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Portin, Fredrik

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Fredrik Portin, postdoctoral scholar at the University of Gothenburg (Department of Literature, History of Ideas, and Religion) & the Åbo Akademi University (Department of Theological Ethics and Philosophy of Religion). Fredrik Portin, University of Gothenburg/LIR, Box 200, 40530 Gothenburg, Sweden, fredrik.portin@abo.fi.

Liturgies In a Plural Age

The Concept of Liturgy In the Works of William T Cavanaugh and James K A Smith

In the article the political theologians William T Cavanaugh's and James K A Smith's understanding of liturgy is analyzed and compared. In an effort to engage with public life from the perspective of theology, they both develop an understanding of liturgy that does not restrict it to a practice within a Christian context. Instead, they argue that liturgies are practices that also are observable within secular contexts. From this analysis, two understandings of liturgy is highlighted – liturgy as resistance and liturgy as dialogue. In conclusion, the article discusses what implications these understandings of liturgy have for the Church when confronting a contemporary pluralistic public context.

Due to a generally accepted liberal belief in the separation of church and state, an important task for political theologians has been to develop theological concepts that legitimize the Church as a public actor and that highlight the recourses that the Christian tradition possesses for striving towards the common good. The political theologians William T Cavanaugh and James K A Smith have made such an effort by, among other things, discussing the concept of liturgy.

In many ways, Cavanaugh's and Smith's understanding of liturgy challenges a commonly accepted understanding within the Church, among academics and in general speech; that the liturgy is something that the Church upholds, the common worship of Christians centered on the Eucharist. Cavanaugh and Smith, however, do not restrict liturgy to a Christian context, but also apply the concept to non-Christian contexts.

This article will analyze how Cavanaugh and Smith have developed the concept of liturgy and discuss the implications their respective understandings of liturgy have for understanding the Church's liturgy as a political practice. As they develop the concept of liturgy in a similar manner, their understandings of liturgy have many similarities. Furthermore, as they are both affiliated with postliberal theology and radical orthodoxy, they also to some extent share the same political theological outlook. However, as I will show, they develop the concept of liturgy differently. While Smith concludes that liturgy is an essential characteristic in all humans, Cavanaugh understands liturgy as something that more or less has been "stolen" from the Church.

An initial point needs to be made. The article will primarily highlight what *conceptual* implications Cavanaugh's and Smith's understanding of the liturgy has for the Church's engagement with the public sphere. It should therefore not be understood as a summary of Cavanaugh's and Smith's respective political theologies. Instead, the purpose of the analysis is to highlight two divergent political theological positions as it pertains to liturgy, which I describe as *liturgy as resistance* and *liturgy as dialogue*. These positions are in turn highlighted in order to understand the implications and to give constructive suggestions for the Church's (liturgical) engagement with an increasingly pluralistic public sphere.

I. Cavanaugh and the Parody of the Modern State

William T Cavanaugh is a political theologian whose primary academic efforts can be understood as a critical review of the modern, liberal state's hegemonic position in Western societies. Cavanaugh discusses in particular how the life that the modern state enables is in conflict with the life of the Church. His main point is not that all attempts by different actors to organize themselves for the general good needs to be challenged –

statehood in itself is not the problem. He instead wants to question the role that the modern state has acquired during modernity, where it, according to him, offers an alternative soteriology to the Church. Due to the hegemonic position of the modern state, salvation is therefore no longer communicated principally through the life of the Church. Instead salvation is acquired through the reliance on the modern state's ability to rescue its citizens from harm.

According to Cavanaugh, the modern state has been able to gain this salvific role because the life of the Church has been reduced into a private concern, which, according to liberal logic, entails that the Church should not play any essential part in imagining the common good.¹ This has led to the liberal perception that church and state should be separated into different spheres of authority, where the Church is assigned to inhabit a "religious" sphere, while the modern state inhabits a "secular" sphere. This is furthermore, according to this liberal logic, a prerequisite for the modern state to be able to neutrally mediate between different actors within society, thus making an endeavor towards the common good possible.²

¹ It is important to emphasize that this description of modern liberal states is somewhat exaggerated, as the emergence of modern states does not necessarily mean a reduction of the public influence of religions. For this reason, it is possible to witness a larger public presence of religion in some modern states and a lesser in some modern states. See José Casanova, "Rethinking Secularization: A Global Comparative Perspective," *The Hedgehog Review*, Spring/Summer (2006). Cavanaugh is aware that different states developed different models for their rule. Therefore, his description should not be seen as an exhaustive description of how a modern liberal state functions, but merely as a heuristic tool that makes it possible to discern, as he expresses it, "the pathologies which modern states seem to share [...] and the common stories which serve to enact these pathologies." William T. Cavanaugh, "The City: Beyond Secular Parodies," in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock & Graham Ward (London: Routledge, 1999), 183; William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism* (London: T & T Clark Ltd, 2002), 10.

