Politics, Religion & Ideology, 2014
Vol. 15, No. 3, 366–379, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2014.943361

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Christian Prayer as Political Theory

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ABSTRACT *The question concerning the boundary between the religious and political is a continuously vexing question for Christians who want to contribute to public life and those who want to engage public life in a manner that is consistent with their spiritual lives. This article argues that the spiritual life, enacted in the practice of prayer, is not incidental to public life but actually constitutes a unique politics. Prayer bears in its practices a political theory that on the one hand provides areas of interface with secular political theory and practice, whilst at the same time providing a critique of many political presumptions of the status quo. The article will first look more generally at the relationship between practice and theory, before analysing how the embodied nature of prayer implicates the contours of a new public body. This new body in turn suggests new contours of what it means to be a political subject, new terms of citizenship, and flowing from that, a new kind of political modus vivendi, exemplified by new attitudes to the necessity of survival in politics.*

Introduction

Religiously observant citizens are constantly perplexed by the question concerning the location of the boundaries between their spiritual and political lives. Does it stop at the threshold of what people call the 'public sphere', or does the line remain hidden in some unknown location in the soul? Is there even a line at all?[1] It is a vexing question not just for such citizens who want to contribute to public life in a manner consistent with their spiritual lives, which are in turn shaped by their religious observance. There thus persists another question on how the political life impacts on one's *spiritual* life or, conversely, whether one's prayer makes any political difference? Strangely, in the vast literature on religion and politics, what is taken for granted is the presumption of a disconnect between a citizen's physical and spiritual realities. Calls to political action from whatever spiritual disposition assume that nothing actually happens at prayer apart from some vague emotional or cognitive inspiration, or some miraculous interruption to what seem to be natural social processes. Either way, whilst religion may be regarded as having a relation to politics, prayer is somehow treated as being inherently extrinsic to political life. With this in mind, the question to be engaged in this article can be framed thus: how is the life of

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[1]There exist a number of highly authoritative works which question the neat compartmentalisation between the sacred and the profane, or the religious and the secular. See for instance William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). See also Erin K. Wilson, *After Secularism: Rethinking Religion in Global Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

prayer intrinsically tied to the political life, and what difference does the politics generated by prayer make to political life as currently construed?

Answering this question will necessitate a project that goes beyond the scope of a single article, which makes a few parameters necessary before this article can proceed. This article will need to bracket from the outset analysis to the level of prayer's impact on specific policy outcomes. It also does not seek to outline the totality of the institutional shape of any polis that is generated by prayer. This might risk a disappointingly vacuous analysis, though the response of this article is that engaging each of the aforementioned projects presumes a link between prayer and politics that has so far not been satisfactorily established in the literature. Therefore, this article has set for itself the more modest aim of first establishing such links between prayer and the political life, that is, to establish the case that prayer is in and of itself inherently political in nature. This more modest claim, however, will be followed by the more ambitious task of showing how prayer bears in its practices a political theory that critiques many fundamental presumptions of secular political theory. The article argues that prayer, recognised as an embodied practice, generates a polity that is constituted and operationalised alongside and across, but not in accordance to, the established institutions and rules of statecraft. It argues also that prayer can act as a site for challenging the inevitability of the dominance of secular politics. Through the avenue of critiquing two presumptions of political life, this article will show some key differences between a polity based on prayer and that of the Westphalian status quo, adding to Sheikh's and May's critiques of the Westphalian status quo in this special issue. Ultimately, this article seeks to establish that prayer is not merely an incidental spiritual nicety, but a political actuality.

Forms of prayer will vary depending on religious tradition, and full accounts of the political salience of each form will thus similarly vary. Indeed, multiple accounts will be needed in order to take seriously the dense particularity of each tradition, and even then, coverage of the various forms within that tradition may itself yield a work that is beyond the scope of a single article. Because of this, no single work will be able to exhaustively unpack the full implications of prayer in general. Aware of this limitation, this article will only act as a first step in this analytical vector, and will confine itself to considering the political salience of Christian prayer; more particularly, this work will unfold aspects of this theory from the Roman Catholic standpoint.

With these parameters in mind, this article seeks to establish its case in two movements. The first movement would tentatively sketch a more general account of the relationship between prayer and theory via three interdependent arguments. The first of these arguments pertains more generally to the close relationship between theory and practice highlighted by critical theory. Having highlighted this nexus between theory and practice, the second argument relates to the ways in which the body becomes implicated as a vital part of political theory. The third argument extends the observations pertaining to the biological body, and in turn shows how prayer's implication of that body implicates in turn public bodies, especially polities. The second movement will look at the specific case of Christian prayer to highlight four areas where the calculus of prayer can act as a counterpart to that in secular political theory. The article will look at how notions of the subject and citizenship in both prayer and secular political theory result in differing political *modi vivendi*, exemplified by differing attitudes to the necessity of survival in political life.

