¹⁸Michael Budde, *The Two Churches: Catholicism and Capitalism in the World-System* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), 115.

¹⁹Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985); Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000); Michael Hardt, "The Withering of Civil Society," *Social Text* 14, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 27–45; Council on Civil Society, *A Call to Civil Society: Why Democracy Needs Moral Truths* (Chicago: Council on Civil Society, 1998).

²⁰Robert Nisbet, *The Quest for Community* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 102–9.

Often, however, it is not direct state intervention, but the colonization of the social imagination of Christians that is the problem. If economic structures breed injustice and environmental degradation, we can think of little else to do but ask the state to fix it. If the ranks of the homeless increase, all we can think to do is to ask the state to house them. Most significantly, we have been so captivated by the rhetoric of national interest that we will go and fight in wars that most church leaders condemn as unjust on the assumption that it is our patriotic duty. The church has not disappeared, but Christianity has often taken on the status of a hobby. Christians consider it true, but only privately. As Marvin and Ingle write, "For what is really true in any community is what its members can agree is worth killing for, or what they can be compelled to sacrifice their lives for."²¹ And this ability to generate truth, Marvin and Ingle point out, has largely passed to the nation-state in the modern West.

It is possible to exaggerate the extent to which the church has disappeared as a social body in the contemporary West. I do not wish to ignore the many kinds of social action that church groups and other groups undertake. In my 2008 book *Being Consumed*, I hold up many concrete examples of Christians creating and supporting alternative economic spaces.²² In that sense, I do not at all "rule out the very useful place of organized religious discourse in a civil society" as Rowe fears, if what "civil society" denotes is anything that happens outside the direct purview of the state. I resist the language of civil society, however, if it is used to ignore the real pervasiveness of the nation-state or if it confines all types of social groups, including the church, to mere intermediaries between the individual and the state, if civil society is constructed as an arena of interest groups vying for influence within the state. I am interested in a more radical pluralism; I have certain sympathies with the English pluralists of the early twentieth century, people like John Neville Figgis and G. D. H. Cole. From a Christian point of view, I think that resisting modern idolatries requires something more robust than the confinement of the church to one more lobbying group within the nation-state. When facing the economic crisis, for example, the church can act more creatively, in concert with other non-state actors, to support economic practices that escape the dominance of the state-supported corporate paradigm. There are even times when the church must be a bit more unruly, when it cannot, for example, let the president decide for it what is a just war and what is not.

Church

But the question, of course, is What do I mean when I say "church"? Do I want a return to the Middle Ages? Do I believe in the "exalted nature of

²¹Marvin and Ingle, "Blood Sacrifice and the Nation," 769.

²²William T. Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008).

the Church as God's provision for world order"? Am I advocating some kind of Christian version of the Taliban?

Rowe acknowledges that I explicitly disavow the idea of theocracy. Modernity has liberated the church from most of its pretensions to have access to the means of violence, and I wholeheartedly endorse that movement. Despite what Rowe says, I do not believe that the separation of church and state was a mistake. How could I, given my critique of the state? I do, however, want to retain the reality of the church as a social body in its own right, and here Rowe finds a multitude of problems. His critiques are as follows: I do not deal with the inherent sinfulness of the church's members. I overemphasize the need for unity and conformity within the church and seek to impose conformity by means of ecclesiastical hierarchy. I have no way of dealing positively and ecumenically with those outside of the church. And I ignore the fact that the church is meant to be a spiritual gathering and not an institutional response to temporal problems.

With regard to the sinfulness of the church, Rowe cites my article "How to Do Penance for the Inquisition" but claims that I am dismissive of the possibility that church sins like the Inquisition may be repeated. I am not sure how Rowe comes to that conclusion; it was certainly not my intention. The point of the article is that the church can do penance for the Inquisition by speaking out and resisting the use of torture today. The use of torture in the West has passed from medieval inquisitors to modern secular intelligence operatives. To recognize this fact is not to say that the church no longer sins, but to call Christians not to give tacit approval to the violence that is currently done in our name by the state. As I have argued elsewhere,²³ the church's resistance to violence should not be based on a romanticization of the church as the gathering of the sinless, but rather on the recognition that we are deeply sinful and, therefore, incapable of using violence justly. To call the church to be faithful to the Gospel is a claim of the holiness of God, not the subjective holiness of the church.

