

From Private Bodies to a Shareable Body Politic. A Theological Solution to a Foundational Political Problem.

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Abstract : The political problem besetting all nations, tribes, and families, as illuminated by Plato in the fifth book of his Republic, is the problem of our own private body with its own particular pleasures and pains. This problem we might label the “irrational love of one’s own.” The reasonable philosopher loves reality just because it is, but we love things only if we can convince ourselves that they are “ours” or an imaginative extension of “ours.” The resulting problem, that can only be medicated, but not cured, is that the “body private,” whether our own, our family, tribe, or nation, always lies underneath any level of “body politic” and threatens the bloodshed and disintegration of civil war. This is also the political problem the Bible deals with throughout, beginning with Adam and Eve’s fall from rationally shareable bodies (“the two were one flesh”) into unshareable bodies whose now shameful “privacy” must be hid behind a bloody rather than bloodless veil. The blood is the sign of always threatening civil war, whether murder between brothers, feuds within tribes, or later, war between nations. The scarlet thread of blood tying the entire Bible together, Old and New Testament, reminds us that however far our loves are pushed out beyond our private body to family, tribe or nation, they remain irrational because unshareable. Only by loving the creator God who first loved us, can we rationally love anything of our own, but it must be loved as gift rather than as a possession. Such a love renders all bodies and nations truly shareable, and achieving this shareability is the paradoxical plot of the Bible, wherein the Word becomes flesh in a particular body amidst a particular people and nation. Yet even with His own nation and His own Son, this Lord is not “partial” and demands justice towards widows, orphans, and sojourners, because the irrational love of only our own can become rational solely through the resurrection of this particular body, king of this particular nation and these particular people. His body, along with all other bodies, can thus now retain their particular wounds and history, while yet remaining shareable. Likewise, all nations will share in the nation of Israel, in the same way all distinct languages will share an understanding through the inner rational word that we see illustrated in Pentecost. Without the resurrection, however, this shareability of bodies and nations remains merely a useful fiction, as Plato saw, and the equally fictitious “rationality” of some sort of deductive universalism will not go away. Reading Scripture in terms of Plato’s “irrational love of one’s own” therefore raises questions for both a Protestant and Catholic understanding of nations, questions that neither can answer adequately without this philosophical and exegetical attention.

Keywords : body private, nations, shareability, body politic

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