

Christians and the Church

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There is no shortage of figural language for the church. Much of it is biblical, and still more is woven into the fabric of the church's hymnody and prayer. The church is, according to her own account, wife and mother, city and garden, kingdom and diaspora, people and body, sign and sacrament, warrior and peacemaker, seed and harvest, pure and defiled, virgin and whore, lover and taskmistress, lamb, eagle, hen, and doe. Feminine figures predominate, in part because of the grammatical gender of the ordinary Greek and Latin words for her, and in part because Christian talk about the church has always shown a deep elective affinity for talk about the archetypically female functions of nurturing, protecting, birth-giving, and educating. This is the primary language of Christians about the church: it is poetic, associative, suggestive of endless meanings that cannot be reduced to precise technical formulations without significant loss.

Such reduction is what ecclesiologists, those who theorize about the church, attempt. Their works are many, some of them profound and of great use to ecclesiologists-in-training, of which the church always needs some; but they are too often predicated upon the assumption that the florid proliferation of Christian figural talk about the church needs to be knocked into conceptual shape, pruned, trimmed, and cultivated. For some purposes, no doubt, this is true. This essay, however, attempts no such thing. It is not ecclesiology, and its purpose is not to survey or to

provide waymarkers through that vast and heavily-tracked field. It is, instead, an attempt to state a particular understanding (and thereby to prompt other, fuller understandings) of what the primary Christian figures for the church suggest about her significance for the moral life of Christians.

Figure -- metaphor, synecdoche, metonymy, and so on -- is language's dreamwork, as the philosopher Donald Davidson (1991) elegantly puts it. Such linguistic forms work as do dreams, reveries, and soulful gazes into the beloved's eyes, which is to say by provoking a shift of the gaze through, behind, and beyond what is immediately before the eyes toward a deeper noticing. Linguistic figures provide intimations that exceed what is apparent on their surface. In this they are like icons, which also reconfigure and redirect the gaze (see Marion 2001). Linguistic figures understood in this way cannot be paraphrased or translated without remainder into non-figural language. They are provocations whose results, in action and thought, cannot be fully predicted, in much the same way that (as Dante tells us in Inferno v.127-142) Paolo and Francesca's reading provoked, unpredictably, the look, the kiss, and the lovemaking. What figural language will provoke cannot, then, easily be foretold from the meanings of the words in which the figure is given. Analysis of linguistic figures proceeds best by paying attention to the effects that the use of particular figures has (or might have) upon those who use them.

Christians are of course not formed morally only or even principally by the language they use. They are formed morally by the practices they perform, among which the deep and repeated use of figural language is only one. Nonetheless, thought (non-paraphrastic thought, of course) about what Christian figural language for the church might provoke and intimate by way of understanding the church as a theater of moral formation may itself be an instrument of importance in furthering and deepening the conformation of Christ's body to Christ. Such thought is what I hope to offer in this essay. If the figure is language's dreamwork, this essay offers

an interpretation of dreams whose goal is to help those who dream the ecclesial dream to do so more fully, and perhaps also more interestingly. The interpretation of dreams here offered is prescriptive rather than descriptive. That is, it commends what should be rather than describes what is. The picture here given of the significance of the church for the moral formation of Christians will be only partly and fitfully evident in the formation of actual Christians by actual churches. It may serve, perhaps, as a set of regulative ideas and images.

The essay is written under the assumption that properly and fully Christian thought about any topic whatsoever should begin by consulting and deploying the primary language of the tradition as its first and last tool of thought. There are, of course, circumscribed and particular topics for which there is no relevant primary language: these include most questions answerable by empirical investigation (what are the syntactical principles of Sanskrit?), and most in areas of theory of no direct and explicit interest to the tradition (is it true that every even number greater than two can be expressed as the sum of two primes?). In such cases there will be no primary Christian language to consult and deploy. But our question -- What is the significance of the church for the moral formation of Christians? -- is very much not of this sort. Treatment of it by Christians must therefore begin in the way I've suggested. Any other mode of approach will be sub-Christian.

I begin then with the body.