Rowe's second complaint is about church imposition of conformity in political matters. In my first book, *Torture and Eucharist*, I endorsed the excommunication of torturers by a group of Catholic bishops under the Pinochet regime in Chile. In the Catholic Church, bishops have an important role to play in safeguarding the integrity of the Body of Christ; where there is the scandal of torturers and tortured approaching the same altar, excommunication can and did bring the scandal to light. I believe excommunicating torturers was an important and prophetic gesture, but it was an extraordinary gesture.

²³William T. Cavanaugh, "Pilgrim People," in *Gathered for the Journey: Moral Theology in Catholic Perspective*, ed. David Matzko McCarthy and M. Therese Lysaught (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2007), 88–105, and William T. Cavanaugh, "The Sinfulness and Visibility of the Church: A Christological Exploration" in *Proceedings of the 2007 Leuven Encounters in Systematic Theology* (Leuven: Peeters, forthcoming).

I do not endorse excommunication in general as a common tool for the imposition of uniformity in the church. The quest, as Rowe points out, is not for conformity but for community. A healthy community will have a great deal of diversity within it. Certain kinds of diversity, however—torturers and tortured, for example—are not healthy. In Pinochet’s Chile, some Catholics had clearly put allegiance to the nation-state and its security above their allegiance to the Body of Christ. The call for community, the call to live eucharistically, is not a call for uniformity, but a call to put loyalty to Christ before other types of loyalty and allegiance.

My earliest published work was based on my experience in Chile, where an exercise of discipline by the church hierarchy operated positively in the theological arena. Rowe’s analysis is based on a rather limited selection of my work, mostly from this early period.²⁴ Even in Chile, the other two concrete examples I give of church resistance to the military regime besides excommunication were grassroots initiatives of laypeople, priests, and nuns. After my first book, I have written little about the actions of the Catholic hierarchy, and primarily about the actions of everyday Christians, Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox. Even where I discuss the action of the hierarchy, such as in the denunciation of the Iraq War,²⁵ I do not think the solution is simply for the pope and bishops to tell us what to do and for the laity to obey. I look instead to the laity, especially those in the military, to say “This war is unjust, and I’m going to sit this one out.” I describe my book on economics, *Being Consumed*, as a “contribution to a kind of theological microeconomics.”²⁶ Likewise, I am far more interested in a Christian micropolitics than in the imposition of uniformity from above. When I say “church,” I primarily mean “us Christians,” though I don’t discount the legitimate role of the hierarchy.

I am increasingly concerned as I see some vocal Catholic bishops become involved in electoral politics in the United States, often giving de facto support to the Republican party based on some (usually empty) Republican promise to push the legislative agenda of the bishops. Not only is such involvement often counterproductive—support for a euthanasia law in Oregon actually increased once the Catholic bishops entered the fray on the opposing side—but the bishops’ involvement is often based on a mentality that sees

²⁴Rowe cites my first two books and six articles or chapters, two of which are wholly incorporated into the second book. In 2008, when his article was submitted to the *Review of Politics*, I had published 25 articles in scholarly journals, and another 17 chapters in edited volumes, in addition to dozens of articles and interviews in less academic venues.

²⁵See William T. Cavanaugh, “At Odds with the Pope: Legitimate Authority and Just Wars,” *Commonweal* 130, no. 10 (May 23, 2003): 11–13; and “From One City to Two: Christian Reimagining of Political Space,” *Political Theology* 7, no. 3 (July 2006): 299–321

²⁶Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed*, viii.

state enforcement as the only solution to any given cultural problem. As my critique of the state should make plain, I am opposed to any nostalgia for Constantinianism. I believe that a Christian should feel politically homeless and refuse to regard the choice between voting for Democrats and voting for Republicans as the summit of our social witness. I favor instead the formation of real communities of witness.

