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THE POLITICS OF FEAR AND THE GOSPEL OF LIFE

Recently I was shocked to learn from my mortgage company that it was not a matter of *if* but *when* a natural disaster was going to destroy my home. This startling revelation came on the heels of the morning's paper announcing that a flu pandemic was inevitable, and a radio show featuring an expert's claim that such a pandemic would have horrific effects comparable to those of nuclear war. As I turned toward my fridge in search of consolation I caught myself just in time, recalling a recent report raising serious safety concerns about refrigerated foods, and of course there is Mad Cow disease, and all those bacteria and the lead leaching into the tap water from the pipes and ... Fear abounds. From color coded alerts and militarized train stations and airports, to runs on gas masks, Cipro and duct tape we are immersed in what Barry Glassner has aptly called a "culture of fear."¹

Awash in fear, armies and security forces are mobilized, secret interrogation facilities are erected, resources are diverted from more pacific needs, suspects are rounded up, civil liberties and jurisprudence fall by the wayside – all in the pursuit of one overriding and all consuming concern: "Nothing matters more to me right now than the safety of my home and the survival of my homeland." So says a leading light among that novel political force, "security moms."²

Fear abounds, but so what? Who would be crass enough to challenge the legitimacy of this fear? Granted, there may be grounds for questioning the form taken by some of the concrete practices that have been promoted by this fear in response to the various and manifold threats that abound. We can, for example, debate the appropriateness of torture or the necessity of curtailing civil rights or the proper limitations of presidential powers in the midst of a war on terror, but who could challenge the underlying, primordial fear? Remembering the horror of Ground Zero, Madrid, London, surely only liberal elites ensconced in their ivory towers, sheltered (some would say "alienated") from the real world and real people by the moribund moat of academia would dare dismiss wholesale this culture of fear and the politics it produces. And in so doing, they would

¹ Barry Glassner, *The Culture of Fear* (NY: Basic Books, 1999).

² Michelle Malkin, "Candidates ignore 'security moms' at their peril," *USA Today* (21 July 2004), 11A.

expose not only the callousness of their souls toward vibrant human emotion and feeling but also their myopia, their failure to appreciate the conditions of possibility of their own lives. This is to say, such a critique could arise only from a failure to appreciate the ways in which the modern liberal political order itself is a response to fear. Thus, to challenge the culture of fear is not only to attack a principal human emotion, but it is also to assault the foundations of the very political order that keeps terror at bay.

So we are left wondering not simply, "Is there a way beyond the culture of fear?" but perhaps more importantly, "Should we even desire an alternative to the culture of fear?" What is wrong with fear? With a culture of fear? Moreover, fear's apologists remind us, the alternative to fear is typically apathy and decadence, a culture that is lifeless and listless, selfish and slothful.³ Whatever a culture of fear's deficiencies may be, such an alternative can hardly be celebrated as an improvement.

Any alternative to the culture of fear must address these concerns, and so they shape the account that follows. I begin by considering liberalism and fear. The dominant account of liberalism is that it is a political order designed to diffuse a pre- or extra-political fear and ward off terror, which it does by means of the construction of complex space (federalism, robust civil society, etc.). Drawing upon Hobbes, Foucault, and Deleuze, I will show that the dominant account misconstrues both fear and liberalism's relation to fear. Indeed, their analyses suggest that fear is not a primordial instinct that swells fully formed from the human breast, prior to any political discipline and immune to political manipulation. To the contrary, modern political liberalism is revealed to be not about dissipating a pre-political fear but about the production and manipulation of fear. Liberalism is a politics of fear; thus, for the denizens of liberal political orders there can be no end to fear.

The relief of our fears will require a different order, a different politics, a politics of life. What are the contours of this politics? Here the constructive moment begins with Alain Badiou's treatment of St Paul. According to Badiou, Paul announced Christ as a truth-event that instantiates being-for-life by means of a break or rupture with the being-for-death that simultaneously animates and eviscerates political liberalism. Yet, such a politics stands or falls on the truthfulness of the claim that Christ's labor was one of pure affirmation, without a shadow of negation. Can such a claim stand at the foot of the cross? This prompts consideration of Christ's work of atonement. I argue, in an Augustinian and Anselmian vein, that Christ's labor of atonement is not a matter of negation. Christ, and the life of fidelity to the truth-event that is Christ, is indifferent to crucifixion, suffering, and death. Thus displaced, death gives way to life, to the

³ See, for example, David Brooks, "The Age of Conflict," *The Weekly Standard* 7:8 (November 5, 2001); Frank Rich, "The Day Before Tuesday," *New York Times* (September 15, 2001), p. A23; David Brooks, "Facing Up to Our Fears," *Newsweek*, (October 22, 2001), pp. 66-69.

pure affirmation that is resurrected life. Christ gives the gift of life, a gift that founds a politics of resurrection. The final move anticipates objections that such a gift constitutes a politics at all by taking up Augustine's vision of the city of God.

I. Liberalism and Fear

The introductory defense of the culture and politics of fear follows the lineaments of what passes today for the canonical account of both the nature of fear and modern political liberalism's relationship to fear.

The Origin and End of Fear (I): The Standard Account

The intellectual pedigree of the dominant account of fear and liberalism's relation to fear can be traced back through thinkers such as Arendt, Tocqueville, and Montesquieu, and it finds expression in an array of contemporary thinkers as diverse as Elshtain, Shklar, Rorty and Ignatieff.⁴ According to this account, fear is a pre- or extra- political impulse. This is to say, it is a primordial, irrational force the cause of which lies prior to or outside of the political order. Think, for example, of the oft repeated explanations of the motives of the terrorists who struck on 9/11 and who have since continued to inspire fear. It is said that they are persons bent simply on pure evil, as such they have neither political motive nor political goal; their aim is solely destruction, pure and simple. Thus the fear they arouse is distinctly extra-political in origin. Fear's source is similarly located by prominent theorists of liberalism. According to Montesquieu, echoing earlier thinkers such as Hobbes and Locke, fear was born of a desire for security of person and goods. Specifically, according to Montesquieu, fear was grounded in the threat of despotic tyranny and terror. For Tocqueville, fear was a generalized or mass anxiety prompted by a rapidly changing environment that washed away fixed reference points and established meanings. According to Arendt, the source of fear was the radical evil of totalitarian terror, a terror that threatened the integrity of the self. The thread that unites these and similar liberal accounts of fear is that in each instance, the source of fear is located outside the properly political realm, be it in a generalized anxiety, an anti-political despotism, or a primordial retraction from death.

If fear's origins are extra-political, the response such fear elicits, according to the architects of liberalism, is distinctly political. Liberalism is born out of fear in the expectation that the liberal political order can keep terror and its consequent fear

⁴ The treatment of liberalism and fear that follows is drawn from the masterful study of Corey Robin, *Fear: The History of a Political Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

at bay. The standard narrative of liberalism's birth is the narrative of a political order founded with the intent to ward off terror, thereby dissolving the source of fear. Thus, Montesquieu lays out a political order characterized by complex space – governing authority dispersed among separated powers with checks and balances coupled to a robust and pluralistic civil society where the self has opportunity to be enmeshed in a web of relations that can bolster it in resisting despotic intrusions. In a similar vein, Tocqueville asserts that the growth and strengthening afforded civic associations and institutions under liberalism provides the best defense against the free-floating insecurity of the masses unhinged by a rapidly changing environment. Once again, it is the complex space of liberalism's political order, the proliferation of local institutions and social hierarchies in civil society, that tethers the individual in the midst of a changing world and so inhibits the spread of fear. Finally, Arendt, acknowledging the influence of both Montesquieu and Tocqueville,⁵ argues that totalitarian terror advances by means of the creation of smooth or simple space that leaves the individual denuded, isolated before power, whereas liberalism's complex space protects the individual by providing the cover of diverse civic associations such that individuals need not be so exposed before terror. Again, the consistency that traverses the various accounts of liberalism's relation to fear is clear: Liberalism is a political response to an extra-political fear that wards off terror and fear by means of the construction of complex space – dispersing governing authority and providing the individual cover amongst a plethora of civic institutions and associations.