Bodies

'Body' is a fundamental figure for the church. To say that the church is Christ's body is deeply scriptural, and the elaboration of this claim lies at the heart of Christian theological thought. The grammar of this claim is a complex one, however, as is the syntax of ordinary, non-Christian and non-theological talk about bodies. The complexity of the latter is in large part an offshoot of the complexity of the former,

and certainly Christian thought about bodies and the grammar of the term 'body' must begin with thought about Christ's body.

Christ's body is, first, the most real of all bodies: it belongs to the second person of the Holy Trinity, and the difficulty of stating precisely the nature of the relation (identity? possession? property?) between Christ's body and Christ is mirrored exactly by the difficulty of stating exactly the relation between my body and me or your body and you. The fundamental syntax of Christian talk about Christ's body oscillates between two poles: one pole is the eucharist, on which more below; the other is the church, of direct concern here. The two poles are always related, of course: when the church as Christ's body celebrates the eucharist it eats what it is, as Augustine's frequently-repeated formula has it. Among other bodies, it is this one that for Christians is of primary and unsurpassable significance, this one in terms of which all other bodies must be thought about and understood.

This primary point of reference for body-talk provides at least the following: all bodies are social as well as individual, intimately and essentially related to and constituted by the bodies of others as well as being (sometimes) a particular person's embodiment. The social constitution of Christ's body is given first by the triune nature of God, within which trinity he is a person identified by his relations to other persons. It is also given by the fact that Christ's body is eaten by, and thus constitutes as a body (his own body), a multitude of particular human bodies -- perhaps one and a half billion of them at the beginning of the second millennium after Christ's incarnation. But it provides more than this: it gives also the beginnings of a criterion for distinguishing between imaginary and real bodies.

If, as is axiomatic for Christian thought, the supremely real body is Christ's, the reality that any other body has must be derivative from and dependent upon the reality of his. It is then theoretically (and to some degree actually) possible to assess the degree of reality that particular bodies have by assessing the degree to which

they participate in Christ's body. Individual bodies of flesh, mine and yours, all have reality in virtue of the fact that they are creatures; and since creation is a work of the triune God, not of any one of the three persons alone (I assume here an approximately Augustinian trinitarianism, according to which the only predicates proper to just one of the divine persons are those that designate that person's relations to one or both among the other two), fleshly reality, like every other reality, is given by participation in the trinity. But since the ordinary first connotation of body-talk for Christians is Christ's body, and since Jesus Christ is embodied in ways that the other divine persons are not (the risen Christ continues to be embodied), it is reasonable to say (though there are complications here) that all human fleshly bodies participate in the divine trinity through the act of creation under the mode of participation in Christ's fleshly body. This is a specification of what it means to say that human physical bodies are creatures. But some fleshly bodies participate in Christ's fleshly body more fully by being, publicly, members of Christ's own social body by baptism, and (what follows upon such public membership) by becoming conformed to him through the consumption of his fleshly body in the eucharist. These individual fleshly bodies have moved closer to their final perfection, a perfection not to be fully realised until the eschaton, because of their membership in the church.

If, as I think, moral realism of a teleological sort is the properly Christian way to think about ethics (also, of course, the truth; this follows from its being properly Christian), then it follows at once that the increasing conformity of the individual Christian's fleshly body to Christ's body that is given by membership in the church has direct moral relevance. Being and goodness are convertible transcendentals, as the tradition at least from Augustine to Aquinas has argued. On this view, to be more is to be better. Incorporation into Christ's body already makes the one so incorporated morally better than she would otherwise have been just because (and

in the same sense as) she is more than she would otherwise have been. Fleshly membership in Christ's body is, then, morally transformative. This is an abstract, theoretical understanding; flesh will be put on its bones in what follows.

There are social bodies as well as individual, fleshly bodies. Another name for these social bodies is 'communities,' groups of individual persons ordered to some end. A half-understood remnant of Christian talk about communities as bodies is to hand in the English-speaker's ease with such phrases as 'the body politic' and 'the student body.' These modes of expression and understanding have pagan roots as well as Christian ones, but their genius is Christian. For Christians, the church, because it is Christ's body, is the paradigm of community: all others are understood to be such in terms of this paradigm, and assessed as to their goodness in terms of their approximation to it. Once again, this mode of approach provides criteria for distinguishing between real and imaginary social bodies or communities, and for commending or requiring degrees of loyalty to (and so also formation by) particular communities based upon such a distinction.

