Christian Reconciliation through the Public Use of Reason

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Abstract: Christian political theologians have usually taken one of two approaches to the purpose of political order: agonist or perfectionist. Either political order should seek a civic peace between opposing forces or advance the full human good. Both approaches face difficulties, so I propose a middle-way: *Christian reconciliationism*. This political theology holds that political order should seek reconciliation between diverse moral perspectives. With perfectionism, reconciliationism aims to establish the political order as a *moral* order, but with agonism, reconciliationism rejects attempts to use the political order to promote the full human good. It thereby avoids the vices of both approaches.

Keywords: Christianity, public reason, agonism, perfectionism, Aquinas, Augustine

Christian political theologians have usually taken one of two approaches to the purpose of political order, the coercive apparatus through which nation-states govern their citizens. The first approach, associated with Augustine of Hippo (1998), is a Christian *agonism*, where the purpose of political order is to achieve civic peace between ultimately irreconcilable political and moral forces. The second approach, associated with Thomas Aquinas (2002), is a Christian *perfectionism*, where the purpose of political order is to realize the authentic human good, temporal and (sometimes) eternal. Christian agonism is especially impressed by the depth of human sin and error, and so downgrades the ambition of political order to being a "straightjacket for sin" by restraining the most destructive forms of bad behavior. Attempts to use the political order in more ambitious ways are unjustifiably risky given the limitations of human political institutions and the wickedness of political leaders. Christian perfectionism is especially impressed by the possibilities for human flourishing when political institutions are rightly ordered; political order should strive to promote virtue in the citizenry and to forbid the propagation of false doctrine. Christian perfectionism is more ambitious in its aims.

In this article, I propose a third approach to Christian political theology that is more ambitious than Christian agonism and less ambitious than Christian perfectionism. I shall call this view *Christian reconciliationism*.[1] The good

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1.   I here follow other "theological" treatments of public reason, such as those found in Weithman 2016 and Biggar and Hogan 2009.

this approach attempts to realize is *reconciliation among diverse persons*. Political reconciliation is a social state in which people who have irreconcilable interests and worldviews can live together on moral terms. They may not agree about the nature of the good life on Earth, much less the life to come, but they nonetheless have the normally effective capacity to create and sustain political orders that go beyond the mere balance of power sought by Christian agonists. So, with Christian perfectionism, Christian reconciliationism aims to establish the political order as a *moral* order, but with Christian agonism, Christian reconciliationism rejects attempts to use the political order to promote the full, authentic human good, temporal or spiritual.

A Christian reconciliationist approach is similar to public reason views in insisting that the moral and legal rules imposed upon persons be justified by appeal to the subjective moral reasons of each person.[2] In other words, moral and legal rules should only be imposed upon other persons when the imposer reasonably believes that the imposed upon has adequate reason *of her own* to endorse the rules to which she is subject. In this way, Christian reconciliationism seeks an agreement on the terms of political life that all parties regard as moral from their own point of view. But given the great diversity of worldviews in any modern, open society, the laws and policies recommended by Christian perfectionists cannot be justified to each person, since some persons are not Christian, and so reject Christian accounts of the good life based on what they regard as good reason. This means that Christian perfectionism is unjust because it requires that Christians oppress and dominate non-Christians (as well as Christians who reasonably reject a perfectionist state). But if we can locate laws and policies that are mutually acceptable, we can aspire to goods that go beyond mere agonist peace, such that persons need not always be at odds.

Public justification establishes a kind of political reconciliation because it helps to explain what it means for Christians and non-Christians to be reconciled with one another in the political realm despite having seemingly legitimate grievances with one another concerning how social life is organized. If we can agree on genuinely moral terms of social life, we will have established a special kind of peace. We will forgo the use of domination, control, and violence to impose our own vision of the good life on one another. This is what I have called *moral* peace because we all see ourselves as having moral reason to abide by shared terms of non-violence (Vallier 2019: chap. 1).

What is *Christian* about this account of public reason? The idea of reconciliation at work is an extension of the Christian ideal of being reconciled to one's fellow man in cases where one person or group sins against another. The

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2.   Rawls 2005, Larmore 2008, and Gaus 2011 provide the leading accounts of secular public
      reason.

requirement of unilateral forgiveness and the hope of reconciliation with others extend to political life, where reconciliation requires that we live together on mutually acceptable terms.

The feasibility of reconciliation is grounded in a Christian account of what can be achieved in earthly politics. Christian reconciliationism recognizes the severe effects of sin on the body politic, not only in recognizing that persons do wrong by their own lights, but that error and confusion about the good will lead to political conflict (Augustine 1998: 926–29). And yet, Christian reconciliationism recognizes that persons, despite their sin, possess a moral nature and a sense of justice that can be relied upon to stabilize moral and political order. We can all recognize the good of political order and can uncover a justification of that order compatible with the normally effective sense of justice instilled in us by God. This is so even when sin leads to dissensus about justice.[3]

This article is part of a broader project that attempts to connect a Christian account of reconciliation with public reason liberalism by means of a shared ideal of reconciliation. That means the arguments in this piece form a prolegomenon for future work. With this expectation in mind, I will review the essential aims of Christian agonism and Christian perfectionism (I). I then explain how the good of reconciliation can be seen as a kind of *via media* between these two aims (II). I next review some of the nuts and bolts of secular public reason views and argues that public justification and public reasoning can achieve reconciliation (III). Both public justification and public reasoning allow us to reconcile in politics. I review Christian accounts of forgiveness, reconciliation, and hope (IV) and then extend these ideas to relationships with non-Christians. I then argue that the ideas of public justification and public reasoning extends forgiveness, reconciliation, and hope into political life (V). I next develop some themes from Christopher Eberle's important work on religion and politics that challenge my position (VI), as well as answer other objections. I then conclude (VII).

Beyond the formal success of the argument, my aim is to navigate between central ideas in the Christian tradition about how to approach political life. The goal of Christian reconciliationism is to transform the Christian's approach to politics from both undue pessimism, as we find in agonism, and undue optimism, as we find in perfectionism. The best Christian attitude towards political life is to recognize brokenness and to hope and strive for healing. The aim of politics in a fallen world isn't warfare or domination, but considering each person and healing her pain in our shared social life on this side of the grave.

