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Not So Private: A Political Theology of Church and Family

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When I told some close friends I'd be presenting on political theology, they all reacted similarly: "What? What are *you* doing presenting on political theology?" I write on marriage and singleness and adoption, and most recently on technology, topics that many would say have little or no interest for political theology. My friends had a knee-jerk reaction: *how* exactly do marriage and family fit with more familiar political theology topics such as just war and the economy?

They are not alone in that assessment; again and again marriage and family are discussed in opposition to what is seen as the political sphere. My friends' knee-jerk reaction comes, I suggest, from the ways Americans conceive of the family in relation to the nation-state, to their faith, and especially to the ways people want to put barriers between state, church and family.[1] Even in the case of homosexuality and marriage, which has become a large part of contemporary American political discourse, the discussions (as I shall show later) still revolve around thinking of marriage and family in contradistinction to nation-states.[2] I focus here on the idea of government as a public space *vis a*

[1] For example, corporate interests tend to counter government laws with an insinuation that the government is acting as a nanny state if and when it tries to impose rules about family leaves, similar to the ways that individuals protest against government encroachment on their "individual" rights. I note that the recent controversy about New York City's law banning the sale of large-size sodas involved discussions of encroachment against "individual" rights on the part of individual people, but that it tended to be corporations who were leading the charge against this infringement of the individual. See, for example, Joseph Ax, "Judge Blocks New York City Large Soda Ban; Bloomberg Vows Fight," Reuters, March 11, 2013, www.reuters.com/article/2013/03/11/us-sodaban-lawsuit-idUSBRE92A0YR20130311.

[2] I would note here that it need not only be these three entities; I am struck by how little we discuss family

vis church and family as private because these are the three that show up again and again in the way people discuss what is public and private, and how public and private are interrelated.

The words used to describe that relationship are *public* and *private*, words that frequently appear in both secular and Christian conversations about marriage and family. We name "family" and "church" as *private* matters, parts of life that are necessarily held distinctly from *public* matters, as in political life. At the same time, because Christians rightly understand family as a place where people learn discipleship and a place where formation and evangelization happen,[3] we care very much about how to think about families in relation to church and state. There is a relationship between these three entities, American Christians insist, and the work that we need to do is to determine exactly how to properly balance that relationship in order to ensure the best possible marriages and the best possible families.

Yet what I argue in this chapter is that the current conversation, which tries to delineate how family, state and church are public or private, derails Christian discipleship. This is because Jesus Christ upends the very notions of public and private; the risen Christ causes us to realize that not only do we have no common views of what is public and private, but that the very ideas are reconfigured to the point that the public/private distinction is shattered. First, then, I discuss some of the several ways Americans, especially Christians, make use of the words *public* and *private*, showing how this dichotomy is utterly unhelpful for Christians. Then I support my claim by discussing what Jesus' life, as attested by Scripture, shows Christians about family, state, church, public and private. Finally, I suggest that for Christians there can't be "public" and "private" in the ways we have tended to name, that we are called to be the church first, and I conclude with some practical implications of making this claim.

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in relation to the modern corporation, for example, and how often the modern corporation tries to name itself as a private entity much like family and church, though traditionally it too has been named as part of a public sphere. Yet that must be a paper for another time.

[3] In my own Catholic tradition, for example, the church document *Familaris Consortio* states: "in the family the human person is not only brought into being and progressively introduced by means of education into the human community, but by means of the rebirth of baptism and education in the faith the child is also introduced into God's family, which is the Church." John Paul II, *Familaris Consortio: Apostolic Exhortation on the Family* (November 22, 1981), § 15, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio_en.html.

NAVIGATING THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE REALMS

What is meant by the words *public* and *private* depends a great deal on historical context and the changing ways in which we use those words. Language about family and church being part of a private sphere and the government (and sometimes business) being part of a public sphere has a long, changing history. Philosopher Hannah Arendt shows that ancient Greek cultures tried to conceive of a separation between public and private spheres: "the human capacity for political organization is not only different from but stands in direct opposition to that natural association whose center is the home (*oikos*) and the family. The rise of the city-state meant that man received 'besides his private life a sort of second life, his *bios politikos*.'"[4] That is, men were raised in families that supported their subsequent participation in the political life of the city. Well-functioning families meant well-functioning states, but the two were also cordoned off from each other; they were two different ways of life.