The picture sketched so far suggests that the church is the primary social body for Christians, and is so because its reality exceeds that of any other. This is because the church is brought into being by the self-emptying of God into its founding events. These events include not only the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ (though these are crucial); they comprise also the call and covenanting of the Jewish people, from which it follows, though not without a chain of reasoning too long and involved to be given here, that the social body of the Jewish people is the only one whose reality can approach that of the church (there are difficulties for Christian thought about the social body of Islam, the ummah; but these can't be explored here). The Jewish people and the Christian church are, then, the pre-eminently real social bodies, constituted by election,

covenant, and sacrament; their reality is directly and distinctively given and guaranteed by God.

Also real, though not in the same way nor to the same extent, are the social bodies brought into being by sex (though not only by sex). These are families, and their reality is given by the procreative acts that most clearly distinguish them from other social bodies. Heterosexual partners are made into a social body by marriage, the distinctive feature of which is potentially procreative sex; and their offspring are made into a social body with their parents and with one another by blood (as older generations would have said) or by genetic inheritance (as we would say). These -- the church and the family -- are the two real communities, the two real social bodies. The reality of both is given by God, the one by graceful election and the other by graceful creation.

Every other community -- the nation, the city, the village, the sports team, the professional association, the wrecking crew -- lacks the reality of church and family. None is rooted in God's elective choice and sacramental gift, as is the church; and none is constituted by blood and sex, as is the family. The reality they do have (and of course they are not entirely unreal) is imaginary. Those who belong to them and order their lives or parts of their lives by that membership must imagine their worth and meaning, must imagine that about them which constitutes them as communities. These acts of imagination, together with the narratives that accompany them and give them shape, provide the only reality such communities have: they are not founded and given by God, and blood does not flow through their veins. What is imagined can of course assume the appearance of what is not, and can become the principal shaping force of a life. The nation is the best example in recent centuries of the power an imagined body can come to exercise over those who have imagined it; the abundant literature provoked by Benedict Anderson's (1991) study of the nation precisely as an imagined community provides a plethora

of examples of how the imagination's power can be harnessed to this end. Church and nation are alike in requiring acts of imagination to elaborate the narratives that depict them and order the thoughts of those who inhabit them. They differ in what those imagined narratives respond to: in the case of the church to God's gift; in the case of the nation, only to more of the same: imagination all the way down.

Real bodies require a degree and depth of loyalty and commitment not properly given to imaginary bodies. This means that Christians' loyalty to all social bodies other than church and family is secondary to and derived from their loyalty to church and family (the family is treated elsewhere in this volume). And this in turn means that the church is, for Christians, the primary theater of moral formation and transformation. In it, the individual's body of flesh is written upon by corporate worship, made a member of the church as social body by liturgical habituation. The fundamental moral fact about a Christian, then, is that she has become habituated to non-idolatrous worship of the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Mary, and the saints. This makes her into the kind of person whose fleshly body is no longer hers but Christ's, which in turn means that she is an icon of God's presence both to the world's body that lies outside and around the church's body, and to the very body of the church. Christ's real corporate body writes itself upon the individual Christian's real body: it makes her holy.

This is to say that the Christian is a saint, a hagios or sanctus, just because she is a member of Christ's body, the body of those who worship God in the name of Jesus Christ. This is good Pauline usage, of course: the first letter to the Corinthians is addressed "to the church of God in Corinth, to those who have been made holy in Christ Jesus, who are called to be holy [a phrase, klêtois hagiois, that could just as well be rendered 'to those called holy'] along with all those everywhere who invoke the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Holiness is, for Christians, the fundamental moral category because it denotes conformity to God, becoming the kind of person

who is transparent to God's will because her body has been conformed to God's. This is given by incorporation into the supremely real and (therefore) supremely holy body, and by habituation to the practices, corporate and individual, of that body.