The Origin and End of Fear (II): Hobbes, Foucault, and Deleuze

In the standard account, liberalism is cast as the end of fear and civil society, in particular, as a space of liberty. This account is not without its challengers. In particular, there are those who take issue with the claim that liberalism establishes a space of freedom from fear. Specifically, it is argued that far from warding off an extra-political fear, liberalism actually thrives on fear, generating and governs by means of that fear. Liberalism is, in effect, a politics of fear.

Hobbes, for example, would certainly agree with those who suggest that liberalism is established on a foundation provided by fear. However, he would disagree sharply with the suggestion that the fear that underwrites the political project of the commonwealth was a pre-political passion. While acknowledging that persons do experience a pre-political sense of fear, Hobbes noted that that aversion in and of itself is insufficient to sustain the kind of commitment to self-preservation on which the sovereign commonwealth depends. In fact, Hobbes observes, fear often gives way to other passions, such as the desire for glory and

⁵ Robin, *Fear*, p. 99.

honor, thus diminishing the motivating force of self-preservation. Consequently, in order for the commonwealth to actually unite under the sovereign, fear had to be promoted as a virtue in the service of a morally legitimate concern for self-preservation, while the moral stature of virtues such as courage had to suffer a corresponding reduction. As Corey Robin puts it, "Hobbes . . . thought about the fear of death and the demand of self-preservation not as a description of an already existing reality – of how human beings actually behaved in the world – but as a project of political and cultural reconstruction, requiring the creation of a new ethos and a new man."⁶

But how, pray tell, was this new ethos to be constructed and this new person birthed? Addressing this question, Hobbes proved himself a much more astute political thinker than Machiavelli, who encouraged his prince to induce fear with the rather blunt instrument of stately violence. Hobbes realized that no prince possessed sufficient force to instill the requisite fear. Moreover, he recognized that fear alone, without a concomitant sense of investment or benefit, would not sustain obedience. In other words, what was needed was a way for citizens to participate in, and a reason for them to collaborate with, this induction of fear. For this, Hobbes turned to civil society. He thought that the leaders of civil society, particularly preachers and teachers (who had certainly shown themselves adept at inciting rebellion during the English civil war), could play a central role in the fostering a culture of fear. Legitimizing the moral elevation of self-preservation on the grounds that if one were dead, one could not pursue any goods, civic leaders could persuade the populace that it has a moral stake in perpetuating fear and moral grounds for collaborating in the establishment and maintenance of the sovereign's authority.

Hobbes' vision provides a blueprint for the modern state erected on the negative moral foundation of fear. This fear, however, is not extra-political but rather the thoroughgoing production of political processes. Moreover, it is the product of a collaboration between the sovereign and civil society, thus calling into question the extent to which civil society is rightly understood as a space of liberty from fear.

But, alas, what does this prove? After all, Hobbes' connection with liberalism is hotly contested. As Judith Shklar pointedly observes, the mere fact that Hobbes propounds a social contract theory of the state and loathes Catholicism does not make him the father of liberalism.⁷ Furthermore, is not the claim that fear is used to bolster the sovereign state a rather antiquated one, given the contemporary geo-political horizon, where, it is widely acknowledged, the sovereignty of states faces erosion by the global capitalist economic order? In other words, Hobbes' analysis may provide more heat than light simply because he was not dealing

⁶ Robin, *Fear*, pp. 37-8.

⁷ Judith N. Shklar, "The Liberalism of Fear," in *Political Thought and Political Thinkers*. Ed. Stanley Hoffmann (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 6

with liberal states undergoing capitalist stress. For this reason, we turn now to more contemporary analyses, beginning with Michel Foucault's account of governmentality and the modern liberal state.⁸

Governmentality, according to Foucault, is simply the art of government, the conduct of conduct. Although on the surface such a concept appeared decidedly unremarkable, as it is developed by Foucault, it encompasses much more than meets the eye. Governmentality includes within its scope disciplinary power, which was paradigmatically set forth in *Discipline and Punish* and for which Foucault is widely known. Disciplinary power is that rather overt and direct power whereby the state extends its dominion and enforces its sovereignty over those whom its renders subjects. The most prominent example of this kind of power is, of course, the sword in the form of the penal power of the state, but it extends beyond blunt force to include the full range of the state's juridical reach.

Of course, at this point, Foucault has not succeeded in moving us much beyond Hobbes' analysis of the absolutist state. Indeed, Foucault acknowledges that the disciplinary power of the sovereign state is perhaps most clearly on display in the absolutist state that Hobbes theorized and, according to Foucault's genealogy, slid into crisis not long after Hobbes' death. Yet it is precisely at the moment of the passing of the absolutist state and emergence of the liberal political order that the illuminating power of Foucault's account of governmentality is most profoundly manifest.

According to Foucault, the absolutist state went into crisis as it was confronted by a host of forces and events – wars, rebellions, financial difficulties, demographic, commercial and agricultural expansion – that simply exceeded the governing capacity of sovereignty and its disciplines. In response to this crisis, the art of government underwent a mutation and the liberal state was born. What is striking about the advent of the liberal state is that the link between maximal governmental effectiveness and maximal government itself is broken. Whereas sovereignty attempted to monopolize government, forging an identity between government and state apparatuses, liberalism extends or diffuses government beyond the state proper across the entire social field. Thus, notwithstanding popular rhetoric to the contrary, liberalism does not juxtapose government and freedom. Rather, liberal government is government *through* freedom. Civil society is rightly set against the state but not in the sense that civil society marks a space of liberty *simpliciter*. Rather, civil society is set apart from the state only in the sense that it embodies a different modality of government. In Foucault's language, liberal government combines macro level disciplinary

⁸ A more detailed treatment of governmentality in Foucault, with appropriate textual pointers, can be found in Daniel M. Bell, Jr., *Liberation Theology After the End of History* (NY: Routledge, 2001), pp. 19-32. See also Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), which includes several essays by Foucault.

power exercised through the state with what he calls biopower – power exercised at the micro level by means of what he calls technologies of the self. Biopower is the power operative in and through the private initiatives to mold the self into a particular kind of subject that proliferate throughout society apart from, and even frequently in apparent opposition to, the state as such. In this regard it may be helpful to think of various privately led campaigns of moralization/normalization, often associated with health, education, philanthropy, or religion that flourish in civil society. These campaigns participate in the art of government as they promote specific techniques of the self, notwithstanding their character as private initiatives. For example, by encouraging practices of saving or the acquisition of insurance or particular parenting roles or the habits of cleanliness, sobriety, fidelity, self-improvement, responsibility and so on, such campaigns exert a biopower, essential to government, that insures an individual's freedom is exercised in a manner commensurate with the state's interests.⁹

The proliferation of various technologies of the self in civil society as a form of "private" government does not exhaust the extent to which liberal civil society is a space of government through freedom. Alongside the proliferation of techniques of the self, the expansion of liberalism's civil society was also accompanied by the decentralization of disciplinary power. The disciplinary power that under the absolutist regime was monopolized by the sovereign, under liberalism is now "outsourced" if you will, dispersed across society, put in "private" hands, particularly by means of the various human sciences. Hence, according to Foucault, it is no mere coincidence that with the dawn of liberalism we begin to see the state licensing what were formally independent fields like medicine, psychiatry, psychology, criminology, pedagogy, and so forth. In these ways, disciplinary techniques proliferate outside the state under the liberal governmentality.