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3.   Sin can lead to dissensus by corrupting the intellect, but also by leading to non-culpable errors in reasoning, so not all dissensus about justice is blameworthy.

I. Christian Agonism and Christian Perfectionism

Here I describe two ideal types of Christian political theologies: agonism and perfectionism. These views are typically associated with Augustine and Aquinas, but I will make no claim that these are the views Augustine and Aquinas actually held. My own sense is that describing Augustine as an agonist may rely too much on Reinhold Niebuhr's (1953) influential reading of *City of God*. Augustine may be best read as a kind of perfectionist, following Eric Gregory (2008: 9). The position I attribute to Aquinas should be less controversial.[4]

The two traditions have been developed at length by Niebuhrians and new natural law theorists respectively, so there are contemporary representatives of these positions, though new natural law theorists like John Finnis (2011) shy away from having political order promote the *supernatural* good, settling instead for having the state do what it competently can to promote natural goods.[5] In contrast, new Catholic integralists like Thomas Pink (2018) insist that the state promote the supernatural good.

Political theologies can be distinguished by two factors: (i) their account of the ultimate political good at which the state should aim and (ii) how "high" the state should aim, or perhaps how ambitious the state should be in attempting to establish true goods. Christian agonists and perfectionists will agree, by and large, on the content of the ultimate personal and social good, but they disagree on what it is reasonable to expect of the state and human society. Beliefs about what we can reasonably expect of human beings helps identify the goods that the two views claim governments should pursue. Agonists agree with perfectionists that there *is* a social and political good; they just think that the authentic political good is beyond the reach of temporal political institutions.

Christian agonism is distinguished by the claim that the state should promote civic peace; it is grounded in pessimism about what political institutions can achieve, *given* the reality of human sinfulness. Christian perfectionism is distinguished by the claim that the state should promote the authentic human good; it is grounded in optimism about what political institutions can achieve, *despite* the reality of human sinfulness. Agonists are pessimistic about human politics, thinking that the reality of original sin means that we can only expect so much of the state. Perfectionists are more optimistic in part because they think original sin is less damaging to human nature, which includes our moral sense and sense of justice.

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4.   Finnis 2011 famously attempts to use Aquinas to defend a doctrine of natural rights, which implies a more constrained form of perfectionism that is somewhat liberal in character.

5.   Finnis 2011: 263 contains the claim that "the authority of rulers derives from their opportunity to foster the common good." But the common good is taken to include basic natural goods, and not supernatural goods.

Christian agonism and Christian perfectionism face great difficulties. Christian agonism may be seen as a kind of *modus vivendi* view on which moral relations between diverse and irreconcilable groups are normally un-available.[6] That means politics is necessarily a kind of war between competing social factions. By settling for institutionalized aggression as the unfortunate reality of politics in a fallen world, the agonist may not achieve political goods that are in fact available, such as the goods of social and political trust.[7] It also seemingly morally permits persons to use the state to force their opponents to knuckle under, which is tantamount to domination and oppression and may conflict with Jesus's teachings on peace and non-violence.

Christian perfectionism has the disadvantage of being authoritarian and paternalistic. If the purpose of political order is to promote the *authentic* hu-man good (natural or supernatural, personal or common), then how should po-litical order treat persons who pursue a reasonable, if false, conception of the human good? If the state is sufficiently competent, the perfectionist must co-opt the state to suppress the activities of such persons, even if those persons are pursuing the good based on their own sincere and informed conception of the good life.[8] In principle, then, a Christian perfectionist state should be *estab-lishmentarian*. It should seek to establish the Christian religion as the true reli-gion insofar as the state is pragmatically capable of securing establishment. A Christian perfectionist might think that, for practical purposes, freedom of reli-gion best serves the common good; in John Courtney Murray's (2005: 59–86) terms, freedom of religion may be an "article of peace" between persons who disagree (which makes natural law views more continuous with agonistic/real-ist views). But the Christian perfectionist has no principled reason to oppose religious social control. I think most people in free societies have the sense that coercively establishing religion is authoritarian and that it treats persons with minority conceptions of the good unequally. The Christian perfectionist state is also paternalistic because it uses coercion to jostle persons who dissent from the authentic human good into embracing it or at least not leading others away from it. And even worse, if the "corrected" minority groups are sufficiently powerful, Christian perfectionism must deploy institutionalized aggression to contain them, which will create an unattractive kind of political stability if

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6.   McCabe 2010 develops and defends an account of *modus vivendi* liberalism, whereas Mouffe 2005 provides a contemporary statement of secular agonistic approaches to democracy.

7.   In Vallier 2019, I develop an account of social trust that I rely on here. Social trust is trust that members of society place in most other members of society to comply with publicly recognized moral and legal rules. Political trust can be understood as trust that government officials with comply with the institutional rules that define their positions.

8.   The Catholic integralist simply embraces this strategy; Vermeule 2018 has outlined how it might work in practice.

there is stability at all. In this way, Christian perfectionism will share some of the disadvantages of Christian agonism.

Christian natural rights views are not really an alternative to Christian perfectionism, as the state will simply be imposing the authentic human *right* instead of the authentic human *good*. If some persons reasonably dissent from the true scheme of natural rights, then the state must respond with social control if such control is pragmatically feasible. This means using coercion against reasonable persons who reflectively dissent from the scheme of true natural rights. A natural rights view may also become authoritarian and unstable, though it does avoid paternalism because it does not attempt to use coercion for the *good* of the coerced.

Hopefully, then, there is a Christian political theology that can avoid the trappings of both agonism and perfectionism. We want a political theology that secures peace and social and political trust while eschewing the coercive promotion of the good, and the authoritarianism and paternalism such coercion entails.

II. Reconciliation as *Via Media*

I will now introduce an ideal of reconciliation as a *via media* between the aims of civic peace and the authentic human good. To be reconciled with another person is usually seen as requiring forgiveness for wrongdoing and the resumption of a relationship that previously existed. But, if we view reconciliation as a kind of outcome, it can be understood as "an improvement in the relations among parties formerly at odds with one another," where being at odds typically evokes the reactive attitudes of resentment and indignation (Radzik and Murphy 2015: 1). The sort of reconciliation achieved depends on how successfully persons address the "emotional, epistemic, and/or material legacy of the past" that forms the basis for resentment. This conception of reconciliation can be distinguished from reconciliation as a process that addresses "bad feelings, suspicions, or harms" created by past conflict and disagreement.

