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Love, Justice, and Social Eschatology

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we explore the ontological and theological ground of political institutions in order to then reflect upon the eschatological calling of society. The paper builds on Tillich's ontological insight that love does not simply transcend justice, but that it permeates and drives justice, that justice gives form to love's reunion of the separated. This relation between love and justice is at play in political institutions: these unite human beings under forms of justice that must be transformed ever anew if they are not to lose touch with the dynamic power of love and freeze into increasingly unjust juridicalism. The modern history of Western civilisation bears witness to this ontological tension, and the phenomenon of globalisation is yet another instance of human society's mystical calling. Thus, love heads the dynamic movement that transforms political institutions ever anew. Yet society as a whole must become conscious of its ontology for humanity to truly reach its eschatological potential, and this will require both that theology recovers its ground and that political theory thinks theologically.

My eyes already touch the sunny hill,
going far ahead of the road I have begun.
So we are grasped by what we cannot grasp;
it has its inner light, even from a distance –

and charges us, even if we do not reach it,
into something else, which, hardly sensing it,
we already are; a gesture waves us on
answering our own wave...

but what we feel is the wind in our faces.

– *A Walk*, by Rainer Maria Rilke

In this article we shall attempt to bring together politics and theology in order to shed some light on the nature and evolution of political institutions. More specifically, we shall explore the underlying theological dimension that lies concealed within the historical trajectory of political organisms in their striving for justice. From the theological perspective this striving for justice is not arbitrary but springs from the roots of human nature seeking to fully actualise itself within the totality of the created universe and to fulfil its destiny within the total scheme of nature. In other words, there is an eschatological dimension at the heart of the social and political organisation of human civilisation which moves and shapes its institutions.

On the face of it, there would seem to be no obvious connection between this eschatological dimension and the concerns of modern politics. Indeed, it appears wiser to keep religion and politics separate from one another. It is our contention, however, that, in the very nature of things, all political institutions have an eschatological dimension, that this has little to do with religious convictions, and that it operates even through what are normally regarded as purely secular institutions. From the theological perspective, all things have a religious ground. This ground needs to be approached ontologically. No matter how pragmatic or ideological, any political or ethical position implies a certain stance towards the nature of being, and therefore any thinking about politics or ethics that intends to be comprehensive requires reflection on the ontological roots upon which it is based.

Moreover, the question of the nature of justice, which ultimately tests any political decision or aspiration, transcends any distinction between the religious and secular and belongs equally to both. Injustice is universally regarded as destructive, both collectively and individually, while justice is a quality that is universally regarded as naturally belonging to all human relations. An analysis of the history of political

institutions that fails to address the question of the nature of justice must fail to account for the essential social and civilising forces that are at play in shaping them.

Yet justice itself, although intuitively recognised as a quality that ought to inform all political and institutional action, cannot be adequately grasped without discerning its metaphysical ground, and this in turn takes us into theology, into the question of the ultimate end of justice and the manner in which it seeks that end. This is the central question that will concern us in this article. In pursuing this question we hope to show how the study of politics and theology may be brought together in a mutually illuminating relation, yet which respects the boundaries that distinguish them so that neither is artificially subsumed into the other, even though we propose that there is a natural continuum between them.

As some of the above terminology may have already indicated, we shall be building upon the work of Paul Tillich, especially his short but superb *Love, Power and Justice*.¹ His ontological analysis of these three elements, along with Paul Ricoeur's discussion of the relation of love and justice, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's insights into evolutionary anthropogenesis, will be related specifically to the realm of politics and its institutions. With this approach, we hope to show that the essential purpose of political institutions is to facilitate and preserve the unity of their members under forms of justice that must always be transforming themselves anew through the ontological power of love which ultimately cannot be separated from justice. Where institutions fail to respond to the ontological call of love, they tend to decline into juridicalism or mere bureaucracy, becoming incapable of serving the ends for which they are established. That is, where this occurs, society tends to divide and fragment, thwarting its potential at every level.

By addressing the relations between politics and theology in this way, we shall trace an alignment between the practical call for political justice which institutions

naturally seek, and the eschatological potential of humankind as a whole that is the essential concern of religion. If humankind is to realise its eschatological destiny, then theologians have a responsibility to discern this alignment and affirm their radical alternative to the otherwise limited contemporary approach to politics. To a large extent, the modern retreat of religion into mere private conviction has contributed to this limited approach to politics, and so the challenge is addressed equally to theological and political thinking.

In order to achieve these ends, we shall begin with a discussion of the ontological tension between love and justice, the findings of which will then be applied to political institutions. A reading of recent history in the light of this will follow, and a tentative assessment of humankind's calling will be proposed. This will then prompt some further thoughts on the tension between political institutions and what we shall call social eschatology. We conclude by drawing out the contrast between this social ontology and modern political theory.

I. LOVE AND JUSTICE

In *Love, Power and Justice*, Paul Tillich explains that the relationship between love and justice is frequently confused. He convincingly rejects the widespread view that love somehow adds to justice when justice has reached its limits, that love transcends justice because its work starts where the work of justice ends.ⁱⁱ Such thinking, he laments, often reduces love to an emotion and justice to calculative rigidity – a concrete result of which can be a sentimental and irresponsible escape from the righteous demands of justice.

Ontology, however, offers a way out of such common confusions. It recognizes that love, power and justice 'precede everything that is', an insight that philosophy has formulated again and again, though often in the language of mythology.ⁱⁱⁱ To put it in

more theological and symbolic terms, ‘love, power, and justice are one in the divine ground.’^{iv} They are united (but not identical) in being-itself. The very purpose of Tillich’s book is indeed to explore the relationship – the tensions within their unity – of these three concepts that permeate the structure of being and that are thus present in every encounter of man with his world.^v

On the ontology of love, Tillich asserts that ‘life is being in actuality and love is the moving power of life,’ meaning that ‘being is not actual without the love which drives everything that is towards everything else that is.’^{vi} Since all things have their ground in the primordial unity of being, any separateness must arise from an estrangement from the original unity of being. As ‘the drive towards the unity of the separated’,^{vii} love is a primordial force of being; it permeates the power of being. Put very briefly, being is the conquest of non-being by the reunion of the separated, and thus love is the foundation of being; in its conquest of separation, love affirms the prevalence of being by (metaphorically speaking) taking non-being into itself.^{viii} Thus, as one of the ‘constitutive elements’ of life, love cannot simply be ‘added to an otherwise finished process’ – it must be intimately present within the dynamism of this process.^{ix} Love is not just an addition to justice.

