Ecumenism, Geopolitics, and Crisis

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Christians need to see Christian decline and current global crisis as equally linked to an older division of Christendom, itself connected to theological and ecclesial inadequacies. The way forwards needs to be an integral strategy: the promotion of mixed government with different emphases at once in Church, State and International Order. This must be linked to a recovery of a true sense of natural law as involving grace as well as nature and as mediated to civil and local law only via the international *ius gentium*. Thus, effective ecumenism is a key to global crisis, while recovery of the sacral 'kingly' role, at every level, including the international, is actually a crucial aspect of ecclesiology.

In this paper I want to argue for a connection of ecumenism to politics. On the one hand, I shall suggest that we need to be more fully aware that ecclesiology is in part a matter of politics in the real sense. On the other hand, I shall also argue that we need to be far more aware of the relevance of ecumenical matters to geopolitical ones.

In keeping with the English constitutional tradition, Richard Hooker, who lived from 1554 to 1600, and was in many ways the father of Anglican theology, always emphasised that Church government should be *mixed*: of archbishop in convocation and of king in parliament, backed up by popular assent.

At the international level, then, one would have thought that, in traditional terms, this mixture should apply to the authority of the Pope in ecclesial council, together with the authority of the Holy Roman Emperor in a conclave of nobles, with the former ideally enjoying eminent power, if circumstances permit, but the latter sustaining a Byzantine or Dantean reminder of the integrity of justice and the ultimate apocalyptic elevation of even corporeal concerns to the supernatural level. Could one not say that this would be the proper geopolitical translation of Hooker's radically Christological and apocalyptic integralism once shorn of his rather excessive, and indeed somewhat Byzantine sacral monarchianism?

To some degree Hooker himself indicated such a translation:

> For as one and the same law divine…is unto all Christian Churches a rule for the chiefest things, by means thereof they all in that respect make one

> Church, as having all but *One Lord, one faith and one baptism:* So the urgent necessity of mutual communion for preservation of our unity in these things, as also for order in some other things convenient to be everywhere uniformly kept, maketh it requisite that the Church of God here on earth have her laws of spiritual commerce between Christian nations, laws by virtue whereof all Churches may enjoy freely the use of those reverend religious and sacred consultations which are termed councils general.[1]

This advocacy of the crucial place of councils is good, so far as it goes, and was much extended in the writings of Hooker's friend and ally Richard Field.[2] Yet it is explicitly construed in terms of 'the law of the nations', the *ius gentium*—which in early modern terms was based upon the minimum need for a suspension of latent mutual hostility between strangers.[3] Clearly Hooker does not restrict international Christian harmony to that, yet he still thinks of global communion too much in terms of a secondary negotiation between national bodies, in a way that appears to grant local communities a sacramental priority. His lack of consideration of the need for an international Primacy and an international Monarchy or its equivalent (in contrast to Dante) is here symptomatic—since clearly he thinks of these institutions as crucial to good polity on the domestic front. The implication would therefore seem to be that he thinks of the global Church as but a deficient polity, not able to realise either natural or canonical law in their fullness.

This can be contrasted not just with a traditional Catholic and Orthodox insistence on the global universality of the Church, but also with earlier views of the *ius gentium* as found, for example in Thomas Aquinas, which assumed that a tacit but very real international law and order, perhaps linked to some node of international government or *imperium,* was a mediating link between the natural law and the positive laws of civic polity, necessary to spell out in contingent detail both natural and international law in general.[4]

Here we would appear to be confronted with the worst aspect of Anglican politicisation, when it is resigned to a certain secularising of the Church in its global dimension. The paradox of Anglicanism may be the contrast of a spiritually generous reach with a practically narrow confinement. Within the confines of

[1] Richard Hooker, *On the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (Oxford: OUP, 1845), The First Book, 10.14.