² In a similar fashion, the political scientist Rajeev Bhargava has argued that liberal democracies emphasize a "principled distance" between religion and politics. He explains that this distance first entails that politics is understood as neutral only to the extent that there exists a distance between religion and politics: "Only when religion has been distanced from politics can the state do one's best to help or to hinder different sorts of believers and unbelievers in an equal degree." Second, this distance entails a general agreement that religion and politics occupy different spheres of existence and should therefore not intrude on each other's borders: "The world of worship and congregation, of prayer and conscience must not be intruded upon by politicians and bureaucrats. Likewise, deeply religious people, in particular, leaders of religious communities must not tread on the toes of politicians." Rajeev Bhargava, "What is Secularism for?," in *Secularism and its Critics*, ed. Rajeev Bhargava (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 520.

Politics thus became understood as an activity that is centered on the modern state, while religiosity is accredited to the Church and other religions. Cavanaugh, on the other hand, argues that in order to be able to think correctly about the Church's public presence, it is imperative that the political nature of the Church is recognized. Furthermore, the idea that the modern state functions as a neutral mediator between different social actors only obscures how the modern state establishes itself as a direct challenger to the Church.³ Such a challenge is realized in two ways.

First, Cavanaugh explains that the modern state develops and defends a conflicting narrative to the salvific narrative of the Church. The salvific narrative of the Church is, as Cavanaugh describes it, a story of reconciliation after the fall. The consequence of sin is, according to him, individualism that separates man not only from God but also from each other: "Humankind was created for communion, but is everywhere divided."⁴ Cavanaugh explains that the state, too, claims that there exists a separation between individuals – a line of thought that is evident in the works of Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Locke. However, while the Church sees this separation as a scandal, the state embraces individualism and tries to deepen it, mainly by freeing the individual by e.g. judicial and economic means from those (mainly religious) traditions that force the individual into subjugation.⁵ The modern state thus imagines salvation as individual emancipation, in that it frees the individual from the constraint of tradition. Accordingly, according to Cavanaugh's reasoning, the modern state challenges the Church's effort to gather humanity into communion before God by not only valuing the separation between individuals, but also seeking to widen it.

³ William T. Cavanaugh, "Discerning. Politics and Reconciliation," in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas & Samuel Wells (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), 196.

⁴ Cavanaugh, "The City," 182; Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*, 9.

⁵ Cavanaugh, "The City," 183-8, 192. See also Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*, 10-4.

Second, according to Cavanaugh, the modern state marginalizes the salvific narrative of the Church by emphasizing that humanity needs to be rescued from religious violence. Cavanaugh explains that according to a modern secularist narrative that is prevalent within Western liberal societies, violent conflict is inherent to religiosity. This narrative has developed from the experience of the 30-year war in Europe (1618-1648), which was according to this secularist narrative a result of conflicts between different Christian denominations after the reformation. This war would commonly be understood as the religious wars and, in order to prevent similar wars in the future, the modern state had to take on the role of mediator between various religious factions in order to prevent religion from causing further devastation. The modern state consequently became the institution that was able to save humanity from religious violence, thus further underlining its salvific role in society.⁶

If it is possible to make a separation between religion and politics, it is conceivable to argue that the liberal modern state is not in conflict with the Church. Then the Church and the modern state would be engaged in different practices – the modern state in politics and the Church in religion. Therefore, as long as they do not intrude on each other’s spheres of authority, there would be no need to perceive of them as opponents. However, Cavanaugh emphasizes that a conflict between the Church and the modern state becomes evident when the salvific role of the modern state is highlighted. Consequently, while the Church establishes that freedom from sin is given through the God who made himself known in Jesus

⁶ See Ibid., 20-31; Cavanaugh, “The City,” 188; William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 123-141; William T. Cavanaugh, “Destroying the Church to Save It: Intra-Christian Persecution and the Modern State,” in *Witness of the Body: The Past, Present, and Future of Christian Martyrdom*, ed. Michael L. Budde & Karen Scott (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 125-6. This modern secularist narrative of the religious wars is still being retold today. But as Cavanaugh points out, it is a misleading narrative. He argues that religion was made a scapegoat for a war that was more about territorial conflicts than religious animosity. See Cavanaugh, “The City,” 190-1; Cavanaugh, *Myth of*, 141-155; Cavanaugh, “Destroying the,” 126-142.