The Political Ingredients of Prayer

Theory and practice

The claim concerning a link between prayer and political valency rests on a foundation which presumes a nexus between theory and practice. For too long, even if unintentionally,

political theory had relied too heavily on exclusively cognitive processes and categories and operated upon what Richard Bourke called a 'dissonance' between theory and practice, which in turn has been associated with political upheaval by trying to force the concrete and practical into conforming with the abstract.[2] In response to this dissonance, theorists from a number of political sub-disciplines – most particularly from those associated with the Frankfurt School such as Louis Althusser and Ernst Bloch – have called for a renewal of attention to the nexus between political theory and practice. On the one hand, theories are what instruct, infuse meaning into and ultimately bear the possibilities for transforming practices.[3] On the other hand, practices themselves, rather than being value neutral, actually are concrete extensions of a particular political theory. Indeed, it is the existence of a distinct form of practice that can explicate the implications and possibilities of political theory.[4]

The literature highlighting this nexus has been well trodden and need not be revisited here. What does require some elaboration, however, is how pointing out this this nexus has influenced similar insights by Reformed theologians such as Richard Osmer,[5] Herman Dooyeweerd,[6] Gerben Heitink[7] and Catholic theologians such as Terry Veling.[8] Osmer, to wit, spoke of this nexus in terms of a recognition of an interpretive dialogue between pastoral practice and the theories within theological categories. Veling and Heitink, on the other hand, speak of a much tighter relationship between theory and practice. Whilst Heitink speaks of *praxis* to denote how practice also involves theory,[9] Veling spoke of theory 'indwelling' practice in the sense that 'it is only in the practice of theology that we begin to realize and understand its meanings and its workings more deeply'.[10] This nexus between theory and practice thereby implicates prayer as a relevant category for analysis, since prayer constitute more than just thoughts in the mind but a series of corporeal practices. Graham Ward builds on Veling's observations of prayer as a *theological* practice,[11] calling it the concrete site of the 'in between', between the church and the world, and also where 'the material and the spiritual inform each other'.[12] The sum of these observations is that, when the rejection of the 'dissonance' between theory and practice is taken seriously, accepting that theory and practice interpenetrate each other, one cannot avoid the implication that woven within the practice of prayer is a theory. It is the task of the sections that follow to demonstrate that the theory implicated in the practice of prayer is also inherently political.

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[2]Richard Bourke, 'Theory and Practice: The Revolution in Political Judgement' in *Political Judgement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 74.

[3]James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), p. 232; Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London: Cox and Wyman, 1969), p. 166.

[4]Althusser, *For Marx*, p. 172; Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), p. 268; John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 380.

[5]Richard Robert Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008).

[6]Herman Dooyeweerd, *In the Twilight of Western Thought: Studies in the Pretended Autonomy of Philosophical Thought* (Lewiston: Mellen, 1999), pp. 13–17.

[7]Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1999).

[8]Terry A Veling, *Practical Theology: On Earth as It is in Heaven* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005).

[9]Heitink, *Practical Theology*, p. 9.

[10]Veling, *Practical Theology*, p. 4.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Graham Ward, *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 60. See also Graham Ward, 'The Politics of Discipleship' in James K. A. Smith (ed.) *The Church and Postmodern Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), pp. 280–283.

The Implication of the Body

The first place to start elaborating on the political valence of prayer, if one understands prayer to be a practice, would be the material things that are caught up in the practice of prayer. If practices are fundamentally corporeal, one key material that cannot be avoided is the biological body. One rarely thinks of the implication of the body in one's immersion into the spiritual. In light of this reading of the body as a field for perception, we need corporeal practices, even something as simple as stopping a task we have at hand (one thinks of the famous 1857 *Angelus* painting by Jean Francois Millet), in order to put ourselves in a proper disposition of prayer, or how we need our lips to articulate our prayer, or even how we need that piece of neuronal tissue – the brain – in order to process our thoughts for prayer. Yet these are but the crudest forms of implication of the body in prayer, and they form the material substrate for subtler operations which work to implicate the body, that are also profoundly political. To understand how these operations work, it is necessary to dispel a number of misconceptions with regard to prayer. One of the first misconceptions to be dealt with is the perception that the primary point of interface in prayer is the mind – think of how often the words 'thoughts' and 'prayers' are coupled in our wishes to others. This perception of the mind as the focus of prayer betrays a tendency to see bodies as only secondary to the 'real business' of prayer, which is a primarily cognitive process.

In contrast to this, this article will take its cue from the phenomenology of James K. A. Smith, who in turn draws heavily on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception. Following the line of argument that Merleau-Ponty, via Smith, puts forward, this article rejects the framing of prayer as a purely 'spiritual' event, framed in terms of a complete departure from any material structure, or in terms of a purely internal and cerebral event. By contrast, Smith argues that such a capacity for apprehending is intimately bound up with the pre-cognitive capacities of the body's being in the world, to borrow Martin Heidegger's terminology. The body, in other words, sets the horizons of the word in a pre-theoretical manner, which then frames what is perceived and apprehended in the mind. One must not discount the involvement of our minds in prayer, but it must be said here that if prayer is a practice which implicates the body, then the 'real business' of prayer cannot be confined to merely the knowledge categories borne out of conscious thought, which are in turn built upon Cartesian epistemological foundations. What this conception of prayer as thought ignores is not merely the long history of empiricism but, going further, a recognition within contemporary epistemology that knowledge is more than merely what the mind can consciously apprehend. Speaking from the perspective of neuroscience, Antonio Damasio has also remarked that even the brain knows more than what the conscious mind does.[13] From a psychological perspective, John Bargh and Tanya Chartrand's research into the 'new unconscious' has provided new modes of knowing where stimuli outside the conscious mind can automatically lay knowledge claims (in the form of inclinations) on the person that bypass any cognitive process.[14] The notion of a physical substrate bearing more knowledge claims than what can be cognitively apprehended could lead us to consider more broadly the role of the body in producing the knowledge claims that are brought to prayer. Though not writing within the Christian tradition, Merleau-Ponty has nonetheless provided a very rich field to question