Foucault's account of governmentality redeems Hobbes from being a mere historical curiosity, suggesting that while the absolutist state of Hobbes may differ from the liberal political order in important ways, with regard to government and fear, the difference is not as stark as is frequently supposed. Liberalism differs from Hobbes' absolutism only in the *modality* of governmental power. Liberalism is government *through* freedom, with both disciplinary and biopower dispersed across civil society. Thus, the very features that the architects of the standard account trumpet as erecting a dike against fear and terror thereby clearing a space of liberty are revealed to be quite adept instruments of fear and terror. In other words, Foucault unmasks the complex space of liberalism, revealing that in itself complex space does not preserve or protect; to the contrary, by means of the decentralized disciplines and a variety of technologies of the self, complex space can facilitate our surrender and our immersion in a

⁹ I owe these examples to Graham Burchell, "Liberal government and techniques of the self," *Economy and Society* 22 (1993): 272.

culture of fear even more effectively than naked sovereign power.

There is yet another lesson to be learned regarding the contemporary culture and politics of fear from Foucault's account of liberal governmentality. "Governmentality" also sheds light on Hobbes' observation that for fear to work, people must be invested in it; they must be induced to believe in its benefits, while the counterposed virtues are marginalized. This is to say, Foucault helps us make sense of our collaboration with the production and perpetuation of a culture of fear. After all, if fear is not an extra-political intrusion but thoroughly political and if power is not the sole possession of a sovereign but instead is always already dispersed in its various forms (disciplines, technologies of the self, etc.) across the *socius*, then it will not do to argue that the culture of fear is simply imposed from on high by an imperial sovereign upon a repressed and captive population. (No one takes those color-coded alerts that seriously). After all, as the account of governmentality suggests, there is no "on high" where power accumulates, leaving a vacuum "below." Nor, for the same reasons, will it suffice to assert a vast cabal of powerful institutions and persons. While it can hardly be denied that there are indeed powerful institutions and persons with vested interests in the perpetuation of fear, such an assertion is insufficient as an explanation in that it fails to appreciate the lesson of governmentality: fear is not merely *reflected* but is also *produced* and *reproduced* by civil society. This is to say, the security moms are not mere dupes of powerful men, but are themselves invested in fear and so reproduce it in their communities and children and so forth.

In this regard, Foucault once remarked that we have come "to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us."¹⁰ His account of governmentality exposes the fact that we do not live in fear because we have been beaten down. We are not simply crushed – although some are; the disciplines have not suddenly disappeared, only dispersed, like secret prisons around the globe. Rather, by means of a host of technologies of the self our desires are so shaped that we come to long for the very goods that are bound up in the perpetuation of fear. We gain by fear. What do we gain? What goods are bound up with fear? Hobbes argued that fear was linked inextricably to the good insofar as survival was the condition of possibility for the pursuit of any and every good. John Locke held that fear was "the chief, if not only spur to human industry and action."¹¹ Likewise, Judith Shklar asserts that fear is the source of life's vitality,¹² while Michael Ignatieff believes that fear can nurture a new universal humanism.¹³ After 9/11 a host of pundits echoed similar sentiments, proclaiming in essence that peace is dangerous and that fear alone can awaken the noblest that is within us. Nor

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, "Preface," in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1977), p. xiii.

¹¹ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1894), 2.20.6 (cf. 2.20.10; 2.21.34).

¹² Shklar, p. 11.

¹³ Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor* (NY: Metropolitan Books, 1997), p. 18.

should we forget the disconcerting insight offered by Arendt, later in her life, in the course of exposing the banality of evil. Fear presents a host of opportunities for careerists, for the ambitious.¹⁴ Lastly, we should not overlook the possibility that fear is desired simply because it provides an adrenaline rush, pulls us out of the undertow of the terminal boredom that weighs life down in the modern technocratic west.

If Foucault's account of governmentality shows how fear can be a political product of liberal political orders and their complex space of civil society, it does not appear to address the current situation where the power of the liberal state is being steadily eroded by the global capitalist market. For a clearer picture of the relation between the nation-state, the assembly of fear, and the capitalist order we turn to Gilles Deleuze.¹⁵

Like Hobbes and Foucault, Deleuze holds that life is constituted by motion; specifically by the active power that is desire. Moreover, this desire in a "state of nature" if you will, is not reactive; it is not fearful. Rather, it is anarchic, creative, harmonic. This active, playful power that is desire only becomes reactive, fearful, or in Deleuze's terms, paranoid, as it is acted upon, as it is captured or seduced by reactive and fearful forces, which is precisely what the state-form attempts to do. The state-form assembles desire, forms and shapes it so that it is paranoid and fearful, and in so doing, the state promotes the promise of its own existence: Surrender and be safe.

Deleuze's focus, however, broadens beyond the state-form to consider the contemporary political horizon as it is constituted by global capitalism. He positions his account of desire and the state-form within a universal history of capitalism. According to this genealogy, the history of capitalism's advent is the story of the state-form's slow subsumption by or becoming immanent to economy. Hobbes' absolutist state of sovereignty was able to channel all desire through the bottle-neck of the state and its mercantile economy. Yet, as Foucault noted, eventually desire exceeded the ability of the sovereign to control and contain it, and as a result the state-form mutated into liberal state. What is novel about the liberal state is that its art of government neither requires all desire be funneled through the state (civil society is fine, as per Foucault's governmentality) nor demands that desire be subordinated to the ends of sovereignty. In this sense, liberal government is distinctly economic government; it is government that strives to further not its own ends, what an earlier political tradition called reason of state, but the ends of capitalist economy. The liberal

¹⁴ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (NY: Penguin, 1994).

¹⁵ A more detailed treatment of Deleuze in this regard, with appropriate textual pointers, can be found in Daniel M. Bell, Jr, *Liberation Theology After the End of History*, pp. 12-9; 29-32. See also Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. 424-73; Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control." *October* 59 (1992): 3-7.

state is immanent to the larger economic field, and its task is primarily that of minimizing intervention and interference in the workings of that field.

Yet, we might ask, have we not crossed a new threshold in recent decades as capitalism has increasingly undermined the governing authority of even the liberal, economic, state? Does not global capitalism mark a crisis of the liberal state? After all, it would appear that capital's ability to eclipse national sovereignty is approaching the point of rendering the liberal state unnecessary, a point where passports can be replaced by credit cards and citizenship replaced by membership in trade alliances and associations. According to Deleuze, we have entered a new era, but the state-form has not been rendered obsolete. Rather, it is undergoing another mutation, a shift toward a much more active or aggressive advocacy of capital. No longer is the state satisfied with merely minimizing intervention in economy; now it actively pursues the extension of economy into every fiber and cell of human life. The state has become a model of realization for capital.

More specifically, and more immediately relevant to the matter of the culture and politics of fear, the state has become a war machine. Whereas it was once the case that states appropriated war machines; today states constitute a war machine. Specifically, they are capitalism's war machine. The capitalist state is the "small state, strong state" that we see evolving all around us in response to the dictates of the global capitalist order – states long on disciplinary power and short on welfare capacity. Furthermore, the object of this machine is no longer, as it once was, war in the traditional sense of the term. Here we might recall the ways the "war of terrorism" was described at its initiation. It is a "ghost war," occurring not at the frontiers of society but, like a fog and in a manner synonymous with governmentality, permeating or blanketing society. And it is waged against a spectral enemy – be it terrorists with dirty bombs, microbes, or superpredator youths¹⁶ – by means equally spectral – stealth forces, renditions, disappearances, electronic eavesdropping, invisible break-ins, snooping librarians, truck driver informants and so forth.

This war machine, moreover, does not simply fight *in* society, but rather it has society, peace, politics, the world order as its object. As Deleuze observes, with this latest permutation of the state-form, Clausewitz's famous formula has been inverted: War is no longer the continuation of politics; politics is now the continuation of war.¹⁷ We are already living in the midst of the Third World War, Deleuze wrote almost thirty years ago. Politics, culture, peace, civil society are the object of this war. Thus we are submerged in a state of permanent war; permanent emergency, a permanent state of exception where the laws and civic-

¹⁶ See Glassner, *The Culture of Fear* and Marc Siegel, *False Alarm: The Truth About the Epidemic of Fear* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 2005).