In contemporary conversation, Christians sometimes describe the distinction between public and private in this Aristotelian way. Consider this quote from theologian Emil Brunner, who is often cited by Vision Forum and other evangelical groups interested in the well-being of families:

> Every state will learn by experience that it cannot allow the divine order of creation to be infringed with impunity. All political anarchy in the state begins with anarchy in marriage. The state in which adultery and divorce are the order of the day is also ripe for political decay. No house can be built with mouldering stones; no sound body can grow out of diseased cells. If the social basis, marriage, is rotten, the whole community is rotten.[5]

Brunner sees the importance of both careful distinctions and connections between the family and the state: the family, and with it, the church, provides the building blocks for a good state, thus the state has a stake in making sure that families are "sound."[6] In a discussion about gay marriage, Vision Forum

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[4]Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 24.

[5]Quoted by William Einwechter, "The Debate Over Same-Sex Marriage," Vision Forum Ministries, June 21, 2006, www.visionforumministries.org/issues/family/the_debate_over_samesex_marria_1.aspx.

[6]Brunner has a much more carefully developed sense of ecclesiology in relation to family than his most-often-used quotes suggest. See Emil Brunner, *Dogmatics III: The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith and Consummation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), and also *Misunderstanding of the Church* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2002).

author William Einwechter uses Brunner to distinguish between responsibilities of Christian families, of churches and of the "civil sphere":

> But if Christians are really serious about "saving marriage," then let them begin by first making sure that they save their own marriages; let them begin by practicing moral purity and marital faithfulness in the home. . . . The church must also rise up and begin to teach the biblical standards of marriage and divorce, and then enforce those standards by church discipline. In the civil sphere, the call to protect marriage should not be limited to the homosexual issue, but should also include the repeal of "no-fault divorce" and the reconstruction of divorce law to reflect the standards of biblical law.[7]

Einwechter makes a clear distinction between church discipline and participation in the "civil sphere"; the first key is that individual Christians are working on their own marriages first and foremost, which is supported by their churches. This effort then necessarily builds up the public sphere, which should support antidivorce and antiadultery laws that in turn advocate for the private sphere.

The more well-known organization Focus on the Family shows an even more carefully laid barrier between the private family and the public state. "Helping families thrive" is the organization's motto, and topics on their website address specific relationship issues: "how to prepare for marriage," "what it means to be intimate," "money and finances" and "adoption." From the point of view of the site's authors (and their presumption about what readers think), the ways to develop good families are so distinctive from the nation-state that in the site's "Christians in Politics" section, the authors are almost apologetic about asking people to participate in discussions about government. They write:

> Have you ever wondered why Focus on the Family encourages its friends to be involved in the culture around them as part of their faith? How being involved in biblical citizenship is part of living our lives as "salt and light" to the world around us?
>
> Or have you wondered if it's even appropriate or legal for Christian beliefs to help shape our government and policies?[8]

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[7] Einwechter, "The Debate Over Same-Sex Marriage."

[8] Focus on the Family, "Christians in Politics," www.focusonthefamily.com/socialissues/christians-in-politics.aspx (accessed September 20, 2013).

The rhetoric is that the Christian family, supported by churches, is and should be almost entirely distinct from government participation.[9] Indeed, in recent years that distinction has been made even more explicit with the formation of the Family Research Council, Focus on the Family's "political issues" arm. Once again, we appear to have Aristotle's view that we live two separate lives—one the life of the home (private), and the other the life of the city (public).

Yet there is more going on in our rhetoric about what is public and what is private than simply the idea that public and private are separate but support each other. Note, for example, another Vision Forum Ministries author's description of the relationship between the presumed private sphere of religion and the presumed public sphere of the state:

> Federal and state governments, in matters of religion, are forbidden to coerce or prohibit individual choice and action. Within the states, the people are free to decide by constitutional majority the nature and extent of the state's expression of religious belief. This leaves individuals free to make their own choices with respect to religion, but it also secures the right of the people of the states to live under a government that reflects their religious inclination.[10]