[13]Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body, Emotion and the Making of Consciousness* (London: Vintage, n.d.), p. 42.

[14]John A. Bargh and Tanya L. Cartrand, 'The Unbearable Automaticity of Being', *American Psychologist* 54 (1999), pp. 462–479.

the dichotomy between the mind and the body, and to consider instead how our knowledge processed through cognitive channels is unavoidably bound up in our embodiment. Merleau-Ponty spoke of the body being 'intervolved' with its environment, such that it becomes continuously committed to that environment and its knowledge claims. This makes the body a 'pivot' of knowledge.[15] Thus, the body does not merely frame the horizons of what is known, as mentioned above, and the intervolvement of the body with its environment imprints on that body a creation of a field of dispositions from that environment which then orients the subject and commits him or her into acting in particular ways and to accepting a particular shape of the world which is pre-cognitive.

The intervolvement of the body in knowing, to borrow from Merleau-Ponty, thus challenges a strictly Cartesian mode of knowing as exclusively cognitive assent. Before something is apprehended in the mind its data enters the body, albeit in an inchoate and unarticulated form. In daily life, various engagements with the world constitute engagements with persons at a profoundly corporeal level. One may shake another's hand, make eye contact, speak with him, pull or push them and so on. These engagements may also be reciprocated, and these reciprocations are no less corporeal than the initiating engagement. According to Ward, the interactions with these bodies leave informational imprints on our bodies long after the engagement is over, and long before the mind can apprehend it as an object. The data may be incoherent and we may not be able to articulate the data within those imprints, but that does not negate the fact that the data is there, filtering through and forming us even before the conscious mind is aware. Knowledge in this inter-corporeal sense is 'transcorporeal'.[16]

Prayer as a bodily as well as a mental act then carries a particular epistemological meaning. In every prayer, the fact that the ones at prayer have bodies means that in their practice of prayer they dedicate more knowledge to prayer than they consciously realise. This is particularly pertinent for the Christian. When the Christian says he is bringing himself to prayer, he is actually bringing before God the articulated data in his mind as well as the unarticulated data his engagements with the world has imprinted onto his body. Ultimately, when each Christian brings himself to God in prayer, Ward reminds us that he is also bringing the world he inhabits towards God.

Prayer and Polis

The bringing of the world in one's prayer to God would suggest that implicating the body in the practices of prayer also leads one to consider the simultaneous implication of, and commitment to, a *public* body. The link between prayer and the production of a *polis* is made here with some caution. On the one hand, the article does assert that the practice of prayer is also constitutive of a distinct political formation that challenges the spatial monopoly of current political configurations, in particular those that have the modern nation-state as the indispensable building block. Prayer, to borrow Stanley Hauerwas'[17] terminology, culminates in the creation of a counter-polity. On the other hand, one is cautious to collapse the challenge to the monopoly of the political status quo with the production of polities that institutionally replicate the modern nation-state, since that risks a form of nostalgic triumphalism that is not advocated in this article. Rather, what is being proposed here is

[15]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 1962), p. 94.
[16]Graham Ward, *Christ and Culture* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 94–95; Ward, 'The Politics of Discipleship', p. 281.
[17]See for instance, Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Towards a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), p. 2.

that the political valence of prayer lies in the production of a polity that sits alongside the modern state and also cuts across it by challenging the dominant narratives that the institutions of the nation-state instantiates. Whilst charting the full array of prayer's challenges to the imagination of the state is beyond the scope of this article, mention will be made of two pivotal categories, that of citizenship and the calculus of survival. These two categories may appear to be arbitrarily narrow, but they are defended here as the fulcrums around which the practice of contemporary political life turns in two fundamental senses: in terms of delineating the contours of belonging within the *polis* and in terms of that *polis*' fundamental operating principle.