In considering the figure of the body it is important to emphasize, perhaps against the inclinations of our time, that the moral formation that is sanctification proceeds principally by embodied habituation and not by any activity of the intellect. Pascal, as so often, saw this with great clarity:

You want to arrive at faith and you don't know the way; you want to be cured of lack of faith and you ask the remedy: learn of those who've been bound like you and who now bet everything they have; these are the people who know the way you'd like to follow, who've been cured of the illness of which you want to be cured. Do the kind of thing they began with, which is doing everything as if they believed, taking the holy water, having masses said, and so on. Precisely this will bring you naturally to belief and will make you like a beast.

(translated from Kaplan 1982:143)

On this view, in order to arrive at faith the only human action necessary is to learn from those who have it, and to learn by doing what they do, performing the practices they perform. People who have faith began by performing liturgically as if they believed in what they were doing, and thereby came to believe. The examples of liturgical performance Pascal provides -- taking holy water, having masses said -- may not be equally to the taste of all Christians; but he means them as only a sample, to be expanded ad libitum. But it is the last sentence of the quoted extract that is most striking and most importantly correct: "Precisely this [performing what those who have faith perform] will bring you naturally (naturellement, in the sense of

automatically, inevitably) to belief and will make you like a beast." The force of the last verb abêtir is often muted in English renderings of this section of the Pensées: it really does mean, for Pascal, that our liturgical actions should be like the habituated automatism of animals and should not be a demand or result of reason. He has, just before the passage I've quoted, been extremely critical of the demands of reason for proof and understanding. And this is just right: the moral formation (which is also sanctification) of the body by what liturgical action writes on the body, proceeds without any necessary connection to ratiocination, and will often be hindered by it.

This is not to say that liturgical action will inevitably bring those who perform it to holiness (or even belief); if Pascal means this (and I don't think he does: the argumentative context of the extract quoted suggests otherwise) he is wrong. It is to say that liturgical performance is among the conditions necessary for holiness, though not a condition sufficient for it. If it were the latter, worship would become theurgy. Pascal's worry is not about theurgy but about an excessive emphasis on understanding, rationality, and motivation. These he thinks, rightly, much less important for sanctification than liturgical performance.

How then does the body become morally habituated by performing the actions proper to Christ's body? A full account of that would be impossibly long. It would require above all analysis of what the worshipper becomes habituated to when she becomes habituated to the liturgy, which is to say to the worship undertaken by Christ's body. Suggestive comments are all that's possible on that large subject.

The Sunday assembly of Christians has a single overarching purpose: to adore God. Adoration (worship, confession, praise -- the lexicon is large and multifaceted), some Christians have thought, is the fundamental purpose of every Christian act in every sphere of life. Augustine, for example, in a comment on Psalm 99:5, claims that adoration is not only sufficient for the avoidance of sin, but also necessary for it: non solum non peccemus adorando, sed peccemus non adorando

(Migne, vol.37, col.1264). Whether or not this is true (my own inclination is to say that it is), it is certainly the case that adoration is the distinctive feature of what Christians do at their assemblies. This corporate adoration is what defines Christ's social body as such: it is a body that adores, and the members of that body have their moral bodies written upon by adoration.

Adoration as the church practices it in its Sunday assemblies (and not only in them; but they will here have to serve as the archetype of what the church does) is a complex activity. It typically comprises four modes of adoration, present to differing degrees and with different understandings in different Christian communities, but typically all present. Each of these modes of adoration writes something on the worshipper's moral body, thus conforming her more closely to the body of which she is, in her fleshly body, a member. What is written gets progressively more deeply incised by repetition, rather as the fleshly bodies of spouses are deeply written upon -- which is to say morally formed -- by repeated lovemaking over the years.

The first mode of adoration is confession. By it, the Christian acknowledges her sinfulness and unworthiness to receive God's blessings; she does this by claiming responsibility for that in her which is ontological and moral lack rather than fullness. A scriptural focus of a peculiarly intense kind for this mode of adoration is 1 Timothy 1:15, in which Paul (or whoever wrote the letter) wrote that it is a truth worthy to be believed that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners ὁν πρώτος εἰμι ἐγὼ, "among whom I am the first." To confess oneself the greatest of sinners is a Christian reflex action, an embodied habit (one might kneel, strike one's breast, bow one's head) given voice, and a habit that at once establishes a moral relation between the worshipper and God, as well as between the worshipper and all others - - all others within and outside the assembly. It is a moral relation that dissolves self-righteousness into humility and thereby checks the tendency assertively to grasp and

display one's virtues and rights. Such habituation ramifies rapidly into particular modes of presence to and action in church and world.