Reconciliation is necessarily tied to the alleviation of the negative reactive attitudes of resentment and indignation (and guilt, which I will set aside here). Reconciliation involves the repair and improvement of relationships comprised by actions that create resentment in one or both parties to the relationship. In political life, this occurs not merely when one party commits an obvious injustice against another, but when one party's conception of justice is violated by the other. That is, one party will see the political behavior of the other as wrong, and so as a basis for resentment. In many cases, the resentment will be mutual if the harmed party resists.

Reconciliation is achieved through four interpersonal changes: changes in external behavior, changes in belief (Dwyer 1999), resolving negative emotions and attitudes (Mihai 2016; Lu 2017), and adopting or resuming positive emotions and attitudes (Hirsch 2011). A change in an external behavior would be a refusal to engage in aggression or insult, to cooperate with another person, and participate in shared institutions with them. A change in belief will involve rejecting the belief that the other person is wicked or untrustworthy and adopting the belief that the other party is not a threat. Resolving a negative emotion is associated with a change in belief. When John is reconciled with Reba, his resentment and indignation, and perhaps her guilt and shame, and their mutual hate and anger, will be resolved. Adopting new emotions and attitudes can include forming mutual respect and love, adopting shared moral norms, and establishing social and political trust.

Notice that reconciliation is possible when people deeply disagree about many issues, including about what the good life consists in and what justice requires. Reba can decide not to try to control John politically and can reject the belief that people with John's ideology are wicked or untrustworthy. Reba can also decide to allow her resentment and hatred of John to diminish. She can then adopt new emotions, such as attitudes of respect and trust.

Reconciliation of this sort does not seem like a utopian aspiration, contra the agonist. In fact, I think we *actually observe* reconciliation of this sort in most liberal democracies (Lu 2017, Murphy 2010). Ideological differences are tolerated, and people will often demure from attempting to control others with their vote, believing that people with other ideologies can be of good will, and that they respect and trust those with different views. At present, we're observing a breakdown in these attitudes in American politics. But many Americans are politically reconciled to one another all the same.

Reconciliation goes beyond civic peace because peace does not require reconciliation. We can simply end open hostilities without a change in external behavior, save the external behavior of attempting to use violence against the opposing group through the political apparatus. The weaker party can then simply bide its time until it has the political upper hand. We can also have civic peace without a change in belief or emotions, nor does peace require new emotions or attitudes, save a preparedness to accept the present balance of power for the time being. Peace is *necessary* for reconciliation, but not sufficient.

Reconciliation is a more realistic goal than shared agreement on the authentic human good, or at least those parts of the authentic human good that are reasonably contested. This is due to what John Rawls (2005: 54–58) called "the fact of reasonable pluralism," the idea that there are certain essential features of theoretical and practical reasoning that, when freely pursued, leads invariably to disagreement about fundamental normative matters. The only way

to prevent reasonable pluralism from generating disagreement is to restrict free reasoning, perhaps severely. Since reasonable pluralism is an inevitable feature of life in free societies, aiming for perfectionist levels of agreement seems unrealistic.

Reconciliation also avoids the disadvantages of agonism and perfectionism. Let's begin with agonism.

Agonism allows for domination, oppression, and undermines the rational basis for social and political trust. The stability it achieves is not moral in nature, but rather a product of exhaustion among competing centers of political power. This means that one group will gain control by dominating and oppressing others, and the losers will have little reason to be trustworthy with respect to the new system of rules when they can get away with defecting. But since reconciliation implies agreement on some moral principles, the basis for political coercion will be moral in nature and mutually acceptable. This means that the use of political power, while violent and coercive, is in a sense self-imposed by both political winners *and losers*. Consequently, exercises of political power should not count as domination or oppression since the person who loses the political contest accepts the exercise as fair. Reconciliation also allows trust to form, since each group has sufficient reason to accept the terms of reconciliation based on their own understanding of moral, political, and religious value. Persons, therefore, have reason to be trustworthy with respect to the moral rules that reconcile them, and social and political trust is a natural response to the perception of trustworthiness in the public.

Perfectionism is authoritarian and paternalistic because it is not based on mutual agreement but on the promotion of the authentic human good *regardless* of whether persons who reasonably reject that vision of the good agree.[9] This means that those with the morally correct view are permitted to use political coercion to promote the authentic human good, which in turn looks authoritarian. Such coercion involves one group dominating another (in this way it is again structurally similar to agonism). Reconciliation prohibits using state power to promote the authentic human good if this would undermine reconciliation between competing groups. For in imposing the true good on others, there is now a rational basis for resentment, indignation, and distrust. The person imposed upon cannot reasonably be expected to see the *purported* authentic human good as *the* authentic human good from her own perspective. Reconciliation prohibits paternalism; the powerful are prohibited from imposing the authentic good on those who reject, even for their own good.

In sum, pursuing the good of reconciliation is a kind of *via media* between pursuing the good of peace and pursuing the authentic human good. It also has

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9. Quong 2011 provides a critique of specifically liberal perfectionism from a political liberal point of view; see especially pp. 45–107.

moral advantages over both agonism and perfectionism. Christian reconciliationism, therefore, may be an attractive middle-way political theology worthy of further development.

III. Reconciliation through Public Justification

I must now connect public justification and public reasoning with reconciliation. Let us begin, then, with a description of these two ideas. We can say that a society's social and legal norms, its rule-based forms of social control, are publicly justified when they can be justified to each person based on the reasons and values they each affirm (Gaus 2011: 263). Public justification involves establishing a kind of overlapping consensus, where we all agree with moral and legal norms based on our diverse commitments (Rawls 2005: 133).

Conceptions of public justification vary considerably, and I have canvassed their differences and defended my own view (Vallier 2014: 104–11). Here I must introduce two main ways in which conceptions of public justification vary, both of which concern how to construe the reasons that figure into a public justification.