Before moving to these essentially political categories which arise from prayer, it is necessary to continue where the previous section left off concerning the epistemological salience of the body. It was necessary to precede the political valence of prayer with a section of the epistemological valence of the body because the pre-cognitive field of possibilities comes not just from the intervolvement of a singular body, but also with a field that is generated by other bodies. This profound interlinkage between one body and another suggests that at a very fundamental level, the embodied self is always one that is 'moving towards the other', in the words of de Certeau.[18] For this reason, prayer as a bodily practice will necessary be an unavoidably public practice insofar as the body already orients the person at prayer in a social vector. Indeed, as Merleau-Ponty suggested above, any embodied practice goes beyond a mere orientation and actually constitutes a call towards the practitioner's commitment to a public body, even if that commitment is unarticulated or unacknowledged. In a similar fashion, the practice of prayer as an embodied practice necessarily implicates what Luigi Giussani calls 'unavoidable solicitations' from others, to which the person 'should say a forceful "yes" with all of the resources of his heart and mind, without "understanding"'.[19]

For the Catholic, there are two other, subtler, ways in which prayer has an indispensable public dimension. First, prayer is profoundly public in the sense that the corporeal intertwining mentioned above also reaches into the supernatural realm. The practice of prayer goes beyond the phenomenon of the person praying to God, beyond the impression that what is taking place is merely in the context of a loose couplet of monads – God and the person at prayer. The act of prayer is profoundly social in that the instigator of prayer is not an isolated individual, but God working together with the one at prayer.[20] At the same time, the endpoint of prayer is profoundly public because what is brought to prayer is not left as something separated from God. In the act of prayer, both the person at prayer and what is brought to prayer is *enfolded* into God in Christ. The world one inhabits and as imprinted on that inhabitant's body is made to abide with the Body of Christ as the act of prayer generates a communion with Christ. This is not to say that the public dimension to prayer is confined to the co-religionists of the one at prayer. The second, even subtler public dimension is that the practice of prayer implicates the one at prayer beyond any apparent confines of the *polis* generated by the practice of prayer. Whilst this first level of justification for a public dimension to prayer applies specifically to Christians, the second level of justification applies to those outside the Christian fold. This second level of justification is an extension of the implications of the body of the one at prayer and the enfolding thereof in God. In the words of Jeffrey Bishop, the body, even at a material level, already comes discoursed in that the body is profoundly 'shaped and molded by particular histories and forms of being into

[18]Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 110.
[19]Luigi Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, trans. Viviane Hewitt (Montreal; Buffalo: McGill Queens University Press, 1997), p. 7.
[20]Ward, 'The Politics of Discipleship', p. 280.

which the body is thrown'.[21] The knowing of something transcorporeally is to implicate not a single biological category, but a whole network of communal relations in which that particular body is located and also constituted. Such a location, because of the body's being in the world, means that these communal relations will necessarily cut across confessional boundaries and reach beyond the confines of any single community of faith, so in the act of prayer, those 'histories and forms of being' that work on the body, Christian and non-Christian alike, are equally enfolded into God as the body of the person at prayer is enfolded into God.

However, just because the web of social relations cuts across recognisable boundaries does not render that web formless. It only means that the spatial logic of any web of social relations generated by prayer will not adopt the same spatial logic of relations in state-centric politics. The fact that the body already comes discoursed with transcorporeal knowledge categories means that the material body is already politicised, it already has built into it an organised public reasoning – a *res publica* – one made by others before him and that comes prior to one's consciousness of it.[22] If this is the case then prayer's implication of the one particular body cannot *help but* implicate in turn a political community.[23] In this sense, prayer as an embodied practice thus has an inescapably political dimension because the mere fact that we are able to bring knowledge categories to prayer means we also bring in some understanding of belonging to a public. So, in a sense, every person at prayer each becomes a transistor that filters through and extends a political entity. Prayer is thereby not merely a vague stirrer of internal dispositions or an inspiration towards political action. Rather prayer's implication of an inherently politicised body makes prayer a political action in and of itself. It is political action by its situating some kind of public that in turn conditions the knowledge categories that we bring to prayer.

The implication of a political belonging and commitment at prayer should also lead one to consider the political valence of Christian prayer in another, more activist, sense. Feminists and critical theorists have in their work taken seriously the Marxist maxim that the task for the theorist is not only to *describe* the world. Lest description descends into cooperating with oppression, it is necessary in theorising to simultaneously entertain a utopic horizon and *transform* the status quo.[24] In a similar fashion, prayer does not merely *position* the one at prayer and his inhabited part of the world. Citing Maximus the Confessor, Ward spoke of prayer as being the expression of a desire, through the enfolding of the world into communion with Christ, to simultaneously extend Christ through time and space, and also perfect and transform time and space.[25] Thus, prayer is also a practice of *transforming* the prayer's position, and his inhabitation of the world.[26] The practice of prayer is thus inherently revolutionary, in that it should not only position the person at prayer and the world but also *re*position them, bringing about what Althusser calls a

[21]Jeffrey P. Bishop, *The Anticipatory Corpse: Medicine, Power and the Care of the Dying* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), p. 289.

[22]Colin Gordon, 'Governmental Rationality: An Introduction' in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 4–5. This is in spite of Hervé Juvin's claim that the body has been cut off completely from all forms of social meaning and is subject to none other than the whims of the individual. Indeed, Juvin implies that this very form of corporeal isolation is, paradoxically, the result of its immersion in a series of technologies which are the result of social mediation anyway. See Hervé Juvin, *The Coming of the Body* (London; New York: Verso, 2010).

[23]Ward, *Christ and Culture*, p. 96.