The second mode of adoration is praise, performed in the assembly with psalms and hymns. Praise is explicit acknowledgment of, dependence upon, and participation in the giver of all gifts, including the gift of the capacity to praise. It is a performance that recognizes and acknowledges the condition of its own possibility, and in so doing forms the one who does it into someone whose mode of being in the world is one of responsive gratitude. As the worshipper's body is increasingly conformed to this mode of being, she becomes one who takes no credit for what is good, but who celebrates it. This is a mode of being complementary to that formed by confession: responsibility for lack entails praise for gift, and each is framed by awareness of the saturated excess of what is given (for a phenomenological explication of this language see Marion 1997:251-342) and the echoing nullity of what is lacking. These responses of confession and praise, when deeply written upon the worshipper's body, order his actions and attitudes as much without as within the assembly's worship. Praise for gift and confession of lack inform, for example, the worshipper's moral interactions with human others, whether or not they are explicitly members of Christ's body.

The third mode of adoration is listening. Within the assembly's corporate worship the principal forms of this are attentive hearing of scripture and of its exegesis and application in sermon or homily. This attitude embodies and represents the need for moral formation and inspiration by instruction; what the worshipper needs to know and become cannot be had by introspection, by merely social formation, or by the use of reason to discern and act upon duty. It is not that these modes of learning and formation are useless or bad; it is rather that in order to have the use and goodness they ought to have, they must be framed and preceded by attentive hearing of the word that is given. The content of what is heard, and the

particulars of the formation produced by hearing it, cannot be pursued here, and are in any case profoundly varied. More important for the purposes of this essay is that attentive hearing is inextricable from confession and praise: confession of one's own lack implies the necessity of instruction *ex auditu*, and impels the one who confesses to become a hearer; and praise for gift is the natural and proper response to the particular gift of the word heard. And as with confession and praise, the embodied attitude of attentive listening incises the worshipper's body with a habit that informs her actions and relations outside the assembly. She becomes, against the grain, less prone to garrulous self-assertion and more prone to attention to what others say and do. Silence, over time, becomes more attractive than speech.

The fourth mode of adoration is both more controversial among Christians and more difficult to expound than the other three. It is incorporation-by-eating (or: consuming) that to which the other three modes of adoration are responsive. Christians confess lack to the triune God; they praise the triune God for his excessive gift; they attentively listen to words given by the triune God; and they incorporate (and are incorporated by) that self-same God by eating his body and drinking his blood. Doing this is, some Christians think, the most intimate and fullest expression of adoration possible for the corporate body and its individual members; it may be, to return to the Augustinian tag already mentioned, aphoristically summarized by saying that when Christians do it, they eat what they are. Its intimacy is indicated by one of its names: communion; that it is a mode of adoration is indicated by another: eucharist. How is incorporation-by-eating to be understood as a moral formation of the body? This too is a vast subject, full address to which would require entrance into some deeply disputed metaphysical questions. If, as the dominant tradition of Christian thought from the fourth century to the sixteenth asserts, the Christian's fleshly body has been made (by baptism) into an explicitly participatory member of the supremely real body, which is Christ's, then a fuller conformity to that body can

be described as an increase in the reality of what is thus conformed. And, if being and goodness are convertible, an increase in reality is also (equivalently) an increase in moral goodness. This way of thinking explains, conceptually, how incorporation-by-eating can be an instrument of moral transformation. It does not explain, substantively, what that transformation is like. All that can be said here is that the principal substantive aspect of that transformation is the formation of the communicant's body as one who is lovingly invited and then lovingly accepted by the God to whom he confesses, praises, and listens. Repeatedly hearing and responding to God's graceful and winsomely cajoling invitation to eat what you are in spite of your unworthiness will, among many other things, transform your body in the direction of becoming one who invites others as he is invited.