Christ, freedom is given through the modern state by fully accepting the sovereignty of the state. A *Leviathan*, to use Hobbes' description of the sovereign state, thus takes the place of God in public life.⁷

In this way, Cavanaugh shows that the concerns of the Church and the modern state are not distinguishable from each other, as they both offer two different and mutually exclusive soteriologies. It is furthermore possible to argue that the modern state's soteriology, because of secularization, has become widely accepted, while the soteriology of the Church has lost its influence, thus transferring the public authority of the Church to the modern state.

The modern state has for this reason also acquired the role that the Church previously had in public life. There has occurred, as Cavanaugh describes it, a "migration of the holy."⁸ This meant, among other things, that the modern state appropriated some of the public functions that the Church previously had – performing weddings, creating laws, maintaining schools and hospitals, etc.⁹ However, the migration is most clearly discernable in how the modern state imitates the Church's ability to ritualistically gather its members into a collective body.¹⁰ Or as Cavanaugh expresses it: how the modern state has adapted the Church's liturgical expressions.

When Cavanaugh describes liturgy, he references the etymological foundation of the term, the Greek word *leitourgia*. *Leitourgia* is a union of the words *laos* meaning "people" and *ergon* meaning "work." From this it is possible to acquire the meaning "the work of the people" or "public work."¹¹ If liturgy is the work of the people, Cavanaugh reasons that

⁷ Cavanaugh, "The City," 186-8; Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*, 15-20.

⁸ Cf. John Bossy, *Christianity in the West 1400-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 153-171.

⁹ See Cavanaugh, "The City," 191-2; Cavanaugh, "Discerning," 204-5; William T. Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 28-9, 51-5.

¹⁰ Cavanaugh, "The City," 190.

¹¹ William T. Cavanaugh, 'The Work of the People as Public Work: The Social Significance of the Liturgy' in *Institute of Liturgical Studies Occasional Papers Paper 6* (2008). It is worth pointing out that the term was not originally used to describe the Christian rite. Even before the spread of Christianity, the term was used by ancient Greeks to describe the public service that a city demanded from some of its citizens. It could be anything

liturgy can be understood as all forms of work that create and maintain a certain people. Then liturgy is understood as the ritualistic behavior that creates a community where one would not otherwise exist. Cavanaugh finds further support for this line of thought by referring to the liturgical scholar Alexander Schmemmann's definition of liturgy, who understands liturgy as "an action by which a group of people become something corporately which they had not been as a mere collection of individuals – a whole greater than the sum of its parts."¹²

Cavanaugh uses this insight to argue that the modern state not only has developed an opposing soteriology to the soteriology of the Church. It has also imitated the Church's practical-liturgical foundations.¹³ Cavanaugh writes:

There is general agreement that we live in an unliturgical age, and in many ways that is true. The rites and customs that structured the hours, days, and seasons of traditional societies have largely faded in the face of Western individual freedoms. Where this generalization does not apply, however [...] is in the public life of the citizen. Here modern societies are every bit as "liturgical" as traditional ones.¹⁴

Why, then, does the modern state need liturgy? Cavanaugh argues that it is because the modern state does, in fact, not exist. If you wanted to prove that a state existed, you might point out, for example, some buildings or a tax form. Cavanaugh would then stress that you only have managed to scratch the surface of what constitutes a state. The only reason why it is possible to believe that certain buildings and tax forms are meaningful parts of public life is because you have accepted the sovereignty of the modern state. Generally speaking, just as

from organizing gymnastic competitions (*gymnasiarchia*) to paying off the city debt. However, it would last till the second century before the term was used to describe the Christian rite. For the etymology of liturgy, see Giorgio Agamben, *Opus Dei: An Archaeology of Duty*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 1-26; Keith F. Pecklers, *Worship* (London: Continuum, 2003), 13.

¹² Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, second edition (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973 [1963]), 25. See also Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*, 83; Cavanaugh, "Discerning," 202. Although Cavanaugh, through Schmemmann's definition, sees an opportunity to develop an understanding of liturgy that also incorporates non-Christian practices, it is uncertain whether Schmemmann himself would have accepted such an application of his definition. If you read Schmemmann's *For the Life of the World* (1963) from which the quote is taken, he does not express that liturgy could be understood as anything other than practices within the Church. See also James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 90.