[24]See for example Ann Manicom, 'Feminist Pedagogy: Transformations, Standpoints and Politics', *Canadian Journal of Education*, 17:3 (1992), pp. 365–389; Andrew Linklater, *The Transformation of Political Community* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998).

[25]Ward, 'The Politics of Discipleship', p. 282.

[26]Ward, *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice*, p. 88.

'revolution in social relations'.[27] More specifically, prayer should upset the secular status quo because secular politics in a context of postmodernity sets all political possibilities within one nexus of political relations, comprising the individual, the bordered nation-state and the global market. This is a nexus that privileges certain forms of (secular) knowledge as objective and thus normative for public knowledge, and subordinates other (religious) forms of knowledge as merely subjective and optional for public life, as outlined in the introduction to this special issue. Prayer should be revolutionary in that it should resituate all political possibilities by repositioning them in a new *polis* called the Body of Christ. As the act of prayer enfolds the inhabited part of the world into Christ, it is in the Body of Christ as the new public from which new knowledge categories, and by extension new political possibilities, are conceived. The sections that follow hope to provide a small, and by no means exhaustive, sample of new knowledge categories. This article will confine its explorations to prayer's presumptions of political subjectivity and citizenship, and look at how the reconceptualising of these two political presumptions extend to transform a *modus vivendi* grounded in survival and the management of political risk.

Prayer and Political Subjectivity

Arguably the key political trope that consideration of the transformative capacity of Christian prayer must address pertains to the conceptualisation of the political subject. This is in light of the view that secular politics presumes the primary political unit is the autonomous and rational individual who is radically pre-communal and enters into communion with others by consent. This kind of individualism is not only the central trope of liberalism in the tradition of Rawls. A number of postmodern political theorists, such as William Connolly, even as they highlight the salience of collective, discursive or institutional belongings, assert ultimately the need for a 'political theory of individuality' that questions collective processes of 'normalisation' that impose themselves onto the individual.[28] Thus, one could, as Kristen Deede Johnson does, 'appreciate [the postmodern] concern to draw attention to these often unrecognised influences upon...identity' and yet critique their continuing concern for a 'certain ethos of individuality',[29] a trend which made Alasdair MacIntyre regard certain strands of postmodern thought as being the 'inverted mirror image' of the Enlightenment's emphasis on autonomy grounded in an exercise of hermetically sealed rationality.[30]

To this emphasis on the 'political theory of individuality', Christian prayer responds by asserting that it does not allow the subject to be such an isolated monad. This is because the person at prayer, as mentioned earlier, becomes enfolded into another, namely the Body of Christ. In that enfolding, the atomised person is 'unseated' and removed from a position of command, for in the Body of Christ the subject only *is so* when he is in relation with other parts of the Body of Christ – other Christian subjects. But more importantly, the atomised person is de-centred because in the Body of Christ the subject at prayer is so, only insofar as it is linked into the life of the Godhead. Thus, in the practice of prayer, it is not the

[27]Althusser, *For Marx*, pp. 175–176.
[28]William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 94.
[29]Kristen Deede Johnson, *Theology, Political Theory and Pluralism: Beyond Tolerance and Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 127. For a similar critique of Connolly see Barry Harvey, 'Book Review: Why I Am Not a Secularist', *Journal of Church and State* 43 (2001), p. 141.
[30]Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 353.

individual who prays, but 'I and the spirit who pray'.[31] Sarah Coakley and Ruth Burrows put it more strongly, asserting that in prayer it is actually God who is the protagonist who enables the pray-er to pray. In prayer, thus, God answers God in and through the one who prays, making prayer a process where 'God must praise God within us'.[32]

This agency of another in prayer also challenges the liberal emphasis on autonomy. If a subject is only so insofar as there is receipt of knowledge categories from another and because such categories are often integrated before being consented to, it means in a sense that the subject only arises from submission to authority structures that created those knowledge categories. This is not to say that one's individual personhood disappears into a faceless monolithic mass, but that individuality is not an a priori given. Rather, it is the embedding into those very power structures that generates the knowledge necessary for the person to articulate oneself.[33] Prayer also critiques the ethos of individuality within secular political theory at the level of self-knowledge, for to be the autonomous individual of secular politics, one must assume complete prior knowledge of self. On the other hand, a self that emerges in relation with others and with God, as instantiated through prayer, actually assumes an incomplete self-knowledge, for Christian epistemology is summarised by Paul's remark that we 'know in part' till and are in waiting for a perfection of knowledge which is *eschatological*.[34] To set this Pauline text in the context of Ward's notion of the enfolding of prayer into Christ, the critique by Christian epistemology of post/Enlightenment variants goes further than acknowledging the need for others to know. For knowledge only comes insofar as one knows Christ, and even then full knowledge is not attainable until the *eschaton*. This means that the subject at prayer can never really completely know him or herself on this side of death. This is why Augustine says in his *Confessions* that 'no man knows the things of a man'.[35]

Prayer's Political Dividends: Unseating Secular Presumptions

Christian prayer's unseating of the autonomous subject extends to the unseating of other presumptions that underpin contemporary political operations. The enfolding of the world into Christ in the practice of prayer presumes straight away that Christian prayer calls for an awareness not just of one's *own* needs or salvation, but also for an alternative political witness of an alternative *polis*. The preceding sections have asserted that the practice of Christian prayer presumes that in prayer the secular public is enfolded into another *polis*, namely the Body of Christ. What needs to be addressed in this section is identifying the political dividends of the preceding, largely theological, reflections. As suggested above, the policy implications of the practice of prayer have been bracketed from this analysis, since the more immediate political fruits of the reconceptualisation of the *polis* lie in the challenging of some fundamental, yet unarticulated, conceptual commitments within politics as currently construed.