So much, inadequately, for attention to what 'body' as ecclesial figure provokes by way of thought about the church. Most immediately, it provokes theologians to think about the liturgy, the corporate worship of Christ's body, as of primary importance in the church's moral formation. The spectacle of Christian worship, when participated in rather than observed, is morally transformative in opposition to the transformations wrought by secular spectacles such as sport, the liturgies of war, or the liturgies of money. Both Christian moral theology and Christian formation should have the liturgy as their point of first worship, and there is no better focus for thought about it than thought about the church under the figure of body.

But 'body' is not the only ecclesial figure that properly provokes thought about the moral formation of Christians by the church. There is also the city, and to that I now turn.

Cities

Calling the church a city has almost as good a scriptural and traditional pedigree as calling it a body. But this figure is more often questioned, rejected, transfigured, and erased by Christians than is that of the body, as Graham Ward's (2000) study of cities in the Christian imaginary and in late-modern actuality shows. Cities are ambiguous and problematic in Christian thought in ways that bodies are not: there is no credal affirmation of nor any prayer for the resurrection of an earthly city. It is different with bodies. Whence the difficulty with cities?

Cities have walls, defended by armies: they are the authorized users of violence within their boundaries. Cities demand loyalty of their citizens, and in return dispense the largesse of protection, education, and (thus) identity: they issue passports, to tell you who you are and to guarantee safe-conduct beyond the defended walls. Cities have laws and norms of conduct, the former enforced by punishment's violent sanction and the latter by ostracism's cold exclusion. Cities tend always to seek extension of authority both within and without their walls: authority within the walls is expanded by the (often violent) suppression of rival claimants to allegiance; and extension without the walls is pursued ordinarily by conquest and colonial expansion. Cities are places of civilization, without which, their defenders tend to think, there is only barbarism, the barbarism of those who do not speak Greek -- and, therefore, Latin, and its European successor-languages as bearers of the only culture that counts. And, of course, cities are places of indulgence and luxury, in which the virtues of civilization tend to be coupled with an endlessly imaginative multiplication of the possibilities of vice: in them, God's voice is obscured and the illusion that we are self-sustaining fostered. That is why they must often be abandoned for the deserts and the mountains, in which God's voice may be heard more clearly.

Four cities, actual and symbolic, have shaped the Christian imagination.

The first is Jerusalem, in whose earthly form the Temple was built and twice destroyed, whose streets Jesus walked and lamented, and outside whose walls he was killed. Thinking about Jerusalem in its heavenly form became for Christians, at least from the Book of Revelation onward, among the principal ways of thinking about heaven, and of differentiating their ecclesial city from other earthly cities -- including, often with distressing results, the continuing earthly city that is the community of the Jewish people. Among cities, the symbolic associations of Jerusalem are most closely connected with thought about what the church will become as she is finally purified before God at the end of all things.

The second city is Babylon, Jerusalem's antitype, a place of linguistic and conceptual confusion (the Hebrew word rendered 'Babel' in most English versions of Genesis 3:9 is the same as the Hebrew word for Babylon), of exile, of mourning, and of the corruptions and distractions of luxury and imaginative viciousness. A splendid visual representation of this aspect of Babylon's symbolism can be seen in the Babylon segment of D. W. Griffith's 1916 movie, 'Intolerance'. Christian thought about the church as city proceeds in significant part by imagining the church as the anti-Babylon, and there is, in general, no deeper accusation of perverse and dangerous otherness than the epithet 'Babylonian'.

The third city is Athens, in whose gift lies philosophy, literature, theater, and all the gifts of thought and culture. This city, too, is typically imagined as alien to the church, but not, as is the case with Babylon, as inevitably hostile. It may be classified by extremists like Tertullian as simply alien to the church-as-Jerusalem; and Jerome can tell, in his twenty-second letter, of a vow (rapidly broken) to stop reading Cicero and his like, whom he thought of as the literary representatives of the Athenian heritage, and whose prose he took to be alluringly distractive from the plain truths of scripture. But more often, Athens has been for the Christian imaginary a city to be respectfully borrowed from (or, sometimes, pillaged) with the intention of

ornamenting more gorgeously the walls of the ecclesial city. In commendation of such borrowing Augustine the bishop fondly recalls his inspiration by Cicero's Hortensius and the shaping of his mind by Aristotle's categories; Aquinas spends a good portion of his life and intellectual energy reading and commenting upon the Aristotelean corpus; and Jonathan Edwards draws gratefully (though with mixed results) upon John Locke's philosophical psychology.