¹³ Cavanaugh, *Migrations of*, 115-6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 116.

the Church forms a body because its members share a common social imaginary (to use the phrase popularized by Charles Taylor)¹⁵ that is centered around God, the citizens of the modern state form a body because they share a common social imaginary that is centered around the sovereignty of the state. The point that Cavanaugh consequently wants to make is not that the state is a fantasy that does not have any concrete expression in society – our experience undoubtedly proves the opposite. The point is instead that buildings, tax forms, etc. lack relevance if they are not connected to a common belief in the sovereignty of the state. This belief is consequently fundamental, according to Cavanaugh, in order for the state to exist and for it to be able to exercise power over its citizens.¹⁶

This is the reason why liturgies are important for the state. By participating in the liturgies of the modern state – e.g. singing the national anthem, receiving a public education, hanging up the nation’s flag, filling out tax forms, voting, rooting for the national team during a sporting event, and celebrating a nation’s independence day – the modern state creates a sense for the nation. Thus, by gathering its citizens around different liturgies, it is possible for the citizen to imagine the sovereignty of the state by acting as if it existed, which consequently makes it possible for the modern state to acquire a political body. Cavanaugh adds that once the social imaginary of the modern state has been embedded into the public consciousness, the modern state has the power to make citizens do almost anything, even go to war to kill and be killed to protect it.¹⁷

By emphasizing the liturgical underpinning of the modern state, Cavanaugh is able to highlight what one could call a “religious” element of the modern state.¹⁸ Because both the

¹⁵ Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (London: Duke University Press, 2004).

¹⁶ William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998); Cavanaugh, *Migrations of*, 116.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 116-9; Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 57. See also Cavanaugh, *Migrations of*, 7-45.

¹⁸ However, as Cavanaugh points out, the modern state can never admit its religious underpinnings, as that would expose the modern state to critique. *Ibid.*, 119.

modern state and the Church can be described as religious, it becomes easier to perceive of the modern state as a challenger to the Church. As the modern state's liturgies create a social imaginary that challenges the practical and narrative conditions of the Church, Cavanaugh even goes as far as to argue that the life that the modern state enables is, from a Christian perspective, a distortion of a "true" life.

Cavanaugh argues this point by analyzing Saint Augustine's description of the two cities in *De civitate Dei*. Cavanaugh explains that within the city of God – which Augustine identifies with the Church – the true order for the world is imagined, while the worldly city – for Augustine it was the Roman Empire – imagines a false order for the world. Cavanaugh associates the worldly city with the modern state, and therefore argues that the modern state, as the worldly city, offers a false order, too. For this reason, the liturgical life of the modern state becomes a "parody" of the liturgical life of the Church. Accordingly, the modern state imitates the liturgical foundations of the Church, but does it poorly, as its liturgy is not founded on a true narrative of human division and humanity's reunion in Christ.¹⁹

The Church's liturgy, in turn, creates a body from a true liturgy. According to Cavanaugh, the Church is through its liturgy able to imagine the kingdom of God, as Christians are given a "foretaste" of the heavenly meal through the Eucharist (Matt 22:1-14, Luke 14:15-24). Consequently, through the liturgy it becomes meaningful to imagine the Church as a reconciled body – the body of Christ. According to Cavanaugh, as a body that is differentiated from the body that the modern state gathers, the Church is able in its liturgical life to present an alternative to the life that the modern state offers. Therefore, the Church's liturgy also is a form of resistance in relation to the soteriology of the modern state. Through

¹⁹ See Cavanaugh, "The City," 194-5; Cavanaugh, "Discerning," 206-7.

its liturgy, Christians live lives that are attuned to the Christian narrative, which in turn reveals and criticizes the parody of the modern state.²⁰ Cavanaugh writes:

The liturgy is more than symbolic. The communal body of people that is formed by the liturgy is meant to embody the politics of reconciliation, the politics of Jesus, in the world.²¹

Cavanaugh's description of liturgy thus points to an understanding of liturgy where it is not reduced to a practice within the Church. Instead, liturgy is also a practice within modern states. But by contrast, the liturgy of the modern state, according to Cavanaugh, is a parody of the Church's liturgy. It is a bad copy of the life of the Church, as it forms a body that doesn't profess any salvation from the division of humanity. Accordingly, the church has a responsibility to resist the false soteriology of the modern state by liturgically living a life that makes it possible to imagine reconciliation.

II. Smith and *Homo Liturgicus*

James K A Smith is part of the Reformed tradition and his research can be understood as an effort to critically review contemporary society from Christian narratives and practices.²² One of the reasons why he develops the concept of liturgy is partly because he wants to establish the concept within a Reformed tradition where the term has often been

²⁰ Ibid., 202-5; Cavanaugh, "The City," 194-7; Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*, 46-52. Cavanaugh gives an example of how the Church can resist the modern state's liturgy in his book *Torture and Eucharist* (1998). There he discusses how the Church in Chile through, among other things, the Eucharist actively resisted the Pinochet regime. The regime systematically tortured Chileans and created in this way, as Cavanaugh describes it, "liturgies of fear." By refusing communion to those who tortured – many of whom were Christians – the Church clearly asserted that it did not tolerate the politics of the state. Instead, the Church emphasized reconciliation – something that was impossible between those who torture and their victims – as a necessary element in a true politics.