Justice, Tillich then elaborates, gives form to the reunion of the separated. ‘Everything real has a form,’ and ‘actualized being or life unites dynamics with form.’^x Justice, Tillich deduces, ‘[gives] form to the encounter of being with being’.^{xi} It follows that ‘love is the principle of justice;’ that is, ‘the justice of being is the form which is adequate’ to love, to ‘the drive towards the reunion of the separated’.^{xii} Justice is thus driven by love, gives form to it. Love does not come after justice but permeates it. Love and justice are ontologically united. The test of love, therefore, is whether justice is achieved – justice is the sign of love in the relation of being with being. That is to say: if there is justice, then there must be love; if there is love, then there must be justice. Hence

Tillich's concise words: 'Love does not do more than justice demands, but love is the ultimate principle of justice. Love reunites; justice preserves what is to be united. It is the form in which and through which love performs its work.'^{xiii} Love is formless without justice.

So love and justice are not identical, but they are united in the ground of being. They work together towards the actualisation of being, but they remain in tension within their ontological unity. This implies that any attempt to define justice, in other words to freeze it into definite formulae that prejudge a concrete situation, amounts to a move that is untrue to the essence of justice. Any rigid definition of 'justice' immediately loses touch with love – and it thereby immediately loses touch with justice itself. For love continues its conquest of the separated, and thus continuously transforms justice anew. Justice is therefore essentially dynamic (Tillich uses the term 'creative').^{xiv} Hence as soon as justice is fixed, it loses touch with its ontological ground, and, over time, an ageing formulation of justice gradually becomes ever more unjust.

Tillich's reflections are of course firmly rooted in the Western theological tradition. It is therefore not surprising that a theologian and philosopher such as Paul Ricoeur, for instance, follows a line of thinking that is sympathetic to Tillich's. A brief summary of Ricoeur's thoughts in his 'Love and Justice' may help enrich the above analysis.^{xv}

After remarking on the inadequacies of an analytic approach to grasping the nature of love, and on the radical discontinuities between love and justice, Ricoeur offers to build a bridge over their dissimilarity by discussing the seemingly incompatible Christian commandments to love one's enemies and to do to others what you would have them do unto you (the 'golden rule'). The 'hyperethical' commandment to love one's enemies, Ricoeur explains, 'develops a logic of superabundance' that seems at odds with the 'logic of equivalence' and reciprocity embodied in the golden rule – just as it is

embodied in contemporary discourses on justice.^{xvi} Nevertheless, Ricoeur proposes an interpretation that refuses their strict incompatibility:

The commandment of love does not abolish the golden rule but instead reinterprets it in terms of generosity, and thereby makes not just possible but necessary an application of the commandment whereby, owing to its hyperethical status, it does not accede to the ethical sphere except at the price of paradoxical and extreme forms of behaviour, those forms which are in fact recommended in the wake of the new commandment.^{xvii}

Ricoeur then quotes Luke 6:27-30 to list these paradoxical forms of behaviour recommended by the hyperethical commandment to love, such as: doing good to those that hate you, praying for those that abuse you, turning the other cheek, giving your coat to he who takes away your cloak, and so on.

Without the commandment to love, Ricoeur contends, ‘the golden rule would be constantly drawn in the direction of a utilitarian maxim whose formula is *Do ut des*: I give *so that* you will give.’^{xviii} The hyperethical commandment to love does not really criticise the logic of equivalence of the golden rule, but its perverse, profit-driven interpretation.^{xix} Put in broader terms, love is not critical of distributive or reciprocal justice, but of its self-interested interpretation. Without love, justice tends to be drawn into cold calculations based on rigid rules. When love informs justice, however, it drives justice to its limits, where it is enveloped by love’s logic of superabundance and leads to pioneering forms of behaviour. Hence the golden rule is truly just only when informed by love – not when it is interpreted as cold, calculative, utilitarian reciprocity.

Ricoeur concludes that justice is ‘the necessary medium of love; precisely because love is hypermoral, it enters the practical and ethical sphere only under the aegis of justice’.^{xx} But love remains ‘hyperethical’, that is, beyond, just ahead of ethics itself. It enters ethics in the form of justice, and yet works for justice to transform justice. The

parallels with Tillich are obvious. Neither of them sees love and justice as fully separated, although both maintain a creative tension between them. They both talk of love requiring the mediation of justice for its dynamism to inform the relationship of one being with another. Justice is a form taken by love, and yet love keeps working just beyond it.

To summarise what has been established so far, love does not simply transcend justice. Love drives towards the unity of the separated, and justice holds the reunited together by giving a form to the reunion, by acknowledging each reciprocal claim to being. But love carries on working for broader reunion of the still separated. Thus love persistently requires justice to adopt new forms, to push itself to its limits and transform itself anew. Accordingly, old forms of justice can become inadequate to new situations, so justice must remain dynamic and aware of its ontological basis if it is to avoid the risk of negating itself.

II. THE ONTOLOGY OF POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

If love and justice are grounded in the very texture of being and work together towards its actualisation, then they must be just as ontologically essential to the actualisation of political organisms. Tillich indeed affirms that

Every organism, natural as well as social, is a power of being and a bearer of an intrinsic claim for justice because it is based on some form of reuniting love. It removes as organism the separatedness of some parts of the world.^{xxi}

But Tillich draws an important distinction between the unity of biological organisms and that of social organisms – a distinction more fully elaborated by Teilhard de Chardin below. Social organisms are different from natural ones in that the individuals who

constitute them remain independent and ‘can resist the unity of the social organism to which they belong’, whereas ‘in a biological organism the parts are nothing without the whole to which they belong.’^{xxii} Social and political organisms, on the other hand, are united by love in forms of justice that relate the autonomy of the individual to a collective perception of justice.