¹⁷ Foucault makes a similar argument for different purposes in *Society Must Be Defended* (NY: Picador, 2003).

political associations that once offered some degree of liberty are suspended indefinitely and foreclosed.¹⁸

Moreover, in waging this war against peace and politics, the state-form, in a move reminiscent of Orwell's 1984, promotes and installs a very special kind of peace: a terrifying peace, the peace of absolute terror, a culture and politics of fear. Security is now conceived as war, as organized insecurity, as distributed and programmed universal catastrophe. War is peace and freedom is preserved only by sacrificing it and we all have a stake in this as we desire the goods that this fear makes possible.

And what goods are those? According to Deleuze, this state of permanent war, this culture of fear has as its goal the deterritorialization of desire, the separation of the productive force of desire from anything that would stand between it and the capitalist market and the concomitant rendering available of this desire to this market. Thus, the culture of fear is not in service to the state *per se*, but the market. The threat of terror paves the way for capital and the goods it promises to provide. So, after 9/11 the president instructs us, not to seek out our neighbors and embrace them, but to shop, to seek out commodities and purchase them. Shortly thereafter, the US trade representative to Latin America wielded the threat of terrorism to cajole reluctant nations to fall in line with trade pacts. Likewise, homeland security and terrorism have been invoked to crush domestic labor actions, as well as popular movements against the expansion of the capitalist market. The invasion of Iraq, while falling far short of its lofty rhetoric with regard to the welfare of the Iraqi people, has gone a long way toward privatizing oil resources, abolishing unions, lowering wages, etc – in short, furthering capital's extension in the region. Likewise, Katrina was used to repeal a host of labor and environmental laws that stood in way of the market and talk persists of rebuilding the New Orleans in a manner that is decidedly market friendly. The list of examples of how fear and terror are used to promote the capitalist order could go on and on.

With Deleuze, we reach the end of our survey of liberalism and fear. The politics and culture of fear that envelop us is not the intrusion of an extra-political force kept at bay by the liberal political order. To the contrary, liberalism needs fear and so it produces it, and it does so not simply by the imposition of the heavy, disciplinary hand of the state and its apparatuses, but by the velvet touch (one that we even desire!) of the vast array of technologies of the self that constitute the complex space of civil society. Moreover, by means of this liberal governmentality, we come to desire our own domination and participate in a kind of political cannibalism whereby we want the very things that undercut the liberties liberalism purports to secure.

¹⁸ Deleuze's analysis helps make sense of the claim that we are now in a "post-political" situation.

Thus, as we examine the culture of fear, we are looking as if into a mirror and glimpsing the truth of our liberal soul. Liberalism is founded on fear. As Judith Shklar has said so well, liberalism does not offer a *summum bonum* toward which all should strive; nor does it rest upon a theory of moral pluralism as many are wont to proclaim. Rather, its foundation is much more barren. Liberalism is erected on the sheer negative, the fear of a *summum malum*. As she says, "to be alive is to be afraid."¹⁹ But in this way the contradiction at the empty heart of liberalism is exposed: The promise of liberalism – recall Montesquieu et. al. – was freedom from terror and fear; yet this it cannot and it dare not deliver. For without fear, liberalism's *raison d'être*, even the very barren surface into which it sinks its sickly roots, erodes as if into nothing. Therefore, under liberalism, there can be no end to fear. Even death is not its terminus, but only its culmination and even its return, for death does not relieve our fears. Rather, as Hobbes's insightfully discerned, face to face with death we are reminded that whatever meager goods we seek out in the midst of this vale of tears – career, family, friends, etc. – are contingent upon actually surviving to pursue them.

For an end to fear, for a politics that finally is not cannibalistic of either liberty or life and so holds forth the hope of nurturing human communion/community (the root meaning of politics), for a more generous politics beyond the (anti-)politics of color-coded insecurity and perpetual war with our neighbors, both foreign and domestic, we will have to look elsewhere. To this alternative we now turn.

II. The Gospel of Life

Even as we wander in liberalism's fields of fear, trying desperately to tend to the goods that constitute our lives – friends, families, neighbors, vocations – a word of hope, as if from on high, catches our ear: "Do not be afraid." The Christian gospel is frequently introduced in this way by both angelic messengers and Jesus. Juxtaposed to liberalism as a politics that begins by heightening fear, this gospel prelude is striking. Here we have the advent of a different and truer politics, a politics of life, and it begins with the dispersion of fear. To make sense of this gospel and its politics, we turn first to Alain Badiou's work on St Paul.²⁰

Being For Death and Being For Life: Badiou on St Paul

¹⁹ Shklar, "The Liberalism of Fear," p. 11.

²⁰ Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundations of Universalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

Badiou's work is about the recovery of a philosophical politics in the midst of an age disfigured by the monumental destruction of all politics. Against the ravages of the present age, Badiou posits a philosophy of the truth-event, which is nothing less than the unexpected irruption of new way of being in the midst of the status quo characterized by what he calls imperialism, democratic totalitarianism, absolute injustice and more recently, "the disjunctive synthesis of two nihilisms," by which he means the politics of fear in both of its prominent contemporary manifestations - fascist terrorism and the western war on terrorism.²¹ What attracts Badiou to St Paul is that in Paul Badiou discerns a fellow traveler, who, under the shadow of the Roman Empire, witnessed a similar destruction of all politics.²² In the midst of these destructions both ancient and contemporary, Paul stands as the militant herald of a truth-event that ruptures being-for-death with the possibility of pure affirmation, being-for-life.

According to Badiou, Paul sets forth the truth event that is Christ in terms of two subjective paths, that of the flesh and the spirit, of death and life. Actually, Christ does not present two paths. Rather, as a truth-event, Christ is a break or rupture with the surrounding site or situation, an interruption, an absolute beginning, an act of creation *ex nihilo*. Accordingly, Christ makes possible a path other than that of the surrounding situation. In other words, where there was only fear and being-for-death, with the truth-event of Christ there issues forth the possibility of life and being-for-life.

What distinguishes these two paths, these two ways of being in the world? Being-for-life is characterized by love, which is a matter of pure affirmation and universal filiation. As universal filiation it is about the extension of the self in the direction of others. As pure affirmation, it is the denial of negation. It is indifferent to death. In contrast, being-for-death is life that is centered on death, that revolves around death, that leads inextricably toward death as its orienting point, even as that life-headed-toward-death may be consumed with resisting that destiny and slowing that descent.²³ (In this regard, think of the practice of contemporary medicine, which draws its orientation not from health, but from illness and death.) Being-for-death is a labor of negation, whether it is confronting others or facing death. As such, it is either pure negation - as in nihilism - or the negation of negation - as in a dialectical vision that ineluctably tethers affirmation to negation, thereby ensuring that negation is never finally left behind but instead always lingers as the trace that is affirmation's condition of possibility. Theologically, this being-for-death takes shape in a vision of redemption that finds its center in Christ's death and the redemptive necessity of sacrifice and suffering.

²¹ See Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (NY: Verso, 2001), p. lv and Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought* (NY: Continuum, 2005), p. 118.

²² Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p. 7.

²³ See, for example, Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (NY: Free Press, 1997).

If Badiou reads Paul correctly,²⁴ then the Christian gospel announces an interruption of the culture and politics of fear. It holds out the promise of a life that does not revolve around death and its warding off. However, it is not clear that Badiou does read Paul or the Christian vision of salvation rightly. After all, is it accurate to say that Christianity is decidedly indifferent to death, that salvation does not revolve around the redemptive significance of sacrifice and suffering? What, then, are we to make of the central artifact of the faith: The cross of Christ, not to mention the cross of all those who would follow in fidelity to the truth-event that is Christ?

Perhaps Christianity is not simply a matter of affirmation, but is a vision of the negation of negation? Which returns us to the question: Fear abounds, so what? Death is, after all, the enemy. Perhaps Christianity, while abjuring the crass production and manipulation of fear that currently plagues us, nevertheless does not offer a politics that is truly oppositional to the culture and politics of fear so much as it presents an alternative vision, a truer culture and politics of fear? After all, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 9:10).