The fourth city is Rome. Athens' inheritor and despoiler, Rome is the secular city that killed Jesus and shed the blood of the martyrs. But it is also the city of Peter and of the Roman Church, which for all Christians, Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox, holds a special symbolic place. The Roman Church in its visible institutional form is never imagined as simply identical with the church as such, not even by conservative Catholic ecclesiologists; much less can it be thought of as identical with what the church will become. But among all earthly institutions and all earthly cities, the city of Rome and the church of Rome remain, for Christians, those in terms of which identity must be construed. Such construal may be negative, as when the pope or the Roman Church is called the whore of Babylon, and particular Christian practices accepted or rejected according to the degree to which they are 'Romish'; or it may be expropriative, as when successive cities -- Constantinople, Moscow -- take to themselves the name of the new (the second or the third or the fourth) Rome (on this see Brague 2002, especially chapter one; the whole book is essential reading for the relations between the idea of Rome and the idea of Europe, a set of relations which is itself a subset of the Christian imaginary of cities). But the metaphorical and actual city of Rome remains an utterly central point of reference for imaginations of the church.

The figures woven around all of these cities are for the Christian imaginary ambiguous and subject to unweaving almost as soon as woven. The figure of the city, in general or in any of the four particular forms mentioned, is so fraught with

difficulty that it can never be used as positively for the church as has been the figure of the body. The church-as-city is an unavoidable figure for Christians, nevertheless, at least since Augustine's magisterial and weighty play with it in City of God; but the ambiguities with which it is instinct in Christian thought mean that when the church is depicted as a city, and when Christians are formed (as they are) by thinking of themselves as citizens of God's city here below, this thought and this formation occur most often in the mode of contrast and erasure. The church is a city very unlike actual earthly cities; and so citizenship in it must be understood largely by contrast with and rejection of the requirements of earthly citizenship. The church is a counter-city, a city-under-erasure, and that this is the dominant grammar of Christian thought about the church as city means that Christians are formed by their citizenship in the church into some very particular relations with actual earthly cities. This is, nonetheless, a properly moral formation, for it constitutes (or should: recall that I here write not in the indicative but rather in the ideal mood) Christians as agents of a particular kind vis-à-vis earthly cities. I'll conclude this essay by considering two central aspects of this moral formation.

The first is erasure of primary loyalty to any earthly city. Christians are as a matter of course citizens of earthly cities: of nations, of towns, of villages, and of all manner of other political communities from trades unions to lobbying groups. They do and should exercise full citizenship in these polities. But such citizenship is always a matter of secondary loyalty and secondary interest, always questioned and partly erased by the primary loyalty and primary interest, which is citizenship in the church. This relegation of all non-ecclesial citizenships to a level of secondary importance is grounded first of all upon the distinction already made between imagined and real communities. Non-ecclesial polities are all given the reality they have by an act of the imagination, whereas the church, like the family, has reality independently of anyone's imaginations. It follows immediately that someone who has been formed in

such a way as to think this -- and it is certainly the direction in which moral formation in and by the church tends -- will understand, whether explicitly or not, the duties of earthly citizenship as insignificant when contrasted with the gifts of ecclesial citizenship. The radical version of this erasure is evident in martyrdom. Martyrs witness to the reconfiguration of their political loyalties with their blood, and they do so joyfully. A useful index of the extent to which the church has failed to form its citizens in this attitude is the extent to which martyrdom seems unattractive to them. It should serve as a governing paradigm of erasure of primary loyalty to any polity but that of the church; and at various times and places it has done so.

Formation in primary loyalty to the ecclesiastical polity is signalled pre-eminently in baptism. Baptism is death: it drowns the old Adam (and Eve) in its waters, so that the reborn Christian, now named and sealed as such, may emerge with a new set of loyalties established even if not yet understood. And baptism is also renunciation: the catechumen renounces, as the ancient triple formula has it, allegiance to world, flesh, and devil, a renunciation marked, once, as a kind of exorcism by a triple exsufflation -- outblowing -- of these false allegiances by the one performing the baptism. These loyalties are replaced with loyalty to Christ and the church as Christ's city on earth, and this is so even if the replacement is not yet understood by the newly-baptised. Baptism is, then, among other things an instrument used by the church for the moral formation of Christians in their relations to non-human cities. It kills that allegiance as primary, and then permits it to live in a secondary way, to be abandoned whenever it contradicts or etiolates the primary loyalty to the church's polity.