Individual members are united by the foundational values of their political body. Tillich calls the communal power of being that unites human beings ‘the spirit of the group’, and sees it ‘expressed in all its utterances, in its laws and institutions, in its symbols and myths, in its ethical and cultural forms’.^{xxiii} In these is visible the love that unites and binds a community together.^{xxiv} Love brings together individual members into political organisms that in turn embody the values that the group considers just; moreover, each individual member of the social group wholly embodies these values as a free person in themselves. Laws, institutions, founding myths and ethical values reflect and inform a social groups’ collective understanding of justice. They are the form that love takes in society. They symbolise what unites the beings whose separation has been conquered.

Furthermore, when the ‘spirit’ of a group is strong and its political institutions are widely perceived as just, then civilisation is given the space it needs to flourish. The arts, culture, science and trade all thrive when beneficial common values are respected, when individual citizens are united under a shared vision of justice. And each individual member that embraces the spirit of the group, making it their own, participates and contributes to the development of their civilisation. Individuals find a place within the group in which their being is given space to actualise itself in a way that enriches the wider community.

In the case of the most powerful political organisms in history, Tillich adds, the consciousness of the power of their spirit turns into ‘the feeling of a special vocation’,

into a ‘vocational consciousness’.^{xxv} The spirit of these civilisations radiates far into ‘the larger space of mankind’ and leaves an important legacy to humanity.^{xxvi} Tillich then lists some examples of the vocational consciousness of historic civilisations, among which are law and order from Rome, and a structure for the united Christian body from the medieval German Empire.^{xxvii}

He further insists that empires do not only subject, but they also unite, thus ‘both love and justice are actual’ in the laws that express their vocational consciousness.^{xxviii} If subjects stop acknowledging (even if only silently) that they are ‘participants of a superior power of meaning and being’, then the strength and unity of the empire evaporates, and its civilisation decays and dies.^{xxix} The strength of a political organism depends on its members recognising the power of its vocational consciousness and contributing to it. In this acknowledgement, separate members are united in a common spirit, and the justice that expresses this spirit is respected.

Furthermore, as ‘power is real only in [...] the encounter with other bearers of power,’ it is no surprise that great civilisations are built through frictions with neighbouring contenders.^{xxx} As a social group encounters another, there is ‘pushing ahead and withdrawing, [...] absorbing and throwing out’.^{xxxi} This struggle determines the relative power of each group, the recognition of the relative strength of each group’s spirit and vocational consciousness – and it is continuously renegotiated. Obviously, Tillich remarks, ‘these encounters are the basic material of history. In them man’s political destiny is decided.’^{xxxii} History narrates the struggle for the reunion of separated human beings under the spirit of great civilisations.

Still, love has not (yet) united the whole of humanity. The civilisations that it did establish rose and fell, though they did leave lasting legacies to humankind. They typically lost their dynamism and froze within ageing forms of justice. But love continued its work and gave birth to new forms of justice. More recently, what has been

called globalisation certainly suggests that love keeps pulling ahead, calling human beings to broader, deeper reunion with other human beings. Love keeps pulling political institutions from ahead, guiding humankind towards the fulfilment of its destiny.

Before these insights can be used to better grasp the political situation in which humankind currently finds itself, a theme in Tillich's work that is more prominent in *The Courage to Be* and in *Systematic Theology* ought to be touched upon first, namely: the ontological polarity between individualisation and participation.^{xxxiii} An understanding of this polarity will help explain the process whereby political institutions can disintegrate.

In a nutshell, the self-affirmation of a human being has two sides that reflect this ontological polarity. On the one hand, there is 'the affirmation of the self as self; that is of a separated, self-centered, individualized, incomparable, free, self-determining self'.^{xxxiv} But on the other, 'the self is self only because it has a world [...] to which it belongs and from which it is separated at the same time;' in other words, the self is self only because it participates in the world.^{xxxv} There can be 'no person without an encounter with other persons. Persons can grow only in the communion of personal encounter. Individualization and participation are interdependent on all levels of being.'^{xxxvi}

But this does not mean that there exists an everlasting, perfectly balanced harmony between these two interdependent poles. Tillich indeed sees the history of the relationship between social groups and their individual members as a constant oscillation between individualisation and participation.^{xxxvii} When participation is particularly important, Tillich talks of a 'collectivist society', a society 'in which the existence and life of the individual are determined by the existence and institutions of the group'.^{xxxviii} Such a society tends to lead to conformist attitude and a complete identification of the

individual with the spirit of his society; but eventually, the very danger of the individual losing his self stimulates protest against excessive collectivism.^{xxxix}

At the other extreme of the ontological polarity, 'individualism is the self-affirmation of the individual self as individual self without regard to its participation in its world.'^{xl} The danger here comes from the complete isolation of the individual from his now meaningless world of empty selves, a situation that Tillich discusses at length in his outline of Existentialism; this can then kindle a totalitarian reaction for a return to collectivism.^{xli}

Hence, as already observed, human beings vacillate between the poles of individualisation and participation. The tension between these poles thus plays itself out in human history. The great civilisations of humankind united their members under forms of justice that struck a provisional balance between these poles. But love always continued its work and continuously transformed justice anew, in so doing also transforming the adequate balance between the poles of individualisation and participation. History narrates how those institutions that did not keep in touch with this transformation of justice eventually lost the respect and the credibility of their members.

III. A READING OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY

In light of the above ontological insights, it is worth gazing back a few centuries in order to better grasp the salient features of the ontological climate which humankind finds itself in today. During the Middle Ages, Catholic Christianity reached the farthest confines of Western Europe and formed a single body that gathered its growing flock under its religious and political power (the distinction between which was far less obvious then than it is today). But Catholicism tended toward a legalistic form of collectivism. It ruled in the name of universal laws and decrees that increasingly lost touch with the dynamism

that moved the members of its body. As already observed, such tendency to juridicalism is a danger inherent within any institution or any political system.