Christ Crucified and Resurrected: The Gift of Life

In 1st John we are told that perfect love casts out fear (4:18)²⁵ and Paul reminds the church at Corinth, in an almost mocking tone, that death has been swallowed up, has lost its sting (1 Cor. 15). Here we have the sign posts of a politics beyond fear and death, a politics of life, of pure affirmation. As Paul says, "The Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you. . . was not 'Yes and No'; but in him it is always 'Yes'" (2 Cor. 1:19). Here we behold a textual marker for a culture and politics that is finally so shockingly indifferent to death that if it is wrong, its inhabitants are of all people most to be pitied (1 Cor. 15: 19) if not dealt with in a harsher manner.

Such a claim, however, runs up against the undeniable presence of the cross, sacrifice, suffering, and death at the center of the Christian narrative of salvation. As Paul says, "we proclaim Christ *crucified*" (1 Cor. 1:23). Hence, does not the cross stand in the way of any attempt to construe Christianity as pure

²⁴ For more on Badiou's use of Paul and its problems, see Daniel M. Bell, Jr. "Badiou's Faith and Paul's Gospel: The Politics of Indifference and the Overcoming of Capital," *Angelaki: The Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* (forthcoming).

²⁵ To be clear, this essay juxtaposes two forms of life: one oriented by fear and death, the other by life. The crux of the argument is this fundamental orientation. Given more space, an account of the place of the passion called "aversion," or what Aquinas calls "the gift of fear" could be developed that would, for example, provide a way of accounting for such well-known texts as "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10; Ps. 111:10) and so forth without in any way undermining the force of my argument. In this regard, see Scott Bader-Saye, "Thomas Aquinas and the Culture of Fear," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 25.2 (2005): 95-108.

affirmation? Is it not the paradigmatic instance of negation, and the resurrection a reciprocal act negating the negation? Consider a widely popular rendition of Christ's work of atonement on the cross. Frequently attributed by the more theologically astute to St. Anselm, but with an evident pedigree reaching back to Paul's letter to the Romans, the prevailing account of the cross goes something like this: Human sin is an offense against God's honor and God, as one who must uphold justice, cannot simply forgive sin but must enforce a strict rendering of what is due. Yet sinful humanity cannot fulfill the debt, so the God-man, Christ, steps forward to pay/negate the debt through his substitutionary suffering and death on the cross.

In this commonplace reading of Christ's work, death – the sacrifice that is the loss of life, the suffering that is redemptive – is the unmistakable fulcrum of salvation. Moreover, the unspoken subtext of this account is fear – the fear of eternal damnation that is avoidable only by a death. Furthermore, the resurrection is marginalized, as evidenced by the fact that this tale could be told without any reference to the resurrection at all. At best it is given a secondary or supporting role, becoming a kind of confirmation that the substitutionary death worked, that the sacrificial suffering was redemptive, that the negation was successfully negated.

Hence, the commonplace reading is not a tale of life but of fear and death and as such it does not hold forth the promise of deliverance from the culture and politics that currently afflict us. (Thus, it is unsurprising that many theological voices see in the liberal political order the proper analog to the Gospel) Yet, the commonplace reading is also a profound distortion of Christ's work, the product of the transposition of the gospel of life into an alien and fundamentally negative key. For Christ's work does not find its center in the death suffered on the cross but in the life of the resurrected. This is to say, Christ's work of atonement is the gift, not of death, but of resurrected life. Being-for-life. Christ's work was not that of negation – submitting to negation, and overcoming negation with an act of negation. Rather, Christ came not because he must die but so that we might live. Christ's work of atonement is a labor of sheer affirmation.

This affirmation upends the commonplace account of Christ's work. To begin with, human offense, sin, does not call forth divine negation.²⁶ The cross is not an instance of divine negation. As the much aggrieved Anselm noted long ago, it is not possible that human insurrection could thwart divine creative intent²⁷ and as

²⁶ A full treatment of this claim would necessarily consider the practice and meaning of judgment in the Christian life. For such a treatment by way of an engagement with Gilles Deleuze, see Daniel M. Bell, Jr., "Only Jesus Saves: Toward a Theo-political Ontology of Judgment," in *Theology and the Political: The New Debate*, ed. Creston Davis (Durham, NC: Duke, 2005): 200-227.

²⁷ For a reading of Anselm against his modern detractors, see D. Bentley Hart, "A Gift Exceeding Every Debt: An Eastern Orthodox Appreciation of Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*," *Pro Ecclesia* 7 (1993): 333-349; Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume II* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1984).

the more esteemed Augustine forces us to concede, there is finally nothing - which is after all the substance of sin, death, and rebellion - to be negated. Instead, as Anselm insisted and Scripture (including Paul) constantly affirms, the atonement proceeds according to the divine intentionality of/for life. In the face of human rebellion, God's honor will not let the breach stand but desires that humanity be restored to the life, to participation in the abundance of the divine life, that from the beginning God intended for humanity. Therefore, the Father sends the Son, who goes willingly to continue the labor of love that is the gift of life. Christ's labor is that of resurrecting life, not suffering death. The heart of Christ's atoning work is resurrection, the taking up of humanity into life of charity shared by the blessed Trinity (*theosis*, deification), the effecting of ontological union with life.

But, of course, there is no evading the cross. The cross is the site of this truth-event. Yet, recall that the truth-event that is Christ is a break, a rupture, with the surrounding site. Hence, while the cross is the site of the resurrection, it is not its condition of possibility. The resurrection, in Badiou's terms, is a subtraction, not an addition, to the situation it breaks open. There is a disjunction between death and resurrection. The Gospels say as much when they testify that the response to the empty tomb is one of puzzlement and bewilderment. There is no way, beginning from death, being-for-death, that one can make sense of the resurrection. Resurrection is not the proper and expected encore to death in accord with some dialectical, rational protocol. This is the case because the resurrection does not answer death or even defeat death - both moves of dialectical negation that reify what they purport to overcome. Frankly, if the resurrection were simply the negation of death, then Lazarus, a resuscitated corpse, which, incidentally, amazed but did not bewilder, would be our hope.²⁸ In contrast, the Resurrected One stands starkly, blindingly alive - life's startling, naked interruption of death.

As the interruption of the site of death, the resurrected Christ does not merely defeat death or tame it or subdue it, all of which presume a relation to death, all of which entail something with which one can be in relation. Such a presumption reifies death and being-toward-death. It grants death a substance, a reality and hence a permanence that it lacks. For this reason, the Scriptures speak of death destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26), of death "being no more" (Rev. 21:4). For this reason, Paul speaks of the resurrected Christ as raised into being (Rom. 6:4), with the implication that death and being-toward-death are in fact not being at all; they are nothing. The offer of resurrected life unmasks death and being-toward-death as the absence of power, a void, nothing.²⁹ Hence, Badiou rightly observes that being-for-life is indifferent to death, because death precisely as nothing is nothing that can be taken into account. As nothing, death cannot make a

²⁸ Lazarus, one should note, will die again, thus proving the point that a dialectical overcoming of death always reifies that which is attempts to escape.

²⁹ See Augustine, "Of True Religion," §22.

difference. Hence, death makes no difference to Christ's fidelity nor to those who would be faithful to the event of Christ and obedience even to the point of death only sounds like foolishness, only presents a stumbling block, to the unredeemed still in thrall to death, being-for-death. To the redeemed, the resurrected, death is no obstacle, no thing, nothing at all and thus no longer concerns us (cf. Matt. 8:22) nor is it to be feared (Matt.10:28).