[2] Richard Field, *On the Church Five Bookes* (London: Simon Waterson, 1606). It was largely Field's influence which eventually secured Anglican adherence to the first Seven Ecumenical Councils—of course another decisive revisionist shift towards a recovered Catholic identity. See also Paul D.L. Avis's helpful book, *Beyond the Reformation* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 2006).

[3] *Laws,* The First Book, 10.13–14: 'For as civil law being the act of the whole body politic doth therefore overrule each several part of the same body: so there is no reason that any one commonwealth of itself should to the prejudice of another annihilate that whereupon the whole world hath agreed. Now as there is great cause of communion, and consequently laws for the maintenance of communion, amongst nations: So amongst nations Christian the like in regard even of Christianity hath always been judged needful'.

[4] See Thomas Aquinas, 'Treatise on Law', *Summa Theologiae,* I–II, qq. 90–108.

a group of small islands and their imperial extensions it has been able at times, by transcending its Reformation origins, and fusing a Patristic-High Scholastic legacy with a Renaissance Humanist neoplatonic and Hermetic one, to exceed a merely spiritualising humanism in the direction of a Cyrilline Christological and cosmically apocalyptic embrace of matter, of nature and of the strange reality of the world of the imagination (as with the work of Thomas Traherne and many others). However, in an international context it has proved all too prey to a merely immanent and all too human logic of pragmatic survival.

Nevertheless, in terms of the Christian ecumenical quest, Anglicanism can have a peculiar contribution to make. This would be to do with Hooker's sense that theology is not so much an adventurous search for the unknown (or a statically methodical exposition of given foundations) as it is a *local quest* for what is already there and should be glowingly apparent, yet remains mysteriously hidden. F.D. Maurice in the nineteenth century later expressed this (not without problematic exaggeration) as the primacy of 'digging' over 'building'. But applied to the ecumenical question this, as it were, 'immanent Platonism' suggests that Christians should not be asking how they can 'construct' one Church out of three or more, but rather how they can come to discern the concealed unity of the one authentic spirit-led Church which, it must be assumed (given the testimony of the New Testament), is *still really there* and has never truly gone away.

Such a quest will be less a matter of drawing up formal agreements, as of the gradual *ad hoc* emergence of practices of intercommunion, plus the formation of Christian movements and even congregations across confessional boundaries. It will also be a matter of the mutual construction of less confessionally-based genealogies which trace how apparent division is often rooted in both theoretical and practical errors and inadequacies that have equally affected the various different Christian denominations.

That consideration applies, for example, to a shared possible recognition that dissent over the *filioque* concerns a common forgetting of an authentic Patristic legacy and both the meaning and the limits of the identification of the divine person with substantive relationality: in the East with the work of Photius and in the West not with Augustine, Anselm or Aquinas but with the later work of often Franciscan theologians.[5] Or again to the parallels that can be seen between a diminution of the divine simplicity in both Palamas in the East, and Bonaventure and Scotus in the West. Or else to the metaphysical confusions about mediation which led to a Western suspicion of theophany and icons in this world, but to Eastern denials of a final vision of the divine essence and yet ironically a tendency to see theophany in this life

[5] See A. Edward Siecienski, *The Filioque: History of a Doctrinal Controversy* (Oxford: OUP, 2010); John Milbank, 'Manifestation and Procedure: Trinitarian Metaphysics after Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas', in *Tomismo Creativo: Letture Contemporanee del* Doctor Communis, ed. Marco Salvioli OP (Bologna: Edizioni Studio Domenicano, 2015), 41–117.

as the direct unmediated presence of God. In either case there is a certain loss of the sense of the absolute rupture between Creator and Creation and the way these two realities lie on incommensurable planes that can only be bridged by participatory paradox.[6] Or yet again one could mention the shared gradual yielding of sacral charismatic authority both imperial and papal to something more like a sacralisation of pure, self-derived power: under alien Tartar influence in the East, under both Arabic philosophical and more complexly internal influences in the West.[7]