While here we do see the idea that the nation-state is responsible for upholding and undergirding the private sphere, in this case specifically religion, we also see the specific reason why there is a connection between public and private: it is the *individual*. On this particular view, the individual's choice of religion is protected by the US Constitution; most scholars would agree to that view. Vision Forum Ministries goes one step further, suggesting that when there are enough individuals in a locality who profess a certain religion, the state should reflect that religious identity because that reflects the col-

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[9]In another section, Focus on the Family suggests: "It's easy to think that 'politics' and 'social issues' are disconnected from your everyday life, or are something that matter only when elections roll around every couple years. . . . Do you know what you'd do if your child's school started teaching material contrary to your beliefs? Would you know how to respond if your child accidentally accessed 'adult material' on a computer while at the public library? These are family issues. But they are also social policy issues." Focus on the Family, "Defending Your Values," www.focusonthefamily.com/socialissues/defending-your-values.aspx (accessed March 15, 2013).

[10]Alan Keyes, "The Rule of Law Must Be Upheld: What the Constitution Really Says About Establishment of Religion," Puritan Rising, February 12, 2012, http://puritanrising.com/2012/02/the-rule-of-law-must-be-upheld-what-the-constitution-really-says-about-establishment-of-religion.

lective will and right of those individuals—which the US government, via the Supreme Court, has tended not to uphold.

What is significant is not so much the articulation (or lack thereof) of the US Constitution but rather the way this quotation displays the role of the individual in maintaining both the public and the private spheres. It is the individual who votes, the individual who is responsible for creating the public sphere alongside other individuals. It is also the individual who chooses his or her participation in the private sphere: chooses his religion, chooses how to maintain her family. Aristotle did not conceive of the individual person in this kind of way; entities like family and state supported the individual, not the other way around, and the individual certainly did not maintain that kind of control (if any) on the public sphere. While we tell a story that suggests good families maintain good governments and vice versa, the underlying story is that good *individuals* maintain good families and good governments.

Focus on the Family also utilizes this emphasis on the individual, and especially the individual's responsibility to maintain both public and private spheres. "Be aware. As parents and taxpayers you have the right—and responsibility—to know what your child is being taught in public school classrooms."[11] The message to be aware and take on individual responsibility is repeated often, in relation to myriad issues from Internet pornography to school choice to homosexuality.[12] Know what is going on; get involved. While the social-activism messages at Focus on the Family's website are often (though not entirely) limited to the realm of public schools and institutions related to raising children, the underlying message is that individuals are the ones with the choices (and the responsibility) for engaging in the public sphere in order to ensure that the state, at all levels, is supporting the kinds of families we want to raise. The acknowledgment of the role of the individual in upholding both public and private spheres puts pressure on individual parents to raise their children to make sound individual choices. In the section on Internet pornography, for example, we see: "Even if you make your own home secure, at some point your children will walk out your door and have to make

[11] Focus on the Family Issue Analysts, "What You Can Do," www.focusonthefamily.com/socialissues/defending-your-values/homosexual-curriculum/what-you-can-do.aspx (accessed March 31, 2013).

[12] For instance, in the section on religious liberties: "Be aware of school policies before inappropriate material gets into classrooms, or your child's hands," www.focusonthefamily.com/socialissues/defending-your-values/religious-liberties/what-you-can-do.aspx (accessed April 3, 2013).

their own decisions. . . . Teach them about healthy sexuality and help prepare them with a plan for what to do if they are exposed to pornography or an online predator." Indeed, for all its focus on the family, the rhetoric focuses much more on the individual parent, who in turn is utterly responsible for his or her own family.

This turn to the individual as the upholder of both public and private spheres showcases how much we Americans conceive of the world in terms of individuals even more than of entities like "public" and "private." Hannah Arendt writes: "The emergence of the social realm, which is neither private nor public, strictly speaking, is a relatively new phenomenon whose origin coincided with the emergence of the modern age and which found its political form in the nation-state."[13] On Arendt's view, the social sphere arises from the emergence of mass culture and consumer capitalism, both of which focus on the production of private, individual desires. The modern nation-state, which has its underpinnings in an Enlightenment age that privileged the individual's ability to make free, rational choices, found a major champion in the work of thinkers such as John Stuart Mill.[14] Mill suggested that the only reason people and states should interfere with individuals was if they were doing something both out of ignorance and that they would almost certainly regret. The nation-state functions to uphold individualism so that, in effect, everything becomes turned inward toward the individual and his or her rights and rationality.