Such communities cannot be closed in upon themselves, but must attend to all in need. There is nothing in my view of the church, to answer Rowe's third objection, that limits its reach beyond church and denominational boundaries. To the contrary, I have tried to make clear that the boundaries of the church are porous, and Christians should cooperate with non-Christians in creating alternative economic and political spaces.²⁷ I don't think that my critique of the reality of civil society leaves us "with precious little space to construct common ground with 'the Other.'" On the contrary, I think a more radical pluralism opens the possibility of a greater variety of such spaces that are not simply subject to the disciplining imagination of the nation-state.²⁸

Though I find much agreement with Rowe's concerns, his fourth objection to my view of the church is based on spiritual/institutional and spiritual/temporal dichotomies that I question. Rowe is right to say that the Body of Christ is not simply to be conflated with the sinful institution of the church, with its checkered history. Nevertheless, I do not think it is sufficient to reduce the social gathering of the church to a spiritual gathering or to suggest "that the Christian needs to filter the ideals of the state through a mind transformed by the power of Christ." In my book on Chile, I show how this type of model had negative consequences in Chile. The prevailing model of Christian social action in pre-Pinochet Chile, derived in part from Jacques Maritain, was of individual Christians absorbing the Gospel message and then entering as individuals into one of the various political parties. This individualization of the Christian message left the church with no social body to resist when the military regime began to employ its strategy of atomization on the body politic. Gradually, however, the church did recover its social body under persecution, and the church became the only effective institutional resistance to the Pinochet regime, the only social space where resistance could gather. What this shows is that, despite anti-institutional sentiment in some forms of Protestant Christianity, the church as institution, that is, as tangible social body, is sometimes necessary to resist the depredations of unchecked power. Rowe is, of course, right to say that there is no guarantee

²⁷See for example, William T. Cavanaugh, "Church," in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. William T. Cavanaugh and Peter Scott (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 393–406 and "From One City to Two," cited above.

²⁸It should be obvious as well that I am just as averse to national churches as is Rowe.

that human abuse of power will not affect the church institution itself. But the disappearance of the church as social body is the disappearance of the hope that Christ's redemption can have tangible effects in this world.

The spiritual/temporal binary as a spatial distinction is also problematic. Before modernity, the temporal was a time, not a space, the interval between the first and second comings of Christ, when coercive civil authority was temporarily necessary to stave off chaos.²⁹ The temporal did not indicate some realm of merely mundane concerns, such as business and government, that were fundamentally separate from spiritual concerns, or the things that pertain to God. To read this modern distinction back into the Gospels—to divide the world into what is Caesar's and what is God's—is anachronistic. What would Jesus have thought belongs to God? Psalm 24 begins, "The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it." If this is so, what is left for Caesar? It is quite unlikely that Jesus had in mind the modern separation of spiritual and temporal, a tidy division of labor between God and Caesar. The title to which Jesus refers on the denarius used to pay the temple tax in Jesus' time read, "Tiberius, son of the Divine Augustus." It is unlikely that Jesus meant to hand much of life over to a rival son of god. For this reason, Scripture scholars tend to be quite skeptical of attempts to read modern Western political institutions back into the episode of Caesar's coin.

The modern nation-state is not Caesar, but the problem of idolatry has not disappeared. What should Christians render unto the civil powers of our day? Many kinds of ad hoc cooperation with civil government are possible and necessary. My work is meant as a reminder to Christians, nevertheless, that before we are Americans, Britons, and so on, we are followers of Jesus Christ.

²⁹For a genealogy of the temporal, see William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 216–21; and "From One City to Two," 308–15.