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[31]Ward, 'The Politics of Discipleship', p. 280.

[32]Sarah Coakley, 'Why Three? Some Further Reflections on the Origins of the Doctrine of the Trinity', in *The Making and Remaking of Christian Doctrine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 37. See also Sarah Coakley, 'Living into the Mystery of the Holy Trinity: Trinity, Prayer and Sexuality', *Anglican Theological Review*, 80:2 (1998), p. 225. See also Ruth Burrows, *Letters on Prayer* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1999), p. 29.

[33]Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 202.

[34]1 Cor 13:pp. 9–10.

[35]Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 192. This is not to say that *nothing* can be known, but that there is an incomplete understanding in the subject proposed by Christian prayer, as opposed to full comprehension in the Cartesian sense. On this note see James K. A. Smith, *Speech and Theology: Language and the Logic of Incarnation* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 28.

As mentioned above, two unarticulated commitments are of interest here. The first theme of citizenship is analysed since many policy decisions are made on the basis of identifying the scope of belonging within a particular *polis* and to this point, this article will look at how the practice of prayer embodies a different kind of citizenship because it operationalises a different conception of time from the political status quo, one that challenges secular notions of inclusivity and exclusion. The second theme of survival as the primary calculus was identified as the unarticulated logic of secular political life, which in turn is tied to the presumption of scarcity and the impulse to ensure individual and communal material integrity. To this, this article will submit how prayer operationalises an alternative logic of providence, one that challenges the necessity of presuming material scarcity, ensuring material integrity, and ultimately challenging the inevitability of survival as the benchmark of political calculation.

Citizenship (and Time)

Presuming another public with another set of citizens apart from a secular public, constitutes another challenge to secular politics because there is a tendency to look at the issue of citizenship in one of two ways. The first is to look at the issue of citizenship in purely statist terms, so that citizenship in the Body of Christ is likened to being a citizen of a state. Talk of citizenship in these terms is thus set in terms of clear spatial divides that set clear distinctions between citizen and alien. The second way tries to overcome these narrow spatial divides through recourse to some vague unitary label, whether that be in terms of secular humanism ('at heart we are all human beings'), or in terms of the 'free world'. Citizenship in the Body of Christ, when set against this backdrop, becomes coextensive with some variation of civil or human rights discourse. As generous as that coupling might sound, it would come with qualifications that in turn limit the extent to which it is consistent with Christian practice. This is because under statist terms of citizenship someone would always fall outside these immanent categories, and both sets of categories are prone to engendering hostile relations through the imposition of the insider/outsider dichotomy.

At the heart of the citizenship problem is not only a spatial but also a temporal divide between secular and Christian political theories. When framed in terms of secular immanence, the 'insider' is confined, not only to one in a particular space, but also one that is alive at one particular point in time. Citizenship in these terms is exclusionary because the terms of citizenship are arbitrarily set by what G. K. Chesterton calls the 'arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about'.[36] In relation to Christian political theory implicated in the practice of prayer, the categorisation of the living as the insider seriously narrows the borders of the Body of Christ, for the body of Christ is extended both through time and across space. It is extended across space because in prayer the entire world which creates the knowledge categories that mark the one at prayer – that world is brought before God.[37] At the same time, the spatial divides are broken down because the whole world is simultaneously enfolded into another spatial formation called the Body of Christ which, in the words of the twelfth-century literary figure Alan of Lille, is 'an intelligable sphere whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere'.[38]

[36]G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Simon and Brown, 2012), p. 45.
[37]Ward, 'The Politics of Discipleship', p. 282.
[38]Cited in Saint Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), p. 100.