Given the way we tend to discuss both public and private in relation to the individual, it should come as no surprise that our discussions of hotly debated issues like gay marriage focus on individual rights. Any discussion of church, state and family is couched in terms of how to maintain the individual's precarious sense of self in relation to all these entities. Thus, the advocacy group beyondmarriage.org offers the following bullet points for what it hopes to achieve: "Separation of church and state in all matters, including regulation and recognition of relationships, households and families. Freedom from state regulation of our sexual lives and gender choices, identities and expression."[15] Liberal-minded commentator Laurie Shrage argues:

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[13]Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 28.

[14]See John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (n.p.: Dover Thrift Publications, 2002).

[15]"Executive Summary," Beyondmarriage.org.

> The state should not promote marriage among adults as a way to establish parent responsibility or to avoid poverty. The state can pursue these aims less intrusively—by formalizing agreements of child support and custody between both unmarried and married parents, that is, independently of marriage. . . . When these arrangements exist in tension with widely shared public values—like those that subordinate wives and daughters and limit their opportunities—privatizing and deregulating marriage will curtail the government's ability to promote gender equality within families structured by marriage.[16]

Churches and other religious groups are, in her view, the inegalitarian groups she advocates against.

At the same time, conservative commentator Ed Morrissey argues for the privatization of marriage in relation to the individual:

> Imagine if government had no interest in the definition of marriage. Individuals could commit to each other, head to the local priest or rabbi or shaman—or no one at all—and enter into contractual agreements, call their blissful union whatever they felt it should be called and go about the business of their lives. . . . I believe your private relationships are none of my business. And without any government role in the institution, it wouldn't be the business of the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, either.[17]

Such questions are not limited to gay marriage. The hotly debated, recent Health and Human Services mandate entailed similar arguments by people who might call themselves conservatives, who say "Stay out of my bedroom" as they protest a mandate requiring artificial contraception and potentially abortifacient drugs to be covered by nearly all insurance plans. "If you want the church to stay out of your bedroom, then don't ask the church to pay for the consequences of what happens there."[18]

American discourse sharply dichotomizes public and private, liberal and conservative, suggesting that they are far apart and should be kept distinct from each other. Yet at the heart of most language about politics and family is a key similarity: the importance of the individual and his or her choices. For

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[16]Laurie Shrage, "The End of 'Marriage,'" *The New York Times*, November 4, 2012, http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/11/04/the-end-of-marriage.

[17]Ed Morrissey, "Why Is the State Involved in Marriage at All?" Hot Air, August 7, 2012, http://hotair.com/archives/2010/08/07/why-is-the-state-involved-in-marriage-at-all.

[18]Kellie Red, "Our Phony Contraception Debate," *Building Cathedrals*, March 6, 2012, www.patheos.com/blogs/buildingcathedrals/2012/03/our-phony-contraception-debate.

those like Morrissey, individual choice is exercised in choosing one's religion, which then can dictate whether and how marriage functions. For those like Shrage, that individual choice is best exercised by choosing family forms first, and only then choosing religion (if, indeed, one chooses a religion at all). Where they disagree is on the question of where individual rights are infringed: are they chiefly infringed by the government, or are they chiefly infringed by the church?

As Christians, we should worry about this turn to the individual for at least two main reasons. One is the point many theologians and other scholars have named: an Enlightenment focus on individual choices and autonomy turns us away from proclaiming Christ. I am struck again and again by how often Christian arguments (and not just the ones I have mentioned here) about the place of family in relation to the state utilize the idea of the individual's right to choose, rather than grounding their arguments in Christ himself. That is, though the Family Research Council names the family as the "the foundation of civilization, the seedbed of virtue, and the wellspring of society,"[19] in each of the descriptions I have given of family, state and church, it is the individual and his or her choices that become the bedrock of civilization. On the individual's shoulders rest decisions about how to form families, participate in governments and maintain the two spheres.