At this point we can see the cross for what it is, neither the satisfaction of a divine demand for death nor even a divine instrument for negating sin. Rather, the cross stands as the nadir of sin; it is the deepest depth of human rebellion. Granted the cross is a negation, or at least an attempt at such, but it is not a negation that God imposed; rather it the last futile human effort at negation. We refuse the gift of life and attempt to negate it. But alas God refuses to accept our negation. After all, since all that is, is only by participation in affirmation, negation cannot be accepted because finally it does not exist. Thus, God actually refuses nothing; conversely there is nothing in our refusal for God to accept. (In fact, as the precepts of medieval theology make clear, God has never been estranged from humanity.³⁰) So, Christ is faithful, obedient to the labor of life, even to the point of suffering our absurd attempts at negation. This is the work of atonement: Jesus is the gift of God's redemption, not because he endures divine negation in our stead, but because he embodies the divine refusal to negate humanity in its sin, a refusal that endures even to the point of death on a cross. And this divine refusal is nevertheless pure affirmation as the resurrected one returns to those crucified him with the offer of life.

Similarly, just as Christ's labor of affirmation reveals death to be nothing and the cross the last futile stand of an eternally foreclosed rebellion, suffering is now seen to be neither redemptive nor necessary. Whereas the commonplace account of Christ's labor tends to privilege suffering, as in what makes Christ uniquely redemptive is that he suffered more than anyone (some responses to *The Passion of the Christ* come to mind), we now see that suffering too is nothing, that what is redemptive in Christ's labor is his fidelity to life, his refusal to depart from this divine mission by repealing the offer of life in the face of suffering. In light of the surpassing glory, the life that is ours in Christ, suffering is unmasked as nothing (Phil. 3:8). Hence the supernatural calmness on display in the accounts of so many of the martyrs. In this regard, what is so remarkable about the martyrs is not their deaths, but their unflinching refusal to surrender their witness (the meaning of the Greek term, *martyr*) to life. Our perverse fascination with the manner of their deaths notwithstanding, what distinguishes the martyrs is their eternal life, on display with particular contrastive force at the moment of their death.

Furthermore, it is clear that suffering is not necessary. The divine affirmation of life is an act of creation *ex nihilo*. It requires no preliminary or contrastive

³⁰ See, for example, Augustine, "On the Gospel of St John, tractate II," §8.

negation. Consequently, what suffering there is is revealed in the light of Christ to be the contingent effect of sin. Suffering is a contingent, historical consequence of sin and rebellion and not of the liberative and redemptive heart of God. Hence, it is only temporal, temporary, passing, and finally nothing. (In this regard, there is no such thing as radical evil whose effects persist, threatening the peaceful ontology of life.³¹) That one faces suffering and crucifixion points not to the necessity of suffering as the path of redemption but to the stubborn persistence of sin's refusal of affirmation and the brutal resilience of the culture of fear and death in producing both crosses and executioners.

Finally, as is the case with both the cross and suffering, sacrifice is transformed as it is repositioned within the theo-logic of affirmation or of being-for-life. Typically sacrifice is viewed as pernicious. This is to say, it is usually linked with negation. Sacrifice is understood as reductive, necessarily entailing a loss – a loss of self, a loss of dignity, a loss of identity, a loss of life. Pernicious or reductive sacrifice is always a giving up or a surrender of the lesser to the greater – the present to the future, women to men, men to the state/corporation, all to the greater good (market). Thus, morality under the sign of modernity oscillates between egoism and altruism, between self-preservation and self-sacrifice. And, perhaps unsurprisingly, modern Christian ethics has tended to embrace altruism and "self-sacrifice." In so doing, however, it rightly earns the censure of liberationists and others, for such pernicious sacrifice does not open a path to affirmation and life but only reinforces our capture by the logic of negation, loss, and death. It remains an instantiation of being-for-death.

In contrast, the truth-event of Christ initiates a non-reductive sacrifice that entails neither negation nor loss. Christ's sacrifice is one of pure affirmation. It should be clear by now that what is offered in Christ is not a death, but life. The substitutionary sacrifice Christ offered at the site of the cross is the fidelity and praise (the return of love) of the Son to the Father. Christian sacrifice is a *living* sacrifice (Rom. 21:1). In this way, the Christ-event ruptures the smooth space produced by our contemporary culture and politics of fear and death, with the result that sacrifice becomes gain (Luke 9:24) and we can give ourselves in love as a gift of life to our neighbors without end and without loss (Matt. 22:39; Mark 12:31). In Christ's sacrifice nothing is lost and everything is gained. Through his sacrifice sin, which as *privatio* is precisely nothing, is lost. Through being joined to his sacrifice, the "nothing" that we lose is the terrified, fearful self that only has the eyes to see and ears to hear the sacrifice of love as loss.

The "nothing" that is overcome is the contemporary fantasy of absolute security, the pursuit of which only entrenches us more deeply in insecurity, terror and fear and leads us (willingly!) to surrender those very goods (life, love, liberty) such security purportedly promises to preserve and protect. The "nothing" that

³¹ See John Milbank, *Being Reconciled* (NY: Routledge, 2003); Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*.

is lost is the illusion that the politics of fear can ever deliver us from terror, conflict, and death. The “nothing” that is dispelled is the “fog of war” that deceives us into thinking that the war against terror can be anything other than a war without end – a permanent emergency, perpetual war, that offers neither peace nor hope but only grief intensified as loss is compounded by loss.

What is gained in Christ’s sacrifice is abundant life, the possibility of living life as pure affirmation, as ceaseless non-reductive giving (and receiving) the gift of life. In other words, Christ’s sacrifice creates the possibility of facing others without armed suspicion as well as non-reductively sacrificing oneself to and for others that life might be extended. Put concretely and too concisely, Christ’s sacrifice clears a space for a politics of life, a politics of relentless affirmation, of ceaseless giving even in this midst of terror. Christ’s sacrifice creates the possibility of a politics that fearlessly pursues justice not as an act of counter-terror, torture, and death but as a work of mercy whose end is the extension of communion.³²

We have now come full circle. Christ is pure affirmation, the resurrection of life. And this gift of life is the love that casts out fear enabling us to live in peace with and service to our near and distant neighbor. Because finally no negation, loss or even death stands – they are all revealed to be nothing – in Christ we are freed from culture of fear and politics of terror and death it underwrites and so can give our life to and for others without fear of loss, in expectation only of the gain that is filiation and communion.

The Politics of Resurrection: Augustine and the Two Cities

We might say that the Christ-event interrupts the culture and politics of fear with the advent of a politics of life, a politics of resurrection. But surely this is too glib. Merely asserting that Christian sacrifice constitutes a politics does not make it so. In fact, far from constituting a novel political intrusion, the refusal of negation and concomitant indifference to death that characterizes being-for-life can be and have been reinscribed in within the dominant political terrain of liberalism. Such a refusal to draw one’s orientation from the fear of death is frequently dismissed in both political and theological circles as extra-political. As Shklar writes, “Self-sacrifice may stir our admiration, but it is not, by definition, a political duty, but an act . . . that falls outside the realm of politics.”³³ Such a charge is of a piece with the claim, advanced by both its critics and adherents, that the gospel of life is not political but otherworldly or, to echo Badiou, about a subjective attitude. In other words, the Christian refusal of negation is extra-political because, it is claimed, the practice of such a refusal cannot sustain the life of a community,

³² See Daniel M. Bell, Jr., “Justice and Liberation,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, eds, Stanley Hauerwas and Sam Wells (Malden, MA.: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 182-195.

³³ Shklar, “Liberalism of Fear,” p. 14.

which is what politics in the last analysis is about. Indeed, such a being-for-life and its refusal of negation regularly are charged with expressing a certain contempt for physical experience, for earthly goods, and so for the things that make political life both possible and worthwhile.

Such charges against Christianity are not novel, and so for a defense of the politics of resurrection that engages these criticisms I turn to Augustine. Long ago, he contended with similar complaints and in responding to them offered a treatment of the nature of political association and a consideration of the use of earthly goods that both exposes the failures of the politics of fear and exonerates the politics of the resurrection as holding forth the possibility of a politics that is not doomed to perpetual war but is truly a form of *living* together, as well as offering an account of earthly goods and their use that is immune to the politics of fear.