First, the reasons that figure into a public justification are only those that each person can be said to *have* (Gaus 2011: 232–35). That is, the person must be able to see the reason as a reason for her through her own rational reflection. Thus, all justificatory reasons—reasons that can justify social and legal norms—must be in some sense internally psychologically accessible. Each person should be able to begin with her commitments and, by means of a sound inferential route, recognize herself as committed to affirming, or at least rationally permitted to affirm, the reason as applying to her. In this way, public justification appeals to *idealization*, where we ascribe moral reasons to a person because she *would* endorse them based on her commitments and effective inference based on some degree of accessible information. Some public reason liberals radically idealize, meaning that they ascribe reasons to persons based on full rationality and complete information, whereas others like Gerald Gaus and myself moderately idealize, meaning that we ascribe reasons to persons based on bounded rationality and easily accessible and computable information (Vallier 2014: 160–64). Public justifications do not consist in the reasons that persons *say* that they affirm when asked, though surely what a person says that she affirms is evidence of what reasons she has. Instead, we ascribe reasons to persons based on the reasons she would affirm at the right level of idealization.

Idealization in public reason might be its most controversial feature. Nicholas Wolterstorff (2012: 31–35), Christopher Eberle (2002: 209–33), and David Enoch (2013: 159–60) have raised a number of concerns. In particular,

they deny that a description of what a person would affirm when idealized can explain the reasons a real-world person currently has or how to treat them. I have recently answered these critics on the grounds that idealization is an implicit presupposition of our ordinary practice of holding moral accountable and blame in maintaining relations of social and political trust (Vallier 2019: 103–07; Vallier 2020). We regard persons as untrustworthy when they choose to act in ways we think they knew better, or *should have* known better, than to choose. We count persons as untrustworthy, then, when they fail to attend to considerations that we think they should have attended to. Moderate idealization only involves drawing our attention to the reasons that we think others should have detected if they were as reflective as our practice of holding morally accountable supposes. When we insist that others are accountable not just for what they knew to be wrong, but what they *should have* known to be wrong, our interactions with others are shaped by an implicit model of idealization. In such a condition, social and political trust is maintained through following this practice. The model, I argue, must be moderate; radical idealization is not implicit in our moral practice.

Secondly, we must assess how much each person's justificatory reasons resemble one another. On strong shared reason views, the only justificatory reasons are reasons that are shared among real members of the public. On weaker shared reason views, the reasons have to be shareable among idealized members of the public; the justificatory reasons are only those that idealized members of the public could share under certain conditions. A still weaker standard is an accessibility requirement on which justificatory reasons are those that each person can accept as a reason for the person who offers it based on shared standards of evaluation, like the scientific method. The weakest standard is an intelligibility requirement, where the set of justificatory reasons includes all reasons that members of the public can see as a reason for the person who offers it based on *that person's* unique evaluative standards (Vallier 2016a, 609–10).

To illustrate the difference between these standards, imagine political disagreements between an atheist, Christian, and a Muslim. (a) All may share reasons to provide vaccines to children because they are all committed to public health and all see scientific reasoning as giving them good reasons to think that vaccines prevent harmful diseases. (b) But they might disagree as to whether the government has reason to encourage the public not to consume saturated fat because, while they share a commitment to the scientific method, they draw different conclusions from the empirical research on the harmfulness of saturated fat. In this case, they don't share reasons, but they share a method of evaluation. (c) And they will certainly disagree about various social policies, such as marriage and abortion, because each group will have their own reli-

gious or secular reasons for supporting or opposing these policies, reasons that the others would not acknowledge as valid based on shared evaluative standards. This is because the reason affirmations are based on their unique evaluative standards, like the Christian Bible or the Muslim Koran. Only reason (a) is shared or shareable, reasons (a) and (b) are accessible, and reasons (a), (b), and (c) are intelligible.

So a legal norm is publicly justified when each person (at the right level of idealization) has sufficient justificatory reasons (shareable, accessible, or intelligible) to endorse the norm. This means that each person can see the legal norm as binding on her own conscience given that she has moral reason *by her own lights* to endorse it.

Here I will not wade into the waters of adopting a particular conception of public justification. However, I think an intelligible reasons standard is best for reconciliation because it allows for reconciliation without squelching diverse religious reasons for and against coercion. I also think that a moderate approach to idealization is best for reconciliation because it ties justificatory reasons more closely to real people than radical idealization. This raises the question of why we should idealize *at all* in developing a conception of public justification (Vallier 2019: 97–103). But, as noted above, idealization is justified by analyzing the presuppositions of our practice of moral accountability and trust. Reconciliation must be based on what persons see as good reasons, and not what they presently accept or reject (Gaus 2011: 232–59).

I will now connect the good of reconciliation and the ideal of public justification. We are reconciled to one another under shared political institutions when the rules that govern their exercise of political power are publicly justified to each person. This is because each person has reason to sign on to these shared moral rules for moral reasons. To begin the argument, imagine a society in a state of mere civic peace, a political *modus vivendi*. What are the relations between political groups?

Whatever social relations obtain, resentment and indignation will abound because the use of political power is not based in what all parties can see, on reflection, as morally right or just. In a *modus vivendi* order with a single coercive hegemon, marginalized groups will resent the hegemon because the hegemon forces them to acquiesce in what they regard as an immoral and unjust form of political life. They are bound to be angry, or at least despondent and prone to resentment, if they have been dominated for long periods of time. The dominated groups may look for opportunities to destabilize the regime through disobedience, and perhaps eventual reconquest. The hegemonic group, confident in their own righteousness, will view dominated groups as untrustworthy threats to the social order, since the hegemon suspects that the dominated group is subversive. In a *modus vivendi* order *without* a single hegemon, the

contest to become the hegemon will generate resentment. One or both parties will believe wrongdoing has occurred and rancor will reign. Reconciliation, as we shall see, is appropriate as a response to that resentment and perceived affront, and Christianity calls us to reconciliation where some perceive a wrong.