The Reformation was an almost natural reaction to this situation. It shifted power away from the conformist Church and towards the individual. From now on, the individual human being would become empowered to use his reasoning in order to make sense of the big questions of life.^{xliii} He would take increasing control of the affirmation of his being. At first, this meant translating the Bible and making Scripture accessible to the people. But the Catholic Church persisted in its rigid legalism, thereby further fuelling the drive towards individualisation and the concomitant de-legitimisation of the Church's spiritual power. The following centuries thus saw the growth and spread of the empirical sciences, Enlightenment philosophy, free enterprise and the industrial revolution – all of which were inspired by the drive to empower the individual.

In due course, in the political sphere, this movement led to the reform of social institutions and the emergence of democracy. In democracy, each individual participant is given the (indirect) power to make the laws that bind the political group together; love unites separated human beings under a new form of social justice that reflects the individual's desire for freedom, equality and self-determination. The history of the last two centuries narrates how, over time, these democratic values captivated an increasing number of social groups, to the point that liberal democracy is considered by some today as the only alternative form of justice that can successfully bring human beings together.

The form of justice embodied by what could be called 'Western civilisation' unites individual citizens in a common love of values such as democracy, free market economics, the rule of law and human rights, the purpose of all of which is to empower and protect the individual. These values animate the spirit of 'Western civilisation' and inform its vocational consciousness. But the point is that what really started as a rejection of Church legalism and collectivist absolutism eventually developed into the common

spirit, the common vocational consciousness that unites democratic countries under forms of justice that are centred around the individual.

However, this very broad drive towards the empowerment of the individual did not advance in a smooth or uniform fashion. It continuously struggled and defined itself against initially religious and later secular types of collectivist absolutism. For a start, the withering away of the power of the Church came with the profusion of nascent nation-states, each gradually taking over the administrative running of given territories from the clergy. Each of these states tried to unite, under new and increasingly secular forms of justice, sections of a Christian population that were losing their medieval sense of unity. But these states also fought against one another.

Moreover, the broader struggle, between the drive towards the empowerment of the individual and the stubborn resistance against it by collectivist absolutism, was in effect embodied by different states at different times, depending on the allegiance of their political leaders. For a while, the Church continued to defend its fragmenting power with the help of rulers that were sympathetic to its cause. But later on, when the Church was weakened in its defence of religious collectivism, the drive towards individualisation had now to carry on its struggle against *secular* types of collectivist absolutism – such as fascism, communism, and other secular versions of authoritarian collectivism.

The separated people of formerly Catholic Europe were only to regain a semblance of their medieval unity, under liberal democratic forms of justice, around the turn of the twenty-first century. It took a long struggle for the new form of justice to defeat its collectivist foes and overcome much of the separation of Christians that this collectivist attitude was partly responsible for. But in time, when the Soviet vocational consciousness collapsed within its crumbling empire, the vocational consciousness of America and its Western civilisation saw itself as the only remaining form of justice through which the separation of all human beings could ultimately be conquered. The

collapse of Communism was less of a direct victory for liberal democracy than an internal breakdown of a form of justice that had fallen into rigid legalism and collectivist absolutism. Even so, Western civilisation saw its spirit, its vision and its institutions as the embodiment of the sole contender for the reunion of humankind. Many have since been expressing the hope that the globalisation of Western values would accomplish just that.

IV. THE CALLING OF HUMAN SOCIETY

But will it? Love drives towards the reunion of the separated, and this would imply that it does drive towards the reunion of humankind. Could the next form of justice for humankind be hinted at by the process of globalisation? Any speculation regarding the future is of course only tentative, but there is no reason why the next form of justice should not be glimpsed from elements of the current human situation. The following are therefore just a few modest thoughts on the subject, though they hope to be faithfully grounded in the fundamental currents presently driving humankind towards its future.

The last century certainly witnessed the birth and growth of international and even global institutions, radical improvements in methods of communication, and record intensification of international trade, foreign investments and migration. With these also came increasing contacts between different cultures – some leading to fruitful combinations, others to sometimes violent aversions. But the broad process of globalisation is clearly visible in political, economic, and cultural realms.

In the meantime, and perhaps somewhat more recently, unease with various facets and consequences of this broad movement has also become widespread. The ‘anti-globalisation’ or ‘alter-globalisation’ movement is constituted by people with incredibly varied agendas: some reject the economic exploitation of inconsiderate economic

liberalism, others are fighting for a more ecologically sustainable way of living, or against genetic manipulation of crops, or for the elimination of protectionist policies in agriculture, and others still want to replace representative democracy by alternative political systems. Some factions indeed have aims that would conflict with the aims of other factions within the 'alter-globalisation' movement.

What all share, however, is a growing sense of humanity that remains unarticulated.^{xliii} All want a fairer, peaceful and more sustainable global economy. They are brought together through a dislike of some of the consequences of globalisation, even though they have largely failed to articulate a common vision in response.^{xliv} At the same time, the very globalisation that they are unhappy about also mirrors humankind's groping towards this same sense of humanity. The processes of globalisation encourage the participation of more human beings in a global culture, a global market, and in ever more inclusive international organisations. So, both the progressive political, economic and cultural amalgamation of humanity *and* the uneasy reactions against some of its aspects are indicators of an ontological movement, driven by love, towards a new and as yet unknown form of justice. The current human challenge is to articulate, to *formulate* this dawning future.

In this regard, it is helpful to consider Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's work in parallel to these insights inspired by Tillich.^{xlv} For Teilhard, the long evolutionary emergence of life on earth has been a movement towards higher and higher orders of unified complexity, a process of differentiation and unification. This has always been in the direction of consciousness, and with humankind consciousness at last reaches the stage of self-reflection, and with self-reflection comes the power to shape the future of the species.