This view, in turn, leads me to wonder whether we thereby reject God's grace. I have long believed that in our culture we are guilty of making the family into an idol; our rhetoric, both secular and Christian, about families suggests that we think if we can just get the perfect family, we will have a more perfect society.[20] Our views of what counts as a perfect family differ, of course, and we have arguments about that. But while I still think it is true that we make families into idols, I think at root we make families into idols because we have already made individuals into idols. The pressure on individuals to make precisely the right choices that strike precisely the right balance between upholding individual liberty on one hand, and fostering good society by the choices we make on the other, puts each individual in an untenable pressure cooker. It suggests that everything that is wrong about the world

[19]Family Research Council, "FAQs," http://frc.org/faqs (accessed March 15, 2013).

[20]See especially chapter 1 of my book *Water Is Thicker than Blood: An Augustinian Theology of Marriage and Singleness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

stems from the fact that we do not take responsibility for our actions and for knowing about our world enough. This denies the fact that we already know Christ saves and Christ redeems this world in spite of itself. By participating in and focusing on our culture's intense love of the individual and intense inward turning, we simply make our world more the world, more of the same. We imitate the world, rather than being witnesses for Christ, because we are drawn inward by the ways the arguments about private, public, family and state are made. We are not able to see, then, that God's grace is meant to draw us away from ourselves and away from the tired conversations about the place of the individual that never go away in American political discourse.

Considering Scripture

In this next section, therefore, I discuss Scripture and what it might have to say about family and state, public and private, and the nature of the individual. Most theologians discussing marriage begin with the Genesis account of God creating male and female and commanding them to be fruitful and multiply and have dominion over the earth. While this is fruitful, and while the Genesis text remains the underpinning of what I say in this chapter, in view of my concern about the place of Christ in the conversation as I have outlined it so far, I wish instead to think about family and state in relation to the Gospels, Acts and Paul's letters, so my aim here will be a rather broad, sweeping vision presented in the New Testament. What I argue in this section is that the fact of God coming into this world reconfigures a public/private dichotomy and leaves aside a privileging of individual autonomy in favor of bringing in a new creation of public/private, family/state and individual.

So I begin with the birth of Christ, which is significant for the fact that Jesus, Son of God, fully human and fully divine, is born into a *family*. It is especially significant that he has both a human mother and a human father, however much that human father is not his biological father. I say this not to negate the fact that the Father begets the Son or that Mary became with child through the Holy Spirit but to bring up a couple of points about Joseph's relationship with Jesus that are often overlooked but that are also intensely important for rightly seeing public and private, family and state, in Jesus' life.

For example, it is important that in Luke's Gospel we read that around the time of Jesus' birth a census was taken by Caesar Augustus on the basis of

Joseph's family of origin. Joseph was related to David and had to return to Bethlehem for the census to be taken. So that is one way in which Joseph is important—it shows Jesus' connection to King David, the premier king of Israel. But the significance is even greater than this. In a homily on the birth of Christ, second- to third-century Christian Origen imagines someone asking him: "Evangelist, how does this narrative help me? How does it help me to know that the first census of the entire world was made under Caesar Augustus; and that among all these people the name of *Joseph, with Mary who was espoused to him and pregnant,* was included; and that, before the census was finished, Jesus was born?"[21] Origen answers the question:

> To one who looks more carefully, a mystery seems to be conveyed. It is significant that Christ should have been recorded in the census of the whole world. He was registered with the world for the census, and offers the world communion with himself. After this census, he could enroll those from the whole world in the book of the living (Rev. 20.15 and Phil. 4.3) with himself.[22]

Such a view coincides, too, with the importance of Adam being named as part of Jesus' genealogy in Luke's Gospel (Lk 3:38), which identifies Jesus as related to the whole world.

Via his family, especially Joseph his father, Jesus is presented politically to an empire. Being named in the census also names this Son of God as fully human, as really a part of our world. Family and politics are tied together in order to make the incarnation of God present to us. But it is then precisely *because* the Word is made flesh, and becomes part of our world as symbolized in this census, that the Word saves the world. This holy family is imbued with political meaning from the outset. At Jesus' birth, there is little or no distinction made between Jesus' familial beginnings and his political beginnings.

When the wise men visit King Herod and tip him off that there is a baby king somewhere about to usurp the throne, Herod responds with an extraordinary amount of violence directed against all children two and under—but as we know Jesus escapes. Why does he escape? Because he is part of a human family and has a human father, Joseph, who hides Jesus and speeds him to Egypt, and thus participates in God's mystery of the incarnation. Joseph, just

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[21] Origen, Sermon 11.