Prompted by pagans who charged Christianity with responsibility for the imminent demise of the Roman empire, in the *City of God* Augustine offers an extended reflection on the nature of political association.³⁴ The heart of his argument begins with a deconstruction of Roman politics. Even according to its own philosophers' definition, Augustine argues, Rome was not a commonwealth, an authentic political community (II.21; XIX.21). It did not achieve that to which it aspired – a common weal, a community united in a shared love (XIX.23). Instead, Rome was a kind of republic, founded upon a lust for glory (XIX.24; V.12ff.). It is worth noting that Augustine reads this lust for glory as response to the fear of death (V.14). As Thomas Smith says, interpreting Augustine on this point: "Rome loved glory because of its desire to pursue a quasi-divine immortality in tangible form. Thus the Roman desire to build something glorious that will last stems from a longing for a shining divine life and a horror at death."³⁵ This lust for glory, born of a fear of death, actually served Rome well for a time, restraining its other vices (V.12). Yet, it was not without its difficulties, for Augustine notes that the lust for glory did not in fact unite the people. Rather, it was the accomplishment of the few (V.12). After all, such is the nature of glory that, unlike true goodness, it is diminished as it is shared and so prompts other vices such as murder and tyranny to thwart its dissipation (XV.5). Tyranny is precisely what this lust for glory led to as the people were simultaneously impoverished and held in check by fear and as the lust for glory nurtured and eventually gave way to a lust for domination exercised through war and conquest (V.12).

Augustine's critique of Rome suggests that a politics built on the negative foundation of the fear of death cannot succeed in ordering human community as

³⁴ Particularly helpful in reading Augustine in this regard is Rowan Williams, "Politics and the Soul: A Reading of The *City of God*." *Milltown Studies* 19/20 (1987): 55-72.

³⁵ Thomas W. Smith, "The Glory and Tragedy of Politics," in *Augustine and Politics*, eds. John Doody, Kevin Hughes, Kim Paffenroth (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), pp. 193-4.

a way of *living* together. To the contrary, Augustine deftly reveals such a politics to be in fact an anti-politics, not a way of life but a field of battle perpetually submerged in terror and leading to death.

So where does Augustine lead us? If, as many suggest, Augustine has no positive political project, then he does not lead us very far. If, as others suggest, Augustine's political vision was but an immature or nascent liberalism, then he leads us to despair insofar as he succeeds only in prophesying the coming of the nihilistic vortex of fear and terror that is now upon us. If, on the other hand, such readings simply miss Augustine's positive political project, perhaps because they are themselves too closely wedded to modern liberalism, then perhaps a post-modern era provides an opportunity to discern and appreciate the contours of a positive political project in Augustine that were previously obscured.

This is indeed the case, for from beginning to end, *The City of God* is an argument on behalf of a true politics, a politics that is founded on a shared love that nurtures and sustains human sociality not as the agonistic struggle of war and death but as the joyous conviviality of life, a politics of resurrection. Augustine's vision is neither apolitical nor nihilistic; rather, it proclaims the politics of life and asserts that this politics is already in our midst, everywhere the communion of saints is gathered. The church is constituted as a counter-politics to the politics of Rome, and to all earthly cities that would rule by dominion, the lust for glory, and the fear of death. Everywhere the community of saints – the city of God on pilgrimage through this world – makes its sacrifices, whereby it is joined to Christ, taken up into the shared love that constitutes the life of the blessed Trinity, and set free to be about the work of mercy/affirmation in the world (X.6), there is a truth-event and there the gospel of life interrupts the politics of fear and death.

In more concrete and contemporary terms, everywhere saints, having joined Christ's sacrifice, go forth not to shop in fear but to live and love and serve their neighbors without fear (in Karl Barth's memorable words from another menacing era, "as if nothing had happened"), there the politics of resurrection is revealed. Where Christians refuse to fear those who can (only) kill the body and relentlessly reach out to and serve others, where they speak and act against torture, against injustice and oppression, against the tyranny of terror and the war against terror, there we catch a glimpse of the politics of life.

What may make this politics both in its contemporary manifestations as well as in Augustine so difficult for many to discern is that this politics does not conform to modern parameters regarding the character of politics. As Augustine suggests, the politics of the resurrection is not Weberian; it is not a matter of fixed boundaries and armed borders. Rather, this politics, as a true politics, by which I mean an ordering of human sociality that holds forth the possibility of nurturing life and not merely delaying death, is oriented not by the fear of death but by the

extension of charity. What centers this politics is not a fear of but a love for God and neighbor. Thus, the very thing that establishes the Christian community as a politics – namely, love – ironically conceals the politics of the resurrection. The centrality of love to politics obscures the character of the church as a politics precisely to the extent that the communion of saints, while it has a center, Christ, does not have a fixed geographical location or armed boundaries. As Augustine says, the earthly and heavenly cities are entangled in this world (I, 35); the citizens of the heavenly city are properly found in the company of the citizens of the earthly cities (XIX, 17, 26). Thus, in the contemporary situation, while there are overtly Christian efforts to push back the politics of fear and terror (think of Christian Peacemaker Teams, School of the Americas Watch, Witness for Peace, Catholic Worker houses, etc.) Christians are just as likely to be found alongside and apart of persons and efforts that are not explicitly Christian. And this is not simply because Christians have yet to figure out a way to separate and establish their own nation-state and NGOs. To the contrary, that the heavenly city is commingled with the earthly cities and that citizens of heaven work alongside citizens of this world is, as Badiou reminded us, but a reflection of the heavenly city's desire for universal filiation – the extension of human communion “to the ends of the earth.”

Of course, such a claim constitutes only a partial answer to the prior objections. One might still protest that the politics of Augustine's city of God demands a turning away from all earthly goods. Is it not the case that this eschewal of the politics of fear is in fact predicated upon a renunciation of those goods that are necessary for communal life? After all, it is Augustine who said that while all desire to live without fear, “the good seek it by diverting their love from things which cannot be had without the risk of losing them,”³⁶ who taught that the eternal law bids us turn our love away from temporal things and instead focus on eternal things,³⁷ and who practiced what he preached by chastising himself for grieving the loss of a friend and henceforth declared that we should not be sorrowful at anyone's death.³⁸ Is it not more accurate to say that this communion of saints is not a genuine politics – a way of living together – after all, but only the sedimentation of a solipsistic ascetism that escapes fear by proleptically relinquishing all earthly goods, including those things Augustine lists, such as bodily health, liberty, human relations, citizenship and so forth? In other words, it evades fear by in essence submitting to death ahead of time, as Paul says, “I die every day!” (1 Cor. 15:30).

Augustine recognized that this politics could appear problematic, for at one point he pleads, “Let no one think [this] inhuman.”³⁹ Yet, he persists in this

³⁶ Augustine, “On Free Will,” in *Augustine: Earlier Christian Writings*, ed. J.H.S. Burleigh (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), §10.

³⁷ Ibid., §32.

³⁸ See *Confessions*, IV.4ff.; “Of True Religion,” §91.

³⁹ “Of True Religion,” §88.

teaching. Why? Because it alone offered the promise of a politics that delivers us from the agony of the civil war that was unleashed by sin and continues to reap its bloody harvest as fearful humanity squares off against itself, brandishing the threat of terror and dominion. It alone ordered human relations in a manner that could resurrect politics, that could posit once again the possibility of humanity genuinely living together. In other words, this difficult teaching, far from portending the end of communion, actually guides us toward true communion. By way of explanation of this claim, I will mention two dimensions of Augustine's instruction regarding our posture toward temporal things.

First, behind this instruction lies the concern that we not be so caught up in temporal realities, in creatures and the creation, that we are distracted from the Creator. Thus, in a homily on 1 John, immediately after stating that we are not to love the world nor the things that are in the world, Augustine responds to the (not so) hypothetical question, "Why should I not love what God has made?" by saying, "God does not forbid you to love them, but he will not have you seek your bliss in them: the end of your esteem for them should be the love of their Maker."⁴⁰ He follows this up with another example that draws the distinction between use and enjoyment. We are to *use* the things of this world, but not *enjoy* them. In a post-Kantian world, we can hardly hear this as anything other than call for the crass instrumentalization and manipulation of others. Yet, that is not at all what Augustine had in mind. As he clarified this distinction, by "enjoy" he means to find one's rest in something.⁴¹ This, of course, calls to mind his well known statement in the *Confessions* that our hearts are restless until they rest in thee. So, his instruction not to love the things of this world is tantamount to saying that we should not burden the things of this world with expectations that they cannot meet. Nothing in the created order, even merely human communities, can set our restless hearts at ease.