Note that I focus on a *perception* of wrongdoing or harm rather than an objective wrong. This is because different political groups are bound to disagree about whether wrongdoing has occurred. If a Marxist group has power over a classical liberal group and imposes socialism on them, the classical liberal group will resent the Marxist group because they think socialism is unjust in virtue of abolishing the right to private property. Similarly, if the classical liberal group tries to establish markets to work around the Marxist group, the Marxist group will resent the classical liberals as subversive. Reconciliation is called for in this case for *even if an objective wrong has not occurred*, but people reasonably think one has. Reconciliation is about restoring relationships when people are at odds, and not merely when they are at odds because one or more parties acted *objectively* wrongly.[10]

Imagine next that a *modus vivendi* order transitions into an order of publicly justified legal rules. We can now see how reconciliation arrives. Consider how the relations between persons have changed.

First, external behavior should change because each person will freely comply with the moral and legal rules of her society. Officials will act differently because they won't impose unjustified coercion on citizens who lose a political battle. Citizens of the majority will act differently because they will not dominate the minority group. And the minority group will conform to the terms of the peace for moral reasons. They will not disobey political rules when they can get away with it.

Second, we can expect changes in belief. If persons freely comply with publicly justified moral rules, the beliefs they hold about competing political groups should change. The fact that other groups freely comply with moral rules is good reason to believe that the other group is trustworthy and not evil or of bad will. Third, emotional changes should follow changes in belief. If each person freely complies with the moral rules of her society most of the time, resentment and indignation will no longer be appropriate. The groups have no rational basis for resenting each other given that they act morally according to rules endorsed by all. This implies a resolution of negative emo-

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10. One might worry that this reply means that public justification is only required when there is a perception of wrongdoing and not otherwise. That may seem like a major departure from standard public reason views, but it isn't. The ordinary progress of reasonable pluralism will lead people to become socially and politically at odds. However, if the shared rules of society are already publicly justified, then resentment will not occur. Conversely, if resentment is present, that is at least good evidence that there is some failure of public justification.

tions and attitudes. Fourth, persons will gradually adopt or resume positive emotions and attitudes, like social and political trust, because they will see that each person complies with legal rules for their own moral reasons, and so are trustworthy and of good will.

We can tentatively conclude that public justification is an excellent way for persons who fundamentally disagree about matters of normative importance to reconcile themselves to one another.

Now let's turn to public reasoning. Many in the public reason literature do not distinguish public reasoning from public justification, but we can distinguish them as follows (Vallier 2016b). Public reasoning is a *process* and public justification is an *outcome*. A public justification occurs when a social state is reached: each person has sufficient reason to endorse the relevant moral or legal norm. Public reasoning is a process by which public justification can be reached; it is how citizens indicate successful public justification occurred. Reasoning publicly with other persons may lead people to think that a legal norm *is* justified for them or persuade people to change their minds about the relevant legal norm such that the norm *becomes* justified.

Most public reason liberals take public reasoning to consist in the appeal to shared or shareable reasons, such as Rawls (2005: xxxvi), who held that public reasoning involves appealing only to reasons identified as such by a shared liberal political conception of justice (or by a member of the family of such conceptions). Thus, public reasoning is a process of appealing to reasons held by all suitably idealized members of the public. But Rawls did allow persons to appeal to diverse reasons derived from their comprehensive doctrines in some cases. So, public reasoning can also consist in unshared reasons, perhaps even intelligible reasons.[11] Public reasoning thereby appeals to idealization and conceptions of justificatory reasons, but to *reach* rather than *constitute* a public justification.

Public reasoning can reconcile us because our external behavior will change when we move from a *modus vivendi* order to a publicly justified polity. The external behavior change is based on the fact that each person engages in moral reasoning to persuade others by assuming that one's political opponents are of good will. The process of public reasoning is therefore a kind of signal: it demonstrates a good faith attempt to convince another person of one's political positions (Thrasher and Vallier 2015).[12] Public reasoning accordingly indicates a change in the beliefs of the public reasoner. The public reasoner has acquired the belief that the listener merits being given good reasons as

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11. Rawls 2005: 462 discusses Rawls's idea of reasoning by conjecture, which allows appeal to diverse, comprehensive reasons in limited circumstances.

12. Though in Thrasher and Vallier 2015, we argue that public reasons have limited usefulness as signals of assurance.

understood by the listener. Public reasoning can also change the listener's be-lief. The public listener will see the public reasoner as being of good will. The activity of public reasoning should, therefore, generate emotional change in the public reasoners and the public listeners, replacing negative emotions with positive ones. If citizens engage in sincere public reasoning, they can, for instance, quiet resentment and distrust and replace it with good will and social and political trust.

I conclude that public justification and public reasoning are ways of es-tablishing and pursuing the good of reconciliation among members of a polity subject to reasonable pluralism. But this only shows that public justification and public reasoning are *sufficient* for pursuing the good of reconciliation, not *necessary*.[13] If there are other ways of achieving reconciliation under condi-tions of reasonable pluralism, reconciliation alone can't ground a theory of public justification.

To show that public justification and public reasoning are necessary for reconciliation, we must focus on a society riven by reasonable pluralism. In such a society, we normally cannot expect agreement on shared principles or institutions. The main way in which reconciliation occurs without public justi-fication and public reasoning is by reacching consensus. However, reasonable pluralism makes a substantial agreement infeasible, such that reconciliation cannot rest on consensus for long.

Without public justification, we may only establish a thin form of tolera-tion where both sides allow one another a measure of liberty and respect to act according to their personal values (Philpott 2012). We will lose reconciliation to the extent that the hegemon tries to pressure and coerce the losing party into agreement on fundamental issues.

Now we must connect the ideas of public justification and public reason-ing to Christian commitments, particularly the Christian commitment to rec-onciliation. My aim is to develop a Christian account of reconciliation that can be endorsed on its own terms, but that can nonetheless link public justification and public reasoning to Christian theology.

IV. Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Hope in the Christian Scriptures

Forgiveness is necessary for reconciliation because a refusal to forgive indi-cates that resentment remains and that the relevant external behavior, beliefs, and attitudes of the potential forgiver have not changed. However, forgiveness is not sufficient for reconciliation; reconciliation with the forgiven may not be advisable for various reasons. We therefore need a reason to believe that we can achieve reconciliation following an act of forgiveness. We need a reason to

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13. I thank Paul Billingham for raising this objection.

hope. So, let us now explore the basis of forgiveness, reconciliation, and hope in the Christian Scriptures, and their interrelatedness.