[22] Ibid., Sermon 11.6.

as much as Mary, knows that the all-powerful and ever-living God has improbably come to earth as a tiny, helpless human infant in need of all the protections a human family can give. Yet it is also precisely because that infant is the all-powerful and ever-living God that Joseph, the poor carpenter, is empowered to make that journey to Egypt. Mary and Joseph thereby protect Jesus not for themselves, not out of horror of losing a child, though surely that is there too—they protect Jesus for all of humanity. Thus family becomes vastly opened. Mary and Joseph, in taking Christ the Son of God as their son, suddenly find that their family is opened, radically. It is made fully public, for Jesus becomes radically all of humanity's.

Jesus underscores this vast openness and public nature of his family in his ministry. Consider the scene toward the beginning of Jesus' ministry when his mother and brothers come to greet him. In Matthew, for example, we hear:

> While he was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers were standing outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, "Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." But to the one who had told him this, Jesus replied, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (Mt 12:46-50)[23]

There is here both a radical acceptance of and a radical rejection of the standard family as determined by culture. While Jesus clearly acknowledges the need for and presence of mothers, brothers, sisters, fathers and so on, he also places a claim on those families in a much larger way. In other words, Jesus accepts the fact of the family and of course embraces marriage and family as instituted by God. Yet at the same time, marriage and family both become absorbed into the new creation, which turns away from an inward focus directed almost solely between the couple and their children, toward outward discipleship to Christ. Family, rightly oriented toward God, cannot be a private entity.

As a further example, note what happens on the cross and the mixture of family and state powers that appear there. In John's Gospel, one of Jesus' last deeds is addressing his beloved disciple and his mother: "When Jesus saw his

[23]All Scripture quotations in this chapter are from the NRSV.

mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home" (Jn 19:26-27). All this happens while Jesus' crucifixion is surrounded by and imbued with political implications. Notions of what constitutes family once again become changed radically. But similarly, Jesus' death on the cross is noted by many as not being the standard kind of political activism people were expecting. This is no Jesus raising up an army and thus no so-called public sphere in the way that we think about it. In a sense, the cross is a uniquely private event: "Into your hands I commend my spirit," Jesus cries (Lk 23:46). It is him alone calling to God. Yet the cross, too, is ultimately and radically made public for all humans, and indeed all of creation. Violence brings in a new kingdom—but it is reverse violence. The one who will be king is killed; it makes all the difference in the world that he is also resurrected. The one who is a son of his mother loses a mother in the act of saving the world. Thus even on the cross, family and politics become enmeshed, and they become both public and private. Just as Jesus' birth entailed that the incarnation of God swallowed the whole of the world, family and politics with it, so in the cross and resurrection the whole of creation is absorbed in that redemption.

What is perhaps most significant of all, though, is that following the resurrection, discussion of family and state doesn't appear in relation to Jesus. The fact of the cross and the resurrection changes everything. Family and state can no longer take on the significances they did preresurrection. Jesus appears to his followers and breaks bread with some unrelated disciples, but the motifs of family and political state do not appear again until after Pentecost, when the church as Christ's body is made known to the world. Now we Christians are meant to see that in the resurrection, family and politics simply don't matter in the ways that we thought they did. The resurrection leaves us both hopeful and perplexed because the world looks entirely different. Part of that difference is exactly found in the institution of the church.

Reinhard Huetter has shown that we tend to understand the church as one entity among many, equivalent to the ways we name business, government and families as entities.[24] As I mentioned above, our language about the

[24] Reinhard Huetter, *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), especially part 4.

church as a private entity matches this kind of language. Yet because of the incarnation, cross and resurrection, the church simply cannot be seen in this way, as one entity among many. Rather it transcends those entities, even as it takes on those entities in a radical way.

The apostles greatly wrestle with the apparent paradox of being part of an institution that is both in the world and radically distinct from it. How can Christians live in Christ faithfully in a world where family and state matter, but yet follow Jesus, who has transformed both family and state? Thus it is no mistake that we see the disciples wrestling with what it means to be married and have families, or what it means to participate in politics. In Acts, for example, we see the disciples complicating standard household rules by living all together as a church household, sharing everything in common (Acts 2:42-47).