If, to a degree, some of the more usual Orthodox criticisms of the West are based upon misapprehension, there are nonetheless other less well-attended to differences that may well be more fundamental. Western eschatology indeed lost the Patristic view of the final judgement as a collective occurrence at the eschaton itself and offered a too confident and literal picture of the realms of heaven, hell and purgatory.[8] The rather greater western emphasis on the eternity of punishment was intimately bound up with an eventual drift towards doctrines of double predestination, which effectively denies the central Christian truth that God is love. More controversially, we can now together wonder whether *apocatastasis* is not the older Christian orthodoxy, whose diminution and eventual loss may have something to do with eventual Christian failure.[9]

One would like to think that Anglicans could promote these sorts of debate. Yet in reality the more global dimensions of Anglican discussion and dissent in recent years have been around vexed questions of sexuality. Nonetheless, Anglicanism is scarcely unique in this respect. The argument between Joseph Ratzinger and Walter Kasper concerning the relative priority of the universal or the local Church has likewise been largely occasioned by issues arising from the pastoral handling of sexual issues. In either case one could go so far as to say that there is a linkage between arguments about how human beings should *naturally* combine in the most intimate way possible, and arguments about how they should *supernaturally* combine, because questions of sexual combination are in continuity with questions of political combination, and even more so with questions of ritual and symbolic combination. In all three instances one is concerned with what is taken to be universally and so globally normative.

A Christian approach to 'combination' in each of these domains has to balance respect for the local and spontaneous arising of order with the need for hierarchical guidance, which we have seen to lie at the heart of Hooker's approach to

[6] See John Milbank, 'Christianity and Platonism in East and West', in *A Celebration of Living Theology: a Festchrift in Honour of Andrew Louth,* eds Justin A. Mihoc and Leonard Aldea (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 107–160.

[7] A. Edward Siecienski, *The Papacy and the Orthodox: Sources and History of a Debate* (Oxford: OUP, 2017).

[8] John Milbank, 'Christianity and Platonism'.

[9] See Ilaria Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of* Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2013); David Bentley Hart, *That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell and Universal Salvation* (New Haven CN: Yale UP, 2019).

natural legality. Walter Kasper rightly insisted, like the Orthodox theologian Nicholas Afanasiev, that each local congregation, each mere gathering of two or three or more, reflects in itself the eternal, uncreated Jerusalem where Christ and his bride celebrate their eternal nuptials, just as every family is in itself a patriarchal and matriarchal polity, a *societas perfecta.*[10] Yet Ratzinger did not really deny such a truth, and was right to argue against Kasper that this reflection of eternal peaceful unity cannot occur unless it is mediated by a harmonious linkage of all localities on earth, coordinated by a charismatic centre that should nonetheless respect fully the principle of subsidiarity with respect to local authorities.[11] It cannot be satisfactory, as with Hooker, to hand 'foreign relations' over to a *ius gentium*, just as families cannot be entirely autonomous, given the proximate presence of other families also, with whom they have to deal.

It should be said here that we need to revive the more self-consistent and traditional view that the desirability of a 'mixed government' that blends democratic, aristocratic and monarchic elements applies to the ecclesial as well as to the secular sphere, in order to avoid the disparities in modern Catholic and Orthodox thinking between advocacy of democracy in secular affairs on the one hand and hierarchy in Church ones on the other.

But any such revision cannot possibly mean a Reformed favouring of limited democracy also in Church affairs, since this would compromise any commitment to transcendent truth. In the case of the Church as compared to the State the bias certainly goes more to the hierarchic, because here questions of truth are at a premium compared with questions of consensus. Nevertheless, truth for Christianity, since it involves a transcendent peaceful harmony, is initially transmitted through ritual and ethical practice and therefore *does* require also popular consensus for its discernment—just as, inversely, in the secular realm no consensus can possibly take firm hold unless there is a real debate, conducted under the guidance of the wise and virtuous, about objective truthfulness and justice.