Forgiveness is among the most important themes of the Christian Scriptures. Human beings are sinful and need God's forgiveness. And God provides humanity with a path towards being forgiven by Him. But God also places a great premium on human beings forgiving *each other*. After Jesus introduces the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6, Jesus says "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14–15; John 20:23 as well). Not only is forgiving other humans one of God's most important commands, God's forgiving *us* is dependent upon our forgiving others. Moreover, forgiveness is always required.[14] When Peter asks Jesus how often we must forgive those who wrong us, Jesus says "seventy-seven times" (Matthew 18:22; Luke 17:4), which is typically understood to mean that the duty to forgive is unlimited. This lesson is associated with the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, where Jesus once again directs His followers to forgive others. You must forgive your brother "from your heart" (Matthew 18:35). Jesus also claims that before offering sacrifices (which many Christians interpret as including partaking in the Eucharist) that one must forgive others: "And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses" (Mark 11:25). And again in Luke: "forgive, and you will be forgiven" (Luke 6:37). Paul echoes Jesus, arguing that if we have a complaint against someone, we must forgive each other, for "as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive" (Colossians 3:13).

Reconciliation is a central theme of the New Testament, though in all but one case (Matthew 5:24). Scripture speaks of reconciliation between *God* and man on account of Christ's sacrifice. But the Scriptures do provide a model for how human beings should relate to one another within the Church. We are not merely to relate as family, but as citizens of a kingdom (Philippians 3:20). And more strongly, we are to be unified in a profoundly intimate manner, as God and Jesus are unified (John 17:22). The Church is consistently referred to as the body of Christ, where we are "being built together into a dwelling place for God by the spirit" (Ephesians 2:22). God's salvation plan is to unite with sinful humanity as a single unit, fully reconciled to God in every part. But there can be no unity without reconciliation; if we have not changed our external behavior, beliefs, and emotions, we are still at odds. So unless we are reconciled to another, we cannot be united as a single body. If God's will is

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14. Though Richard Swinburne argues that forgiveness is always required only if the forgiven person repents. See Swinburne 1989.

to prevail, and His desire for union with humanity satisfied, then we must be reconciled to one another.

I would also argue, perhaps controversially, that the ministry of reconciliation discussed in 2 Corinthians 5:18–20 extends to reconciliation between persons. Paul argues that we are new creations in Christ, thanks to God, "who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. . . . Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us." The ministry of reconciliation preaches the reconciliation of God with each individual person, but since God wishes to relate to us as a single body, the ministry of reconciliation with God necessitates the reconciliation of each human being with every other human being.

Reconciliation with other persons is also central to Christian life because reconciliation is a necessary condition for loving one's neighbor. Aquinas argues that love involves two desires: a desire for the good of the beloved and a desire for the appropriate sort of union with them (Stump 2012: 91; Aquinas 2016: I-II, q.26, a.4). If we want to love others, we must not only will their good, but will union with them. And there is no union without between persons at odds over perceived wrongs unless they forgive one another and reconcile. So pursuing reconciliation is necessary for obeying the second love command. And consequently, pursuing reconciliation is necessary for obeying the first love command, since Jesus says that if we love God, we will obey His commandments (John 14:15) and He commands forgiving and loving others.

Reconciliation following forgiveness must begin with hope that reconciliation is possible. We should not merely open ourselves to reconciliation, but we should hope for and seek reconciliation when we think it is available and advisable. There will certainly be circumstances where reconciliation is not advisable, but in the normal case, reconciliation must be our aim. And even if we cannot in fact be reconciled to others in this life, we should still live *as though* this were possible, and a decision to live as though reconciliation were possible also requires some degree of hope.

One may reasonably wonder whether the rationality of hope can be extended to political reconciliation. We might be *rationally* pessimistic based on observing failed attempts at reconciliation in the past. But if hope for reconciliation isn't justified, then perhaps Christians could be justified in settling for something less than reconciliation, like a *modus vivendi*. In response, I believe that this hope can be justified on the same grounds that other forms of theological hope are justified, by appealing to the relationship between a believer and God. The believer can hope that God will act in order to ensure reconciliation in the future even if reconciliation has failed in the past, much as Christians

rationally hope that non-Christians can be saved even if they have seen many non-Christians reject Christianity.[15]

V. Reconciliation with Non-Christians

Christians should be reconciled with one another in the body of Christ. But we should also seek reconciliation with non-Christians. We can infer this from the command to love our neighbor because our neighbor includes the non-Christian, as the Parable of the Good Samaritan makes clear (Luke 10:25–37). We should hope for reconciliation with the non-Christian neighbor for similar reasons. Perhaps this is part of living peaceably with all others (Romans 12:18).

I can see no reason to think that our aim of reconciliation, as enabled by forgiveness and required by love, should be limited to our local interactions with non-Christians. We have good reason to seek reconciliation between groups of people, including people of different faiths and ideologies. Reconciliation may not *in fact* be possible between these groups, but Christians still have good reason to hope that reconciliation is possible. For this reason, we should not follow the agonist in downgrading our expectation of reconciliation with others, counting only on establishing civic peace instead. The goal of social and political life is to establish the Kingdom of God through the love of God and neighbor. Since doing so requires pursuing reconciliation, we must believe that reconciliation is available to us.

Some may complain that reconciliation in Christian theology is a merely theological concept. Reconciliation is a work of God, not man, and applies only to the relationship between God and the Christian believer. For this reason, reconciliation does not extend to the relationship between Christians and non-Christians. It therefore cannot be pursued by Christians without God's help. In reply, let me stress that God has entrusted Christians with a ministry of reconciliation that we pursue with the understanding that God supports us in that ministry. Since this ministry is initiated by God, and carried out by us with His help, and reconciliation is preached to non-Christians, then we should be able to extend reconciliation to relationships with non-Christians. We can, with God's aid, broaden the ministry of theological reconciliation to include social and political reconciliation.