This hierarchical ordering of political allegiances is also an ordering of desires, and to describe it in that way makes even more obvious that it is an instance of moral formation. Desire has weight: it moves the one who desires toward what is desired, often with what seems like an irresistible impetus. The weight of

citizenship's desires is heavy upon us; it masters us easily, and it is plastic: it can be shaped, directed, and ordered. Imagined political communities -- the nation, the earthly city -- deploy a massive technology in order precisely to direct political desire toward themselves. Mayday parades in the old Soviet Empire, July 4th festivals in the United States, recitations of the pledge of allegiance in American public schools, flag-waving greetings to the monarch as she makes her way through the streets of London to open a new session of the House of Commons -- all these are instances of the technology of desire at work. The church's moral formation of its citizens toward erasure of primary loyalty to any polity but itself is a counter-technology of desire. It begins with baptism, proceeds through the moral formation provided by worship (sketched above), and is always eschatological in orientation, which is to say that it turns its citizens away from exhaustive engagement in imagined polities by ordering their political desire toward a polity not yet fully known, a polity most fully foreshadowed by the church but evident even there only in chiaroscuro. The political formation of Christians by the church in these ways not only erases primary loyalty to imagined communities, but also turns its citizens' gaze beyond itself toward the New Jerusalem, which is the only finally and fully real polis.

This aspect of the moral formation of Christians by the church makes them into unusual political agents. They act politically, often with passion and vigor. But they tend to act with a deep sense of the inevitable failure of their actions. Since imagined political communities are by definition not perfectible, a point constantly underlined by the church's moral formation of her citizens, action without this sense would be an idolatrous error. There is, so Christians tend to think, no finally successful political solution to systemic injustice, to violence inflicted upon the weak, to the corruptions of wealth and power, and to all the other difficulties to which earthly cities are always subject. Political action in the earthly city is therefore more likely to be understood by Christians as an attempt to alleviate and reduce

unavoidable horrors than to create a world-order in which such horrors will cease to be. This attitude underlies and explains the second fundamental aspect of the church's formation of its citizens in their relations to earthly cities: training in lament.

Lament is not despair; it is, instead, public evidence of hope. It is the response to violent injustice characteristic of those who see it for what it is, which is an inevitable work of all imaginary polities; who see, too, that it can and must be alleviated, opposed, and challenged; and who understand, regretfully, that all such attempted alleviations and challenges will not fully succeed but must nonetheless be attempted, ever and again. Christian liturgy has lament as one of its dominant tones: I've mentioned confession already, and it is one note in this tone of lament. But more important is the church's use of the Psalms. These are, predominantly, cries of lament. Their cry (like that of Job) is one that combines incomprehension of violent injustice with knowledge that it is violent and is unjust, with hope that there will be a time and a place in which there is no more of it, and with certainty that that time and place is not now and not here. It is a cry that, as Gillian Rose (1992, 1996) showed so precisely and eloquently before her untimely death in 1995, can only be uttered in the broken middle between the delusory dream of a perfectly just earthly city and the desert of despair that abandons hope and rejects the city without remainder. Rose made this argument in the service of a particular construal of Judaism; but this is something that Christians and Jews share, and they share it principally because of the Psalms and their liturgical use.

Formation in the ecclesial city is thus a counter-formation to that given by the earthly city. It is a catechesis of erasure, aporia, and lament. Primary loyalty to imagined communities is erased, and as a result they are given just the kind of allegiance they deserve; the aporetic contradiction between what is hoped for and what is actual is constantly pressed upon the church's citizens, and increasingly deep awareness of this contradiction fosters both political action and lament for its failure.

The former without the latter is an inevitably violent perfectibilism; the latter without the former is a quietist withdrawal. The joining of the two, in a gesture of mourning that becomes the law, is most fully possible for those whose bodies and whose citizenship have been given them by the church.