But this is possible only through the unification of thought and the full socialisation of humankind.

By virtue of the emergence of Thought a special and novel environment has been evolved among human individuals within which they acquire the faculty of associating together, and reacting upon one another, no longer primarily for the preservation and continuance of the species but for the creation of a common consciousness.^{xlvi}

This common consciousness, however, does not subsume the individual into an anonymous collective, which would be a regressive step, but it emerges through the communion of what is most unique in each individual:

In such an environment the differentiation born of union may act upon that which is most unique and incommunicable in the individual, namely his personality. Thus socialization, whose hour seems to have sounded for Mankind, does not by any means signify the ending of the Era of the Individual upon earth, but far more its beginning.^{xlvii}

Up till now human socialization has taken the form of harnessing the mechanical energies of the earth, the stage of any species ensuring its biological survival, while the phase which Teilhard sees emerging now shifts from the physical or biological to the sphere of thought or consciousness, manifesting in the quest for knowledge, in culture and specifically in competing political ideologies. These competing ideologies are essentially struggles between two poles – individualism and collectivism. This struggle can be resolved only through the synthesis of both into a higher unity: ‘All that matters at this crucial moment is that the massing together of individualities should not take the form of a functional and enforced mechanization of human energies (the totalitarian principle), but of a ‘conspiracy’ informed with love.’^{xlviii} Teilhard understands love as the principle of life and evolution emerging at the level of consciousness that both unites and individuates, gathering individuals together in order that they should become most themselves through extending their participation within the totality of nature. It is only

through the principle of love that the ethical dimension of humanity emerges in its full magnitude. As with Tillich, Teilhard understands love as the only power that can unite humankind in freedom:

Love has always been carefully eliminated from realist and positivist concepts of the world; but sooner or later we shall have to acknowledge that it is the fundamental impulse of Life, or, if you prefer, the one natural medium in which the rising course of evolution can proceed. With love omitted there is truly nothing ahead of us except the forbidding prospect of standardization and enslavement – the doom of ants and termites. It is through love and within love that we must look for the deepening of our deepest self, in the life-giving coming together of humankind. Love is the free and imaginative outpouring of the spirit over all unexplored paths. It links those who love in bonds that unite but do not confound, causing them to discover in their mutual contact an exaltation capable, incomparably more than any arrogance of solitude, of arousing in the heart of their being all that they possess of uniqueness and creative power.^{xlix}

Thus for Teilhard, the current era – which for him spans at least as far back as Ancient Greece – is witnessing the still tentative beginning of the socialisation of man; and it is in this vast historical context that the challenge to articulate the nascent sense of humanity must be located. In their increasing interactions with ever more – and ever more distant – neighbours, human beings are forming political structures that are ever more highly ‘socialised’.ⁱ Teilhard insists that the process that drives this socialisation ‘coincides exactly, in its continuation, with the process, already independently recognised, of cephalisation’.ⁱⁱ That is, the movement that draws human beings together socially, to form more and more complex political institutions, is the very same movement ‘that covers the whole biological and atomic history of the earth’.ⁱⁱⁱ

Teilhard's perspective places the phenomenon of globalisation (including its critics) in this very broad evolutionary context.^{lviii} By extrapolating the 'historical reality' of 'cerebralisation' and 'anthropogenesis', he can assert that the future is 'still open to collective cerebralisation or socialisation', which reveals an 'immense, boundless, horizon'.^{liv} 'Ahead of us', therefore, 'there must be a Super-humanity,'^{lv} a form of society that will unite the diversity of human beings.^{lvi} At that eschaton, the personal and the collective – individualisation and participation – will have been transformed, transcended and fulfilled.^{lvii} But in the meantime, globalisation plays its part in this colossal historical movement: it bears witness to the collective cerebralisation of humanity.^{lviii}

Finally, for Teilhard just as for Tillich, 'it is love that heads this movement,'^{lix} it is love that drives towards the unity of the separated. But the higher social form that humanity is groping towards must be one that balances and transcends the poles of individualisation and participation. So far, it seems that the political form that has best addressed the tension between these poles is democracy. Yet if liberal democracy – and its global exportation – was to be considered as the final form of social justice, it would fall into the old trap of rigid legalism and lose touch with the essential dynamism that initially informed it. Love continues to transform justice and thus calls for the reform of political institutions. Nonetheless, democracy does take part in humanity's transformation towards Super-humanity. In other words, democracy bears witness to the eschatological calling of humanity.

V. THE TENSION BETWEEN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND SOCIAL ESCHATOLOGY

History thus confirms what ontology suggests. All institutions tend to decline into juridicalism, into rigid legalism or fixity. The form of justice that they embody risks losing touch with the 'creative' or 'dynamic' justice that love calls for in every new situation. As love conquers separation, it transforms justice (and thus the balance between individualisation and participation) to preserve what is being united. The justice that continually gives love its form is therefore innovative and dynamic. Institutions, however, tend to reflect a form of justice that was once adequate but that always tends to complacently become increasingly inadequate.

If institutions fail to constantly reform themselves anew in order to reflect new forms of justice, they eventually fail to fulfil their very mission: they slip into legalism and bureaucracy and rely on fixed interpretations of ageing laws, the application of which, at some point, leads to injustice and disunity in the transformed present. An institution that has thus lost touch with the form of justice that unites its members faces decline and eventual death. If it fails to transform itself, it loses its claim to embody the unity of its members, and in due course gets replaced by another institution that better represents the transformed spirit of the group.

The risk of becoming inadequate to the changing demands of justice, of freezing into either collectivism or individualism, is a real risk faced by all institutions (though perhaps to different degrees). Civil or religious, democratic or authoritarian, legalism can stifle any of them. It suffocated the medieval Church, it suffocated the Communist revolution, and it can just as easily suffocate a democratic state. It is not because democracy is formally designed to constitutionally reflect the changing will of its members that its legislation is guaranteed to reflect the ongoing transformation of justice.^{lx}

The very process of drawing legislation is, to some extent, already caught up in the logic that leads to legal rigidity and fixity. What is just in a concrete situation cannot

be defined a priori by some positive universal law. Tillich indeed declares that ‘there are no principles which could be applied mechanically and which would guarantee that justice is done.’^{lxi} Thus the highest level of justice, of ‘transforming or creative justice’, is based on the understanding that ‘intrinsic justice is dynamic’ and that, therefore, ‘as such it cannot be defined in definite terms.’^{lxii} Hence, fixed legislation that is believed to inform all concrete situations *ex ante* is ultimately unjust. True justice transforms itself in every new situation.