However, we need not hope for agreement on the authentic human good. Scripture only gives us reason to love our neighbor and so to hope for recon-

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15. Here I advance an argument much like that offered by Robert Audi's notion of "theo-ethical equilibrium" where God organizes the world such that we can access non-religious rationales for various moral principles. I do not assume God organizes the world such that we are able to access non-religious rationales; instead, I merely claim that Christians are rational in hoping that God has organized the world so that we can establish a kind of moral peace. Audi 2000: 135–37.

ciliation. But loving our neighbor does not require *agreeing* with him about what the good life consists in or insisting that he agree with us. Moreover, there is no Scriptural injunction to agree with the neighbor.[16]

So if we are to love persons of different faiths and different ideologies, then we must hope to be reconciled with them. And if reconciliation with other groups requires public reasoning and public justification, then by extension, Christians should engage in public reasoning and seek public justification. We can now formalize the argument:

1. Christians have a duty to love our neighbors, which includes all human beings.

2. If we have a duty to love another person, we should hope that reconciliation with that person is possible (when a perceived wrong has occurred), and we have a duty reconcile ourselves with that person when possible.

3. Christians should hope that reconciliation with other human beings is possible (when a perceived wrong has occurred), and Christians have a duty to reconcile themselves with other human beings when possible (1, 2).

4. Reconciliation with other human beings in mass politics requires public reasoning with others and public justification to them (and refraining from coercion otherwise).

5. Christians should hope that public reasoning with and public justification to others is possible (when a perceived wrong has occurred), and Christians have a duty to engage in public reasoning with others and a duty to establish public justification to others or refrain from political coercion (3, 4).

I have already defended premises 1, 2, and 4, and since 3 follows from 1 and 2, and 5 follows from 3 and 4, we have a case for my thesis.

But I do want to entertain a challenge to premise 2 here. Imagine a society with clearly defined abusers and victims, say in post-apartheid South Africa. It makes sense to think that white abusers have an obligation to reconcile with their victims. But it is implausible to think that black victims have an obligation to reconcile with their abuses, even if both parties are Christian. One reason for this is that it seems harder for victims than abusers to reconcile, which means the duty to reconcile will fall harder on the oppressed than the oppres-

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16. There are exhortations for Christians to agree with one another, such as Philippians 2:2: "complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind," though this is only applied to a single church, in contrast to loving one's neighbor, which Jesus makes clear applies to all.

sors. But that seems backward. The duties of the oppressed should be weaker than the duties of the oppressor. We might be skeptical of any moral rules that generate tougher obligations for victims of abuse than for abusers, but an obligation to reconcile generates precisely this sort of obligation-pattern.[17] So perhaps premise 2 is only partly true.

Here I think the proper response is to adjust the conditions under which the obligations of the abused should be discharged rather than weakening the obligation. For instance, abusers must take active steps to meet with and reconcile with the abused, but perhaps the abused are only obligated to respond after a certain amount of time, or once a certain degree of personal healing has occurred. And perhaps the obligation isn't for the abused to *approach* the abuser. But the duty to pursue reconciliation could be activated once the requisite degree of psychic healing has occurred, and in response to an indication that the abuser will take the first steps towards reconciliation.

Note that premise 5 implies that we should only coerce based on publicly justified legal rules and refrain from coercing persons to follow unjustified rules. But Christopher Eberle has argued that public reasoning exhausts what we owe others. When public justification fails following public reasoning, we may permissibly coerce others. So, I now turn to address his argument, as well as some related concerns.

VI. Eberle's Challenge

Most public reason liberals hold that, if John uses public reasoning to attempt to persuade Reba to endorse his coercive proposal, and he fails to persuade Reba, that John should not attempt to impose the proposal on Reba through political coercion. This does not imply that John should restrain himself from imposing upon Reba if she objects to his proposal for bad reasons. Rather, John is forbidden from coercing Reba if he comes to rationally believe that Reba has justificatory reasons strong enough to defeat the coercive proposal. This means there is no prohibition on imposing defeated proposals on others.

Eberle (2002: 18) has persuasively shown that many of the arguments in favor of not imposing unjustified coercion on others only favor the weaker proposal that one should *pursue* public justification in public discussion. And if pursuit fails, Eberle argues, one may coerce anyway. Eberle uses his arguments to construct an *ideal of conscientious engagement*, which holds the following regarding a citizen who believes in respecting other persons as free and equal:

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17. I thank Toni Alimi for this objection.

(1) She will pursue a high degree of rational justification for the claim that a favored coercive policy is morally appropriate.

(2) She will withhold support from a given coercive policy if she can't acquire a sufficiently high degree of rational justification for the claim that that policy is morally appropriate.

(3) She will attempt to communicate to her compatriots her reasons for coercing them.

(4) She will pursue public justification of her favored coercive policies.

(5) She will listen to her compatriots' evaluation of her reasons for her favored coercive policies with the intention of learning from them about the moral (im)propriety of those policies.

(6) She will not support any policy on the basis of a rationale that denies the dignity of her compatriots (Eberle 2002: 105).

Eberle's position is attractive to public reason liberals given its emphasis on public reasoning, but public reason liberals part ways with Eberle's claim that one can coerce if public justification fails.

It may surprise the reader, but I think Eberle's ideal is too demanding. I think the best conception of public justification allows *voters* to use political mechanisms to impose coercion on others, given that individual votes in most conditions have no impact on whether anyone is coerced.[18] But I do think that people who have a non-trivial effect on political outcomes, such as political officials, must refuse to use political coercion if they believe their favored proposals cannot be publicly justified.

So my question is whether political officials, political parties, influential pundits, special interest groups, lobbyists, and judges should refrain from supporting coercion when they come to believe that their policies cannot be publicly justified.

On my view, we should forgo coercion when public justification fails because reconciliation is spoiled by such coercion. This is because the perception of the coercer of the coercee will undermine the conditions of reconciliation. Recall that reconciliation involves four kinds of alterations of relations between persons: changes in external behavior, changes in belief, resolving negative emotions and attitudes, and adopting or resuming positive emotions and attitudes. But in the case where the coercer knows that the coercee can see no adequate moral reason to impose the coercion on herself, she gives the coercee

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18. There are still good moral reasons to follow Eberle's idea of conscientious engagement, but these reasons are not grounded in a public justification requirement. They're instead grounded more directly in the dignity of the person and the value of high-quality democratic deliberation.

grounds for doubt about the coercer, doubt that undermines reconciliation by creating resentment. Again, the main reason for resentment is that the coercee will view the coercion used against her as an alien imposition and as harmful and unjust. These negative emotions will undermine the positive emotions and attitudes about the coercer held by the coercee.