For after the event of the Incarnation, as the twentieth century lay Anglican theologian Charles Williams emphasised, every human city is secretly Jerusalem, or else it remains Babylon.[12] It is true that the Byzantine settlement (despite the influential criticisms of John Damascene and others) sometimes lacked the fullness of the Augustinian-Gelasian insight that the State as still Babylon lies outside as well as inside the Church which is already Jerusalem. Yet ideally and for the sake

[10] Nicholas Afanasiev, *The Church of the Holy Spirit,* trans. Vitaly Permakov (Notre Dame IN: Notre Dame UP, 2012).

[11] Walter Kasper, 'On the Church' in *America: the National Catholic Weekly,* 23rd April, 2001; Joseph Ratzinger, 'The Local Church and the Universal Church' in *America,* November 19th, 2001; 'Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion' in *L'Osservatore Romano,* 29th February, 2008; 'The Ecclesiology Of the Constitution On the Church, Vatican II, Lumen Gentium' in *L'Osservatore Romano,* 19th September, 2001.

[12] Charles Williams, *The Image of the City and Other Essays* (Berkeley CA: Apocryphile, 2007).

of the world's salvation it should come entirely within its scope. The question of the universal kingship as well as priesthood of all Christians is therefore of crucial relevance.

With the eschatological fulfilment of justice beyond the coercive law in the event of incarnation, all the baptised are now priests and are to fulfil this office even in their secular callings. As Nicholas Afanasiev taught, the ordained priest merely presents this universal priesthood in an intensified form, in order to preside at the sacrificial meal which all Christians offer.[13] But equally, after the Incarnation, all Christians are all *kings,* as St Paul frequently says. Like the ordained priest, the anointed ruler—or, we can say, in some degree, any secular ruler within Christendom—intensifies this kingship of all believers. This is at once the glory and the burden that accrues to her. It is, I think, for this reason that Shakespeare had the genius so often to render the king as everyman. For the present, indeed, anointed monarchs and secular rulers deal mainly with the affairs of things in time, yet their role, as understood both in the East and by some theorists in Medieval England, also anticipates the bodily and cosmic integrity of the resurrection at the *eschaton*. If priesthood stands for the priority of the spiritual, then kingship stands for the unity of grace and nature and the final elevation even of every aspect—including the mineral, vegetable and anima—of the natural.

This reflection suggests that Christianity cannot be sufficiently 'incarnated' in a fashion that is essential to the work of salvation unless it is in some fashion or other politically 'established'. Inversely, there can be no justice that is not ultimately and implicitly ordered to the beatific vision and the Peace of Jerusalem. True order is always integral.[14] And this must apply at the global level also. The internationalism of the *ecclesia* alone is not enough: if there is to be a concrete embodiment of supernatural peace, besides an international coercive securing of the peace of this world, then there needs to be an effective international secular power. And in order for this to be fully just, according to theological criteria, it needs in some sense to acknowledge the Church as the community orientated to final eschatological peace and the reign of charity.

This imperative roughly translates the consensus assented to in the Middle Ages, both East and West, concerning the role of the Emperor, who was taken to perpetuate Rome in either case. In those days it was assumed that peace ultimately derives from international authority and even international force, justified in terms of its imposition of natural justice, supervening upon endemic local squabbles. In the case of the West, the emperor in theory, and sometimes in practice, acted as a kind of

[13] Afanasiev, *The Church of the Holy Spirit.*

[14] Ironically, *intégrisme* was not truly integralist because it usually assumed a neoscholastic pure nature. In consequence it was positivist with respect to the secular order, but theocratic with respect to granting an ultimate power (conceived in all too secular terms) of the Church thought of in equally positivistic terms as dealing with sheerly 'supernatural' matters.

reserved final guarantor of the order and unity of Christendom. Kings in general shared collectively in this role to a lesser degree and their authority was inseparable from their ultimate support for and mediation of the Pope and the ecclesial communion.