This means that at the very least, political institutions cannot claim to enact a form of justice that is universally and eternally fixed. In its perpetual drive towards the reunion of the separated, love is persistently moving beyond the forms of justice that it takes; political institutions must either continuously reform to reflect this ever-transformed justice, or face decay and replacement by an institution that will. One of the advantages of democracy is that, to the extent that it does reflect the dynamic values that unite its people, it is open to reform. It is theoretically designed to reflect and express the love and the form of justice that unite the human beings that participate in it. But to remain just, it must keep paying attention to its reformers and be willing to reconsider every one of its fixed, written laws.

Idealistic reformers, philosophers and prophets have always existed and animated society. Every civilisation was formed by visionaries, and within them there were always thinkers calling for an even ‘better’ society, for political reform to fulfil an even higher degree of justice. These ideals constantly call humankind forward – the challenge is to actualise them. Love calls for reform, but political institutions sometimes fail to take up the challenge and freeze into juridicalism. Tillich thus suggests that an intricate and permanently shifting balance needs to be maintained between dynamism and form: love needs to build upon some form of justice in order to reach beyond it, though the risk is that this form may suppress the dynamic element of love.^{lxiii} Failure to

grasp the eschatological ideal, however, ends in juridicalism and a deferring of the actualisation of the potential of (both individual and social) beings.

At stake here is nothing less than the full actualisation of the potential of being-itself, the eschatological fulfilment of Creation. It is no coincidence that idealists portray their vision as the formula for the salvation of humankind from its predicament: their vision is informed by the very power which drives justice towards the full reunion of the separated. This primordial force of being pulls humankind and its institutions towards the eschaton and the actualisation of universal love. The historical evolution of political institutions thus bears witness to the progressive transformation of justice, driven by love, towards its eschatological fulfilment.

VI. SOCIAL ONTOLOGY AND MODERN POLITICAL THEORY

The above discussion has important implications for contemporary political theory. More specifically, it puts forth an understanding of humanity that is radically different to the one that classic modern political theory (that is, political theory since the Renaissance but excluding ‘post-modern’ variants)^{lxiv} assumes. As John Milbank and William T. Cavanaugh have shown, modern political theory is founded upon an ontological assumption of a primary state of violence.^{lxv} In a word, a ‘state of nature’ is assumed in which humans tend to get into conflict with one another; but reason brings these warring individuals into agreeing over a social contract whereby the monopoly of force is granted to a central authority whose task becomes the preservation of peace.^{lxvi} It is through this contracted social body that humankind is to be saved from endless chaos and conflict.

Thus, the remedy for the salvation of humankind follows logically from the original ‘mythological’ assumption about human nature and ‘the origins of human conflict’.^{lxvii} In more general terms, a statement on the ideal formula for the salvation of

humankind is already included in any founding myth. Accordingly, if one assumes a state of primordial violence, then the creation of a strong but static state does appear to be the natural option to minimise and police conflict.^{lxviii} But if, instead, a founding myth narrates the disruption from an original unity, then the salvation of humankind is to be enacted by progressively restoring this original unity.^{lxix} Cavanaugh identifies the former myth with modern political theory and the latter with Christianity – though the ontology of a disrupted unity need not be confined solely to Christianity.

Still, for Cavanaugh, whereas the soteriology of modern political theory institutes a strong central authority to maintain order among ontologically *distinct* individuals, that of Christianity calls for the participation of all *separated* beings in the body of Christ.^{lxx} Cavanaugh notes that ‘both soteriologies pursue peace and an end to divisions by the enactment of a social body.’^{lxxi} But, while in one case humanity is to be saved by handing over the monopoly of legitimate force to a centralised political body, in the other salvation depends on mutual participation, driven by love, in a social body that recovers humankind’s primordial unity. The ontology presented in this article obviously accords with what Cavanaugh identifies as the Christian ontology, and is thus radically dissimilar from that of contemporary political theory.

Cavanaugh is of course aware that the Church has often failed to present itself as the alternative ontology and soteriology to the state that it actually signifies.^{lxxii} On the face of it, the Church seems to have failed in its mission precisely by falling into the trap of juridicalism, by compromising with imperial power and by deferring its ideal beyond Creation. So the point is certainly not to call for the Church to reclaim the political power it once abused, but for it to *stop acknowledging* the legitimacy of the state’s mythology and soteriology.^{lxxiii} This also requires theologians to recover, rethink and shamelessly present the theology that was lost in Christianity’s slow transition to modernity.

Somewhere in history, the ontology of love that was central to Christianity was displaced by the secular ideology of modernity.

On this topic, the work of Louis Dupré is especially helpful: he identifies the beginning of the breaking down of the ‘ontotheological synthesis’ that prevailed up to the Reformation with the split between nature and grace.^{lxxiv} That is, a fateful dualism was allowed to emerge when God as One, as immanent within His intelligent Creation was replaced by God the external moral Lawmaker whose Will must be obeyed by His sinful individual subjects.^{lxxv} The Creation thus became separated from its Creator. God’s relationship to human beings became one of required obedience to unquestionable laws. The Creation was no longer understood as permeated by God’s immanent love, providence and grace – instead, it became the ground for a struggle between good and evil, victory in which demanded obedience to the Divine Will. Love and idealism were displaced by conflict and law. In other words, here is visible, yet again, the tension between love and juridicalism.