To illustrate, imagine, that a conservative Christian political official attempts to ban same-sex marriage and so undermines a variety of benefits that same-sex couples have come to rely upon via state recognition of their marriage (Eberle 2002: 3). The conservative Christian recognizes that same-sex couples have adequate reason to oppose his support for restricting same-sex marriage, but he is prepared to revoke legal recognition of their marriage anyway, as well as undermining the benefits these couples receive. Same-sex couples are bound to see this action as just cause for deep bitterness and resentment against the political officials who imposed this policy. The same-sex couples, therefore, are no longer reconciled to the conservative Christian political officials. This is true *even if* the political official follows the ideal of conscientious engagement. The ideal requires public reasoning, so resentment will be mitigated to some degree, but good reasons for resentment remain. It is as if the coercer said, "I listened to your concerns, but I don't care enough stop."

We can construct parallel cases where progressive politicians force their values on conservative religious citizens, such as proposals to fund abortion with taxes. For the pro-life citizen, this policy forces her to finance the destruction of innocent human life. Even if the pro-choice political official attempts to convince the pro-life citizens, pro-life citizens will still have excellent ground for resentment because they can see no reason from their perspective to spend taxpayer dollars to kill the unborn. So, I tentatively conclude, that because Eberle's ideal of conscientious engagement only involves public *reasoning* and not achieving a state of public justification, that following his ideal falls short of establishing political reconciliation. Reconciliation necessitates, in the normal case, a refusal to coerce when public reasoning and public justification fails.

But if Eberle is right, the coercee's resentment may be irrational because the coercer did her level best to justify her position. So why not think that pursuing justification is enough to treat others with respect? It is not enough because the person imposed upon is alienated by the coercion, and rationally sees the coercer as having an attitude of bad will. For she fails to recognize that the coercee is owed reciprocal respect, and respect to not merely be addressed, but to be treated as free and equal.

Here's a related objection. Eberle acknowledges that the achievement of public justification is good. It is just a good that can be *overridden* by other considerations, such as the need to prevent grave suffering and severe injus-

tice. Thus, it is unclear why the value of public justification should have over-riding force. We might think the same is true of the value of reconciliation as a grounding value for public justification. If reconciliation grounds public justi-fication for the Christian, then in cases where reconciliation seems impossible or inadvisable, we can ignore public justification or set it aside.

This is a serious objection that I cannot resolve here. Elsewhere I defend the priority of public justification drawn from my social trust foundation for public justification (Vallier 2019: 73–75). If my argument is successful, and given that reconciliation requires restoring trust, my arguments apply here.

Here's an additional related objection. Perhaps in some cases, we must act as Eberle recommends because there are no publicly justifiable proposals; the set of potentially justified proposals is empty. In that case, there may be no alternative to coercion, in which case hoping for public justification will be counterproductive, since in the process we will be tempted to blame the other party for the set being empty, when in fact the emptiness of the set is no one's fault. In that case, reconciliation requires the sober recognition that one or the other party must capture political power, and perhaps reconciliation should be based on that solemn recognition, rather than continued cajoling for an eligible option.[19] But I wonder whether this lament is a kind of reconciliation, rather than simply learning how to live with persons that we cannot be reconciled with. Christians must always hope that the use of violence is avoidable, and perhaps they must have reasons of faith to believe as much. There is almost always decisive reason not to coerce when it cannot be justified to multiple points of view, as the moral costs of coercion are quite high. Perhaps, in the end, the alternative to coercion is worse; I cannot rule that out. But I insist that in this case reconciliation is not possible, or at least not feasible, and not that reconciliation *consists* in the lament or recognition of the impossibility of public justification.

VII. Conclusion

I have outlined an approach to political theology that is a *via media* between Christian agonism and perfectionism. Christian reconciliationism aims at the good of reconciliation between persons, which is simultaneously more ambi-tious than the agonist good of civic peace, and less ambitious than the perfec-tionist pursuit of the full, authentic human good. It avoids the vices of agonist and perfectionist approaches by seeking an agreement on shared moral rules that falls short of a substantive agreement on the nature of the good life. Chris-tian reconciliationism can therefore achieve a greater degree of stability and

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19. I thank Marilie Coetsee for raising this important objection.

social and political trust than agonist approaches while avoiding the authoritarianism and paternalism of the perfectionist approach.

I then explained that the idea of reconciliation is an appropriate response to resentment, and involves changes in external behavior, changes in belief, resolving negative emotions and attitudes, as well as adopting or resuming positive emotions and attitudes. I argued that reconciliation in politics can be achieved through public reasoning and public justification. Public justification gives persons *grounds* for making the changes that constitution reconciliation; public reasoning gives persons a *method* of pursuing reconciliation.

The third step of my argument was to ground the idea of reconciliation in the moral values emphasized by the Christian Scriptures. I argued that Christians have good reason to pursue reconciliation with others, and not just other Christians. I argued that the pursuit of reconciliation is not too ambitious because Christians can reasonably hope that reconciliation is always available to us if others are willing. I also argued that we need not hope for more ambitious goods than reconciliation because agreement on the authentic human good seems truly fantastic in any open society. Fortunately, being reconciled with our neighbor does not require agreement on the good life.[20]

I then argued, contra Eberle, that engaging in public reasoning alone, without public justification, is insufficient for reconciliation.

I hope to have convinced the reader that Christian reconciliationism is a coherent and potentially attractive *via media* between agonist and perfectionist approaches, as it may avoid the flaws of both approaches and comport well with Christian theological and exegetical principles. But there is more work to be done.[21]

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20. A natural objection here is to challenge whether hoping for agreement on the good is in fact much less feasible than reconciliation. Perhaps they are equally feasible or infeasible.

21. I am grateful to attendees at three conferences, one at Wheaton College in 2017, one at Oxford in 2018, and one at Notre Dame in 2019 for comments on this paper. I am especially grateful to Bryan McGraw, Christopher Eberle, Paul Billingham, Toni Alimi, and Marilie Coetsee for detailed discussion and commentary.

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