Second, Augustine's concern is that we love truly. With regard to temporal goods, this means that we cannot love them as such. It may be helpful to note that 'temporal' does not mean simply 'material'. Rather, it means temporary, contingent, accidental. Hence, the problem with loving temporal goods is that such love is temporal, contingent, subject to change and loss. And such a temporary love is not really love at all, or rather it is a distorted love. True love is not temporary and changing but steadfast, eternal. It is not contingent upon such accidents as geographical or biological proximity. As an example of the problematic character of temporal love, Augustine writes of someone "loving" a singer on account of some perceived advantage attendant upon such love – be it praise or glory or pleasure. When the circumstance changes and the advantage disappears, the love too disappears. Such is not the love of Christians.⁴²

⁴⁰ "Homilies on 1 John: Second Homily," in *Augustine: Later Works* ed. John Burnaby (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), p. 275. (Translation slightly altered)

⁴¹ See *On Christian Doctrine*, I.4.

⁴² See "Of True Religion," §89.

Augustine puts it this way: "It is more inhuman to love a man because he is your son and not because he is a man, that is, not to love that in him which belongs to God, but to love that which belongs to yourself."⁴³ In other words, Augustine is concerned that we do not love things because we grasp, capture or possess them. (He is well aware that those things we attempt to possess have the uncanny ability to turn the tables and possess or capture us.) Rather, those things that we love, we should love as gifts received from the Creator.⁴⁴ Here there is overlap with the preceding point: we rightly love things only when we love God in them, or, when we love them in God.⁴⁵ In this way, our love of temporal things is not temporary, or perhaps more accurately, what we love in things is not what is temporary or contingent, but that which is eternal. Thus, Augustine writes of loving our enemies: "Let your desire for him be that together with you he may have eternal life: let your desire for him be that he may be your brother. . . . You love in him, not what he is [i.e. temporally, an enemy], but what you would have him be [i.e., eternally, a brother]."⁴⁶

Here again, as with the preceding point, Augustine reveals the politics of the resurrection not to be antithetical to human community but rather foundational to genuine human community. In not loving *temporal* things, the point is not to effect dispassionate detachment but rather to love things truly, eternally, without regard for or limitation by accident or advantage. In such a love alone is there hope for a communion that can withstand the vicissitudes of temporal existence that tempt us to civil war.

The preceding discussion paves the way for appreciating Augustine's comments on not grieving the dead. While we might quibble with a rigor that fails to recognize the appropriateness of grief to this time between the times when we await the fullness of the resurrection in which we already participate,⁴⁷ there is a salutary point in Augustine's claim. To put it bluntly, one does not grieve because finally anyone who is loved truly is not lost in death. As Augustine says, "He is not made sorrowful by the death of anyone, for he who loves God . . . knows that nothing can be perish for him unless it perish also in the sight of God."⁴⁸ The unspoken premise of this startling claim is the resurrection. We need not fear death, not because we have already surrendered to it, but because it has no sting. After all, the Resurrected One has revealed it to be no loss, nothing. Accordingly, it cannot rupture human community. This is the lesson Augustine

⁴³ "Of True Religion," §§88.

⁴⁴ For more on grasping and receiving in Augustine, see Gerald W. Schlabach, "'Love is the Hand of the Soul': The Grammar of Continence in Augustine's Doctrine of Christian Love," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6:1 (1998): 59-91.

⁴⁵ See *Confessions*, IV.12.

⁴⁶ "Homilies on 1 John: Eighth Homily," in *Augustine: Later Works* ed. John Burnaby (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), pp. 323-4.

⁴⁷ In this regard, it is interesting that whereas Augustine permits no eschatological leeway with regard to grieving, he is permissive with regard to coercion.

⁴⁸ "Of True Religion," §91. See also *Confessions*, IV.9.

wants us to learn from the discussion of his friend's death in the *Confessions*, not that we should disavow human bonds. Thus he writes that friends are bound together when they love God, or as Gerald Schlabach says, "mutual clinging to God joins believers together in mutual clinging to one another."⁴⁹ In other words, the resurrection makes possible a way of life, a communion, a politics that cannot be rent by death.

Augustine's apparent otherworldliness that would seem to undervalue or neglect the earthly goods necessary to sustain human community turns out to disclose that the politics of the city of God is not only without fixed geographical boundaries but is without temporal boundaries as well. It is indeed the politics of resurrection, of heaven, a politics that extends the communion of life beyond the grave. So Hobbes and liberalism are wrong and the veil of terror that has descended upon us in these latter days is rent. The goods worth pursuing in this life are not threatened by death; they are not capable of finally being lost at the hands of those things and persons we are incessantly instructed and formed (recall Foucault's account of governmentality) to fear.

Thus, what appears as an otherworldliness that severs the nerve of any positive politics in Augustine and so eviscerates the city of God as a fully political presence and possibility actually sets us free. Whereas the politics of fear inevitably curtails our liberty; the politics of resurrection extends freedom. Moreover, it sets us free, not in a post-modern and post-political sense of license from responsibility for renewing and extending community, but in the sense that we are freed for politics. We are freed from the fear that would inhibit our living and loving and serving and giving (and receiving), precisely those things that constitute the heart of a true politics. Secure in the hope of the resurrection, we are set free to live and love and serve others, confident in the knowledge that although we and those we love and serve may die, we will not perish. Death has lost its sting; it cannot break the bonds of communion.

* * *

Gripped by fear of those threatening to overrun their fortified borders and extinguish Rome's dominion, pagans charged Christianity with undercutting the politics of fear and dominion. Augustine's defense of Christianity amounted to a concession that the pagans were right. The city of God establishes another politics, one not oriented by the fear of death and sustained by violent dominion. Instead, the city of God is animated by a politics of resurrection, a politics of love that exceeds the boundaries of both time and space in its effort to share the *summum bonum*, the extension of universal filiation, the communion of all in love.

Writing a community at the very heart of the anti-politics that dominated his age,

⁴⁹ Schlabach, "Love is the Hand of the Soul," p. 84.

a community that no doubt felt the pressures of the surrounding culture and politics of fear and death, Paul assures them that nothing is able to separate them from the love of God that is theirs in Christ (Rom. 8:39). Neither imperial rulers nor terrorist powers, neither vague threats in the present nor speculative threats of things to come, neither microbes nor mad cows, neither hurricanes nor hate. In Christ, sharing in his resurrection, they have received the gift of life.

And, of course, this is no gift of sentimental solitude (more accurately, “resignation”) nor an otherworldly consolation. This is the love that has always moved saints and martyrs – like the Christian Peacemaker Teams – to risk all (in the fear of losing nothing) for the sake of breaking down the dividing walls of hostility and in the midst of terrified and fearful individuals, create communion, community.

This gift of love, this gift of life, this resurrected life, is our political hope. In the midst of a world that purports to have attained its end in political liberalism,⁵⁰ which is a world of war without end, a world where we discover no end either to fear or death, into this world Christ enters, a truth-event that ruptures the culture of fear and the politics of death with the gospel of life. And where the gospel of life inflames saints to make true sacrifices, which are works of mercy that relieve distress and spread the joy of communion, there we are set free from fear and death and being-for-life is made possible. There, in the midst of the smoldering rubble of a terrified and terrifying post-political age, politics – the possibility of human community – is being born again.

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PURL: <http://www.jcrt.org/archives/08.2/bell.pdf>

⁵⁰ See the well-known thesis of Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *National Interest* 16 (Summer 1989): 3-18 and his *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).