A comparison of the modern state with this dictatorial and moralistic conception of God reveals striking similarities. For instance, the modern state’s moralising, its structure of rewards and punishments and its expectation of submission to its laws all mirror the behaviour of this juridical misperception of God. That is to say, it would seem that the juridicalist theology that displaced the ontotheological synthesis within Christianity also permeates the secular view of nature and thus informs the modern image of the state. Even though modernity portrays itself as opposing a theological conception of things, it is actually adopting the same relation to Creation and thus a similar recipe for salvation as the juridicalist theology that it pretends to react against in the name of reason. This suggests that the Church and the theology that has infused it since the end of the Middle Ages in effect brought about the modern secular

state. And this, it turns out, would concur with Cavanaugh's perspective of the modern state as a parody or 'simulacrum' of the body of Christ.^{lxxvi}

But this also means that the responsibility for modern political theory's ontologically myopic mythology and soteriology rests not so much on modern philosophy as on the Church and its theology. With the breakdown of the ontotheological synthesis, theology failed to criticise modern political philosophy from its true ontological ground, and the Church conceded its eventual relegation to the private and subjective realm of the soul. For Milbank and Cavanaugh, therefore, the Church today must question modernity's presumption of an initial state of violence, against which it must then reaffirm the 'counter-ontology'^{lxxvii} and 'counter-politics'^{lxxviii} of love that it truly signifies.

This, however, is not quite strong enough, because as Dupré shows, theology itself has already lost its true ground. What is called for is for the full ontological ground of politics to be perceived by society as a whole. It is about human society discerning the *present* immanence of God, not about appealing to a lost ideal or to a God conceived of as an outside agency. Thus it is not a question of competing doctrines and religions, but it is about the very nature of things, about how things are *already* underway – whether this is really seen to be so or not. Nor is it so much about the formal relation between religion and state: it is about society discerning its true ground and embracing its call in all its social institutions. These institutions – be they church, state, local, national or international – must keep reforming themselves anew if they are not to entrap humanity in ageing forms of justice. What is called for is not some 'counter' ontology in society but social ontology *per se*. And ontology is not just another 'belief-system' that competes for public attention in the political sphere, but is concerned with the very nature of being and becoming.

The decline into juridicalism is a reminder of the inadequacy of contemporary thinking, both within secular circles and within Christianity. If justice is not actualised, it is because it is not yet fully understood, because society as a whole does not yet perceive the ontological and theological ground of love and justice which permeates everything in nature. And yet humanity must reflect upon and become conscious of its calling for this calling to be fulfilled. In Teilhard's words, the human condition is 'to see or to perish.'^{lxxix} But for humanity to see and fully give form to the political institutions that love calls it to, theology must reclaim its voice *and* society must learn to hear it again. The responsibility to recover and formulate humanity's reflection on the authentic nature of things lies primarily with theology, though it also calls for political philosophy to think theologically. In other words, for human society as a whole to become fully conscious of its ontological ground in love and justice, for humankind to become aware of and thus fulfil its eschatological potential, theology and political philosophy must embrace each other in thinking about society, and society as a whole must reflect upon itself theologically.

Human civilisation has a mystical calling, a destiny, which is the reunion of the separated in the mystical body of Christ. As Teilhard observed, the entire evolutionary process of nature is revealing an ascent from mere scattered multiplicity towards complex unity, and finally the conscious union of all things in God as the consummation of the Creation. This is the form which all societies ultimately seek to actualise, the true ground of all ideology. All progress is ultimately grounded in the pull in that direction. The flaws or inadequacies of society at any time are a recognition of a falling short from this call. Yet in the bearing witness of political institutions to the evolution of justice, this call is nevertheless revealed. The task of humankind is to become conscious of this call and to thus fully actualise it in its institutions.

- ⁱ Paul Tillich, *Love, Power and Justice: Ontological Analyses and Ethical Applications* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954).
- ⁱⁱ Tillich, *Love*, pp. 13-15 (and chap. 1 in general), and pp. 82-84.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Tillich, *Love*, p. 21.
- ^{iv} Tillich, *Love*, p. 108.
- ^v Tillich, *Love*, pp. 1-2.
- ^{vi} Tillich, *Love*, p. 25.
- ^{vii} Tillich, *Love*, p. 25.
- ^{viii} Tillich, *Love*, chap. 3.
- ^{ix} Tillich, *Love*, p. 26.
- ^x Tillich, *Love*, p. 54.
- ^{xi} Tillich, *Love*, p. 56.
- ^{xii} Tillich, *Love*, p. 57.
- ^{xiii} Tillich, *Love*, p. 71.
- ^{xiv} Tillich, *Love*, p. 64.
- ^{xv} Paul Ricoeur, 'Love and Justice' in Richard Kearney (ed.), *Paul Ricoeur: The Hermeneutics of Action* (London: Sage, 1996).
- ^{xvi} Ricoeur, 'Love', pp. 33-34.
- ^{xvii} Ricoeur, 'Love', p. 35.
- ^{xviii} Ricoeur, 'Love', pp. 35-36.
- ^{xix} Ricoeur, 'Love', p. 36.
- ^{xx} Ricoeur, 'Love', pp. 36-37.
- ^{xxi} Tillich, *Love*, p. 98.
- ^{xxii} Tillich, *Love*, p. 92.
- ^{xxiii} Tillich, *Love*, p. 98.
- ^{xxiv} Tillich, *Love*, p. 99.
- ^{xxv} Tillich, *Love*, p. 101.
- ^{xxvi} Tillich, *Love*, p. 101.
- ^{xxvii} Tillich, *Love*, p. 102.
- ^{xxviii} Tillich, *Love*, p. 104.
- ^{xxix} Tillich, *Love*, p. 104.
- ^{xxx} Tillich, *Love*, p. 41.
- ^{xxxi} Tillich, *Love*, p. 99.
- ^{xxxii} Tillich, *Love*, p. 100.
- ^{xxxiii} Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, second edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), chap. 4 and 5; Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (London: University of Chicago Press, 1951), pp. 174-178.
- ^{xxxiv} Tillich, *The Courage*, p. 86.
- ^{xxxv} Tillich, *The Courage*, pp. 87-88.
- ^{xxxvi} Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, p. 177.
- ^{xxxvii} Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, p. 199.
- ^{xxxviii} Tillich, *The Courage*, p. 92.
- ^{xxxix} Tillich, *The Courage*, p. 112.
- ^{xl} Tillich, *The Courage*, p. 113.
- ^{xli} Tillich, *The Courage*, chap. 5.
- ^{xlii} Tillich, *The Courage*, p. 94.
- ^{xliii} Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, 'A Great Event Foreshadowed: The Planetisation of Humankind' in *The Future of Man*, trans. Norman Denny (London: Collins, 1964), pp. 124-139; Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, trans. Bernard Wall (London: Collins, 1959).
- ^{xliv} The most elaborate articulation of this vision so far is not very developed beyond popular (but still revealing) phrase such as 'global village' or 'another world is possible'.
- ^{xlv} As the following passage makes clear, Tillich himself recognised that Teilhard's work was similar to his: 'Long after I had written the sections on life and its ambiguities, I happened to read Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's book *The Phenomenon of Man*. It encouraged me greatly to know that an acknowledged scientist had developed ideas about the dimensions and processes of life so similar to my own.' Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (London: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 5.
- ^{xlvi} Teilhard de Chardin, 'The Grand Option' in *The Future of Man*, pp. 37-60, p. 54.
- ^{xlvii} Teilhard de Chardin, 'The Grand Option', p. 54.
- ^{xlviii} Teilhard de Chardin, 'The Grand Option', p. 54.
- ^{xlix} Teilhard de Chardin, 'The Grand Option', p. 54.