In modern times peace has usually been upheld in Hobbesian terms within states that have pursued merely their own power and self-interest. At the international level it has been fragilely upheld by the surrogate *agon* of trade which has yet often proved to be itself the occasion for an outbreak of now highly anarchic and unlimited technologised warfare. But in our own postmodern times of globalisation, international anarchy has started to interrupt the interior peace of nations, in the mode of terrorism inflicted both by private groups acting in the name of religions or ideologies and by 'civilisation states' upon each other, often through virtual electronic intrusion. Equally, the post-war and significantly Christian-influenced international structures of order designed to inhibit typically modern international anarchy have come increasingly unstuck: first through the increasingly disparate interests of poorer and richer nations and more recently because of the dangerous turn to buccaneering by large nations ('civilisation states') linked with increasingly anarchic capitalist forces.

In the face of this situation a much intensified and indeed desperate need for an international order and guarantee of peace arises. But the dream of international government on the current Hobbesian model of government is illusory: for this model, as Carl Schmitt realised, requires the presence of an enemy—nor would a permanent terrorist threat be a sufficiently threatening one, unless it truly constituted a rival power.[15] Nor again can we be confident that environmental depredation will serve this negative role.

Instead, international order must, first of all, be based upon a natural law that acknowledges an objective, transcendent good, and thereby refuses a self-founding of nations in terms of mere self-preservation and legislative positivity. Secondly, it must be enforced by an effective alliance of powers—given that it is always and everywhere genuinely transnational political structures of various kinds (for all their frequent horror) that have alone been able to establish some degree of international peace and justice. Such a transnational political structure need not be 'imperial' in the sense of direct sovereign subsumption by one power of others, but it does require some jurisdictional reality and therefore some real possibility of enforcement, which only leading powers acting in conjunction can provide.

In terms of these two requirements for the global future, it remains primarily the Roman Catholic Church, in alliance with other churches, that is best placed to re-instil a sense of natural equity (as opposed to merely formal 'human rights') into international order. Genuine natural law, in a Patristic lineage, as most supremely

[15] Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political; Theory of the Partisan* trans. G.L. Ulmen (New York: Telos, 2007).

articulated by Thomas Aquinas, is about equitable distribution and a just mediation between people that involves a just partition of things. It is a rational and conscious mediation of the eternal law of the *ordo* of the Divine Trinity in which also animals share. As such, it inherently involved, as for the Church Fathers, a fulfilment of human nature only through the gift of grace and of the beatific vision. Thus Aquinas is at one with Gratian or with Robert Grosseteste in saying that the gospels alone contain the full realisation of the natural law. There is no possibility of human justice unless it points beyond secular order towards the ecclesial order of charity. This involves also a subservience of every law to the test of eternal justice, such that law is an entirely analogical matter, mediated to us through the law of peoples, the positive civil law, customary law, canon law and familial authority, all of which change through time in response to circumstance. In terrestrial terms this means that the eternal law in the mode of human reason is always first mediated by the *ius gentium,* the international common sense of humanity. International law and polity come first and international relations have priority over mere 'politics'.

The gradual loss of this vision in later medieval and early modern scholasticism is considerably responsible for many of our modern ills. This includes the later disdaining of animals and our treatment of nature as merely an object for rational appropriation. It also includes a reversed priority for internal politics and the laws of what were now termed 'states' over international order. All these things ensued because law was now understood univocally to mean any rational regularity imposed by an arbitrary force of will, whether divine or human. Such an outlook both allowed and was allowed by the new early modern scholastic view that humans pursue a twofold end: not just a supernatural one, but also a purely natural one subject to merely ontological and not theological considerations.[16]