As the spatial axis of citizenship is interrupted by Christian prayer's enfolding into the Body of Christ, that enfolding also interrupts the temporal axis of citizenship. Time in the Body of Christ does not follow the secular template because the Body of Christ into which the person at prayer is enfolded is a *polis* whose citizens are not only those in the present, nor only those of the past. In the Body of Christ, even those who are yet to be incorporated in the future,[39] 'a people yet unborn' in the new life in Christ, are considered insiders.[40] The inclusion of these 'yet unborn' is a future horizon, the lines of which are decisively drawn at the end of historical time. It is only on the other side of the *eschaton* that one can finally see who really is excluded from the Body of Christ, and until that moment arrives, one has to assume that all, including those deemed outsiders by secular notions of citizenship, are at least 'potential members in the Body of Christ',[41] and thus the potential citizens of the *polis*. The terms of citizenship set by the Body of Christ must therefore seriously challenge the way one conceives of the non-citizen on this side of the *eschaton*, and here one can speak not only of future generations of citizens, but also those well outside the bounds of conventional citizenship, such as the asylum seeker, the deviant and the traitor. Until the time of judgement, even those not formally within the Body of Christ are to be regarded as future citizens. The borders of the dichotomy between 'insider' and 'outsider' hereby become blurred, which might challenge any pretensions of being entitled to subject those conventionally categorised as outsiders to oppressive or exclusionary treatment from which citizens are exempt. Conversely, this blurring of the lines of 'insider' and 'outsider' could also serve to curb the decisiveness by which citizens conventionally construed can be arbitrarily quarantined from other citizens and subject such classes to exclusion or discrimination, whether by reasons of race, gender, religion or immigration status. The blurring of the borders between generations may also question the necessity of policy-making with ramifications that prioritise the current generation of citizens for which such policies are made, to the detriment or exclusion of other generations, whether those relate to a *polis*' commitment to warfare, economic planning or the provision of welfare.

The Calculus of Survival (and Providence)

If prayer resituates public, subject, citizen and time in the body of Christ, then prayer would also announce a kind of politics very different to the secular status quo. If secular politics, as previously asserted, presumes a 'political theory of individuality', then it also presumes an imperative to protect the liberty of an autonomous individual, this means in turn that the political *modus operandi* would be one grounded in the imperative of self-help and survival.[42] This is so because secular politics as a mode of sociality has to be under-girded by a network of contracts to protect that liberty of one individual against other individuals, and if *that* is true, relations between individuals can only be sustained by a hierarchy of contracts, and the most fundamental contract is the social contract with the modern state.[43] Protection of liberty thus becomes synonymous with the *survival* of a static piece of

[39]William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), p. 51.
[40]Psalm 22:31.
[41]Dorothy Day, *On Pilgrimage: The Sixties* (New York: Curtis Books, 1972), p. 94.
[42]This tendency is suggested in a series of essays edited by Janet Coleman. See *The Individual in Political Theory and Practice, The Origins of the Modern State in Europe* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1996).
[43]Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*, p. 45.

territory, for like individual integrity, territorial space must be firmly delineated, integrity solidly walled, and the status quo strictly observed. If survival becomes the highest good, then all means becomes justified, including the resort to violence, not just against 'the outsider' but even the 'insider' when it becomes something that the modern state cannot firmly define and control.[44] One should thus not be surprised that the survival of autonomous citizens would become the justification for the resort to all means necessary to protect the state, including state violence against its own citizenry who fail to integrate into the political status quo, as Giorgio Agamben writes in his *State of Exception*.[45]

If, however, Christian prayer announces a political formation that has no borders and thus no outsiders, then such prayer provides an alternative to the politics of survival, an alternative that Scott Bader-Saye calls the 'politics of providence'.[46] This critiques the politics of survival because while modern politics emphasises the primacy of the temporal agent for social betterment,[47] political agency within history is at all times a participation in the ultimate agency of God that transcends history (with all political action set within a horizon of waiting and preparation for God's completing action within history).[48] At the same time, while the politics of survival calls for the distancing of oneself between one and the other via contract, Christian prayer calls for an 'open[ing of] the self to the infinity of what is God'[49] and more immediately, in the words of Michel de Certeau, calls for 'being other and moving towards the other'.[50] The agent, insofar as he wants to know himself and further his interests, must always see to the stranger, his identity and his needs, even at the risk of one's own survival. An analogy to such a politics is found in the fifth chapter of the Song of Songs. The interests of the beloved lay not in the possessive capture of the lover, but in an extending beyond herself towards the constant call of the Lover. We hear of the pained exclamations to the daughters of Jerusalem, suggesting the possible death of the self because of the absence of the Lover. The openness of the Beloved toward the Lover can be seen in her almost blasé obliviousness to the risk of damage to the integrity to her character caused by the possibility of scandal. She is even oblivious to her physical integrity, such as rape and assault perpetrated, interestingly, by those that are charged with guarding the integrity of the city walls.[51] She is constantly moving towards greater openness so she can be in union with her beloved. Drawing from the Song of Songs, Gregory of Nyssa looks at the agent abiding in Christ not as a static monad, but one that is always in process and movement towards another. Being drawn to God, for Gregory, calls for a constancy in openness, a constant draw beyond itself towards the other, and never closing.[52]

Prayer thus calls for a political agent that constantly opens itself in acts of generosity towards the other for several interconnecting reasons. First, it is because the other is the avenue towards self-knowledge. Second, it is because that other, seen from an eschatological vantage point is a possible citizen in the Body of Christ. Third, it is because even if that

[44]Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 7–8.
[45]Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, n.d.), p. 2.
[46]Scott Bader-Saye, 'Figuring Time: Providence and Politics' in Randi Rashkover Pecknold and C. C. Pecknold (eds) *Liturgy, Time and the Politics of Redemption* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), p. 98.
[47]Philip Goodchild, 'Capital and Kingdom: An Eschatological Ontology' in Creston Davis, John Milbank, and Slavoj Zizek (eds) *Theology and the Political: The New Debate* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 127.
[48]Bader-Saye, 'Figuring Time: Providence and Politics', p. 110.
[49]Ward, 'The Politics of Discipleship', p. 280.
[50]de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 110.
[51]Song of Songs 5:16.
[52]St Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (Brookline: Hellenic College Press, 1987), pp. 109–124.

opening results in tragedy, the ultimate agency of God is coupled with a promise of his steering all historical processes towards a 'comic' end.[53] This means not a relief from earthly suffering, but of transformation of all earthly tragedy. It is this promise, and the hope in the fulfilment of that promise,[54] that allows a politics of surrender to the other, rather than a violent distancing of what is unknown.