¹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, 'Super-Humanity, Super-Christ, Super-Charity: Some New Dimensions for the Future' in *Science and Christ*, trans. René Hague (London: Collins, 1968), p. 155.

^{li} Teilhard de Chardin, 'Super-Humanity', p. 156.

^{lii} Teilhard de Chardin, 'Super-Humanity', p. 156.

^{liii} Teilhard died before the word 'globalisation' became the common term that it has become today, but he lived long enough to see the international spread of political, economic and cultural interactions that eventually became known as 'globalisation.'

^{liv} Teilhard de Chardin, 'Super-Humanity', pp. 153-154.

^{lv} Teilhard de Chardin, 'Super-Humanity', p. 154.

^{lvi} Teilhard de Chardin, 'Super-Humanity', p. 160.

^{lvii} Teilhard de Chardin, 'Super-Humanity'; Tillich, *The Courage*, chap. 6.

^{lviii} On this topic, however, Pieper invites caution and warns against any over-simplistic optimism. He considers the conditions for the potential emergence of one single global political power (conditions which globalisation gradually allows for) to be the very conditions for the Antichrist to emerge. In other words, every evolutionary step that makes the emergence of one overarching political power easier is also a step closer to the Apocalypse. Still, Pieper regards the approaching Apocalypse with neither optimism nor pessimism, because he insists that the catastrophic downfall that it will precipitate will also be mysteriously concomitant to the final affirmation of Creation. But the point here is that he would probably be in agreement with the eschatological perspective on globalisation that we are here putting forward. If his enriching considerations are omitted from the main body of the article, however, it is because he uses a prophetic discourse that is very different to the metaphysical one adopted in this article. Josef Pieper, *The End of Time: A Meditation on the Philosophy of History*, trans. Michael Bullock (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1999).

^{lix} Teilhard de Chardin, 'Super-Humanity', p. 171.

^{lx} One example of an absolutist and legalistic manipulation of democracy is the so-called tyranny of the majority, where the winner of a perfectly democratic election interprets its legal mandate for power as a licence to forcefully impose its views on the minority.

^{lxi} Tillich, *Love*, p. 56.

^{lxii} Tillich, *Love*, p. 64.

^{lxiii} In Tillich's words, 'One of the injustices in the transformation of the intrinsic claim for justice into practical judgements is the suppression of the dynamic element in the actualization of being. The opposite injustice is the denial of the static structure within which the dynamic element can be effective.' *Love*, p. 63.

^{lxiv} In this section, we focus on 'modern' political theory in order to contrast its ontological assumptions to the ontology and eschatology of political institutions elaborated in this paper. 'Post-modern' (the term itself is problematic, but here, it should be understood in its broadest sense) political theory is omitted because it attempts to do away with ontology altogether – a move which clearly takes it in a completely opposite direction to this paper.

^{lxv} William T. Cavanaugh, 'The City: Beyond Secular Parodies' in John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward (eds.), *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999); John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990). Though Milbank preceded and appears to have inspired Cavanaugh, the ensuing discussion will refer only to Cavanaugh as his work is somewhat clearer and more specifically directed to the question at hand. This, however, does not lessen the merit of Milbank's pioneering contribution.

^{lxvi} This is obviously a succinct (thus imperfect) synopsis of the social contract theories of Hobbes, Locke and perhaps to a lesser extent Rousseau. For a more detailed summary and for references to their original works, see Cavanaugh, 'The City', pp. 186-190.

^{lxvii} Cavanaugh, 'The City', p. 182.

^{lxviii} Cavanaugh, 'The City', pp. 186-190.

^{lxix} Cavanaugh, 'The City', pp. 183-185.

^{lxx} Cavanaugh, 'The City', pp. 182-190.

^{lxxi} Cavanaugh, 'The City', p. 182.

^{lxxii} William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

^{lxxiii} Cavanaugh, *Torture*.

^{lxxiv} Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (London: Yale University Press, 1993). Note that in his *Theology*, Milbank also addresses this shift, though with a specific focus on social theory.

^{lxxv} Cavanaugh likewise remarks that a 'theology of will' replaced a 'theology of participation.' 'The City', p. 186.

^{lxxvi} Cavanaugh, 'The City', p. 182.

^{lxxvii} Milbank, *Theology*, p. 422.

^{lxxviii} Cavanaugh, *Torture*, p. 204.

^{lxxix} Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, p. 31.