In all these ways the extraordinary thing is that the conceptual space of secularity was invented by a perverse theology: the space of an international anarchic sea in which states swim like islands; the space in which justice is subordinate to law conceived as either positive imposition or the pursuit of utility; the space where the mark of natural law is no longer participation in the mind of God but merely rational deduction from supposed pure facts or principles. This mode of natural law is no longer concerned with the integrally just and charitable mediation of people through the dignity of things (the *res* of Roman and Byzantine jurisprudence) but with the assertion of endless isolated and self-derived rights which are inherently

[16] See Michel Bastit, *Naissance de la Loi Moderne* (Paris: PUF, 1990); Franco Todescan, *Lex, Natura, Beatitudo: Il problema della legge nella Scolastica Spagnola del sec. XVI* (Milan: CEDAM, 2014); Jean-François Courtine *Nature et Empire de la Loi: études suaréziennes* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1999). Bastit's work, building on that of Michel Villey, is crucial. However, his neoscholasticism fails to see the importance of the neoplatonic dimension, the priority of (an authentic) analogy of attribution over the analogy of proportion and the absence of pure nature in Aquinas. All these things are corrected by Todescan and Courtine who are thereby able to fill out Bastit's analysis.

the supposed rights of mind over indifferent bodies, irrational animals, and the indifferent body of the earth itself.

If the secular space was bizarrely opened to view by theology itself, then it is impossible to say what the consequences of a much more widespread and deeply rooted recovery of a more genuine Patristically-based vision might be. And in reality the programme of *ressourcement* has barely begun and is now often thwarted. We cannot rule out the idea that a space opened out by a dubious theology can be foreclosed by a better one. And increasingly the incoherencies and irresolvable conflicts of the secular attempt at natural self-rule are becoming evermore apparent.

At the same time, we need to recall the older and the ecumenical dimension of eventual theological catastrophe. There is the question of the long-term impact of a dubious eschatology already mentioned, and of the consequent perversion, as Ivan Illich and Charles Taylor have argued, of the ecclesial economy somewhat into a regime of mere fear and ethical discipline, routinising personal rule instead of infusing the institutional with the personal.[17] Such doubtful practice helped falsely to encourage the sense of the normality of poor academic theory. And the division of East and West weakened a shared sense of the true depth of a shared inheritance. Eventually this weakening led to such terrible ecclesial divisions in the West that only the theologies and philosophies of pure nature seemed capable of securing a certain simulacrum of order.

If today relatively Christian principles can be recovered and made to prevail (and we now live in a crazy era where nothing may be impossible, as many often worryingly extreme theorists like Alexander Dugin and Steve Bannon realise),[18] then in political terms this will inevitably require substantive international alliances rooted in a West that we can hope will eventually also include Russia. For besides the rising conflict we see today between globalising and nationalist forces, with capitalism ambiguously on both sides at once, it is also the case that the world is dominated, as Christopher Coker has argued, by large 'civilisation states' like China, Russia and the USA. [19] This is why the survival of European civilisation probably requires the EU or something like it, quite apart from the theological dubiousness of notions of absolute state sovereignty for reasons which I have tried to indicate.

I have also tried to show why ecumenism is not just an internal issue for Christians but an essential dimension of our historical fate and our current dilemmas. The unity and self-understanding of the global West are to this day profoundly impaired by Christian divisions and the linked loss of an authentic Christian vision. The question of global order and the question of Christendom remain secretly connected.

[17] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge MS: Harvard UP, 2019).

[18] Alexander Dugin, *The Fourth Political Theory* (London: Arktos, 2012)

[19] Christopher Coker, *The Rise of the Civilisation State* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019); Adrian Pabst, *Liberal World Order and its Critics: Civilisation States and Cultural Commonwealths* (London: Routledge, 2018)

For this reason, besides more directly theological ones, Orthodox, Catholic, and Anglican Christians need in future to work, in the name of both objective architectonic justice and of popular consent, towards a restored Church unity under the Pope in Council and towards its partnership with some sort of emergent international and effective secular authority, acknowledging at least implicitly the superior ordering of our supernatural destiny and the eternal law of God.