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul clearly privileges a single life to marriage—obviously wrestling with what, exactly, it would mean to live as a person in a post-resurrection world and whether family ought to have the same kind of status and importance as it did in a preresurrection world.[25] In his letter to the Ephesians Paul writes: "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God" (Eph 2:19).[26] This is meant to remind Christians that, again, the church is no entity among other entities and that family and state take on a different kind of significance in light of Christ. Christ becomes the site for being both citizen and household, together. Here there is no room for the kind of dichotomies that we saw earlier in the discussion about public and private.

Scripture constantly attests that when our focus is on Jesus, family and state, public and private get overturned. Contemporary liberal conceptions of public as being about citizenship get transcended by this view of the church with members as citizens. As well, contemporary liberal conceptions of private space as being about households get transcended here—for members are members of the household of God.

Conclusions and Implications

What are the implications of all that I have said here? I think what becomes

[25]In ancient Palestine, family mattered because it was the means by which a person belonged to society as a whole and the way in which a person received an identity.

[26]Reinhard Huetter develops this point in *Suffering Divine Things*, p. 163.

clear, first and foremost, is that any attempt to divide family, state and church into spheres called "public" and "private" is more a concession to a modern Enlightenment-based culture than it is a response to Christ. There can be no sense that a proper division between public and private somehow "saves" our society, or more particularly, that it saves the individual. As Christians in the church, our understanding of family necessarily morphs because we have a broader vision of what it means to belong to a family—just as our understanding of the state and politics changes in the ways my colleagues mention in this book.

This does not mean that there is no distinction between state and family and their functions; what it does mean, however, is that Christians should not merely acquiesce to the perceived cultural boundaries of public and private. Instead, what counts as public and private is transgressed and transformed. Indeed, I suggest that rather than of thinking in terms of "public" and "private," Christians ought to think in terms of the virtues of charity and justice and the ways in which the individual, family and state relate to each other in living out these virtues. I do not have time to develop this idea further, but I think justice and charity stand as much more significant than the public/private distinction for the Christian tradition. Charity calls us to love each other as God loves us; justice calls us also to seek right relationships with each other while being able to speak to the world's range of organizations, government among them.

Living with justice and charity instead of public and private means that family cannot be turned in on itself. Indeed, Christians are called radically to embrace other members of the body of Christ as their family. I am reminded of a church in Chicago where, if the pastor discovers that a teenager has become pregnant and been thrown out by her family, he asks his congregation if anyone will take her in and care for her as their own daughter. This is not because they think that out-of-wedlock pregnancy is a good thing or that premarital sex is good—but rather that, regardless, this girl is part of their Christian family. If she is Christ's, then she must be theirs too. And that means a call to radical discipleship.

I am reminded, too, of the example of Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove and his wife, Leah. They run the Rutba House, a community in inner-city Durham, North Carolina, where they, a white couple, live in the poorest, most racially diverse part of Durham, an area known as Walltown. And from the beginning

of their marriage they have opened their house to anyone who needed a bed because that person was Christ, coming to them. Their household is not just themselves and their children; it is a whole host of people who live with them and cook with them and raise their children with them.

That is my suggestion for the so-called private sphere: families become more public, more engaged, more radically involved in treating each other as the body of Christ. In the public sphere, the implication is somewhat different. I am not calling on people to decline to vote, though that may be an outcome. I hope that people will decide that for the sake of Christ they cannot go to war anymore, and I hope that they will decide to find ways to curtail participation in a global capitalist economy. That means more engagement with families and their local neighborhoods and economies.

The most important implication, I think, is that Christians need to learn to live being betwixt and between. Just as Jesus breaking into this world is so radical that the world doesn't quite know what to do with him but is also utterly changed by him, so we Christians who follow him must realize that there is no easy way to be Christians in the world. Following Jesus means that we never neatly fit into a box. I was amused by how, following the 2013 election of Pope Francis, people were immediately trying to label him as "liberal" or "conservative," but he keeps defying those categories. No political party, no human family, will every fully be all that we want it to be—and indeed we should be suspicious when we think it is.

That, then, is why I think I have something to say about political theology as someone who writes on marriage and family. Marriage, family and politics are swallowed up in Jesus' great embrace, as we wait in joyful hope for his coming again to bring us home.