Conclusion

The preceding sections run the risk of painting an overly rosy picture about the way that Christians pray all of the time. It seems that Christian prayer is always an unproblematically Godly act and that the politics of providence, characterised by openness towards the other, seems to snuff out the Church's task to judge. Christian prayer may not announce this alternative politics all the time. Indeed, prayer's political edge can at times be blunted and actually extend the secular status quo rather than challenge it. This problem is particularly acute in prayers involving requests for assistance.

The heart of the problem of prayer extending, rather than challenging, the status quo lies in the conceptualisation of prayer as a filtration or interpretation of the world around the one who prays. Given the corporeal dimension of prayer outlined above, the one who prays will be the point of convergence for both secular and Christic political formations, as they imprint the knowledge categories that are then brought to God in prayer. If this is true, then the problem to be faced is that of secular knowledge categories shaping the horizons of the prayer that is articulated before God.[55] Coakley said that in prayer God is the primary agent, but she underplays how the person at prayer also has an agency in prayer, and if I am a fallen creation, and if my identity is somewhat shaped by the claims the political formations of the world have on me, then it is possible that I could pray both as a transistor of God's grace and as an extension of secular political formations. For instance, if one were to pray and ask God to make one rich, would that person not be praying as if I was an autonomous individual? And if this is so, the question persists as to what constitutes real prayer.

This on its face may dampen any notion of prayer's political valency. An initial response to this problem might look not to the individual practice of prayer, but to the whole network of practices in which that act of prayer and that person at prayer is embedded. For it is in the light of such embedding that we see the nature of that individual act of prayer.[56] Thus, talk about the political valency of prayer must also be embedded in other practices of discipleship, examples of which include sacramental discipline, the works of mercy and the communal discipline of religious communities. It is those practices of discipleship that can point to the overall *telos* of that one act of prayer, and thus it is in those practices of discipleship in which the transformative enfolding into the body of Christ can take place.

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[53]Steven Kepnes, 'Rosensweig's Liturgical Reasoning' in Randi Rashkover and C. C. Pecknold (eds) *Liturgy, Time, and the Politics of Redemption* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), p. 123.

[54]This hope is at the same time the recognition of a risk. The fact that veracity of this promise lies in a future hope rather than a demonstrated efficacy, says Daniel M. Bell, sharpens the difference between the calculus of a politics grounded in prayer and that grounded in secular statecraft, between a politics rooted in an empirical evidence and another grounded in witness, which then distinguishes the seeming 'refusal to cease suffering' in the calculus of a prayerful politics as mere resignation. See Daniel M. Bell Jr, *Liberation Theology After the End of History: The Refusal to Cease Suffering* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 192–195.

[55]Graham Ward, *Theology and Contemporary Critical Theory*, Studies in Literature and Religion (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), p. 4.

[56]Graham Ward, 'A Christian Act: Politics and Liturgical Practise' in Randi Rashkover and C. C. Pecknold (eds) *Liturgy, Time and the Politics of Redemption* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), p. 40.

This article is mindful of the risk of having the transformative edge of prayer being blunted via allowing secular premises form prayer's horizons, as well as the risk of descending into a kind of baptised resignation to the suffering that emits from political life. Nonetheless this article asserts that as a practice at the threshold between the material and the spiritual, Christian prayer still constitutes a politics which re-imagines secular counterparts, since it is mindful of a horizon 'totally other than this world as [sic] structure of facts'.[57] Thus, rather than turning to prayer as an escape from the structure of facts, prayer acts as its own structure of facts by resituating the *polis* in the Body of Christ, re-conceptualising the modern subject of secular politics, extending the scope of citizenship and reshaping the overarching *telos* of politics from survival to providence. It is hoped that this article has outlined the foundations of a research thread in which prayer can break not only the divide between the public and the private, but also the divide between the transcendent and the imminent, and in so doing posit Christian prayer as a peculiarly Christian contribution to the task of *Kulturkritik*,[58] where the sites in which many have invested themselves politically could be read in a distinctly Christian grammar.[59]

[57]Rudolf J. Siebert, *From Critical Theory to Communicative Political Theology: Universal Solidarity* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), p. 188.
[58]On this see Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, p. 80.
[59]Graham Ward, 'Radical Orthodoxy And/as Cultural Politics' in Laurence Paul Hemming (ed.) *Radical Orthodoxy? A Catholic Enquiry* (Burlington, IN: Ashgate, 2000), p. 103.