²¹ Cavanaugh, "Discerning," 219.

²² See James K.A. Smith, "Secular Liturgies and the Prospect for a 'Post-Secular' Sociology of Religion," in *The Post-Secular in Question: Religion in Contemporary Society*, ed. Philip S. Gorski, David Kyumam Kim, John Torpey & Jonathan VanAntwerpen (London: New York University Press, 2012), 2-7.

marginalized,²³ partly to highlight a religious dimension in secular ritualistic behavior.²⁴ The main feature in Smith's understanding of liturgy is describing it as an essential part of being human, thus arguing that man is a *homo liturgicus*.

Smith is critical of what he argues is a modern understanding of religion, where it is perceived as a worldview. As such, religion is primarily understood as a collection of theoretical-cognitive assertions, which entails that the life of the Church is reduced to an ability to "think correctly." In order to get away from this worldview-emphasis, Smith contrasts the understanding of man as a thinking creature with man as a *loving* creature.²⁵

Based on a reading of Saint Augustine,²⁶ Smith argues that humans by nature are guided by desire. This furthermore entails, according to Smith, that a person's life will by nature be directed towards an object of his or her desires – a *telos*.²⁷ Smith emphasizes that a *telos* cannot be understood as a collection of theoretical-cognitive assertions, but should rather be understood as a vision of the world at its best that is, more or less consciously, narratively and practically expressed. It is a vision of the good life that, as he writes, "captures our hearts and imaginations not by providing a set of rules or ideas, but by painting a picture of what it looks like for us to flourish and live well."²⁸ He further claims that this is why such visions "[are most powerfully communicated] in stories, legends, myths, plays, novels, and films rather than dissertation, messages, and monographs."²⁹

²³ James K.A. Smith, "The Devil Has all the Best Stories," in *Encounter, ABC Radio National*, 7 July (2012).

²⁴ Smith, "Secular Liturgies," 175.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 167-9; Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 32-34, 41-46; James K.A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 6-8, 10-1. Cf. James K.A. Smith, *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 8-9.

²⁶ For Smith's use of Augustine, see Smith, *Awaiting the King*, 43-52.

²⁷ For Augustine, it was natural that this *telos* was God, something that becomes apparent in his famous phrase "You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1:1.

²⁸ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 53.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 52-5. See also James K.A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 62-79; James K.A. Smith, *Discipleship in the Present Tense. Reflections on Faith and Culture* (Grand Rapids: The Calvin Collage Press, 2013), 47-58; Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 103-124.

As desires are not only expressed through the intellect – not even primarily through the intellect, according to Smith’s reasoning³⁰ – he highlights practice as an important element in man’s pursuit of a certain *telos*. According to him, a *telos* cannot be pursued by thinking in a certain way. Instead, he argues that it is by *moving* in a certain way that it is possible to strive towards a specific *telos*. For this reason, it becomes important to understand which patterns of action enable the pursuit of a *telos*.³¹

This process resembles an act of love. When a person loves, according to Smith, he or she expresses a form of knowledge that transcends a strictly theoretical-cognitive approach to existence. Love is accordingly a pre-cognitive action. Specifically, it is in the act of love that a person directs his or her action towards the object of his or her love. Smith writes:

We are primordially and essentially agents of love, which takes the structure of desire or longing. We are essentially and ultimately desiring animals, which is simply to say that we are essentially and ultimately lovers.³²

The point that Smith wants to make is that it is not enough to love from a distance. If it truly is love, the person will be drawn towards the object of his or her love and will endeavor to act in a way that brings or him or her closer to it. That is why practices need to be emphasized, as they make this endeavor possible. The pursuit of a *telos* can therefore, according to Smith, be described as an endeavor to learn the practices needed to direct one’s desire towards a *telos*. Furthermore, according to Smith, the more a person trains his or her body in the practices that makes the pursuit of a *telos* possible, the more he or she will get to know the object of his or her love.³³

³⁰ See *Ibid.*, xiii.

³¹ Smith finds support for this line of thought in the works of the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who emphasizes that the human body cannot be understood strictly theoretically-cognitively by imagining it as an object that the person becomes conscious of. Instead, the body, according to Merleau-Ponty, is the primary site of knowing the world. By physically engaging the world with the body, it learns how to behave in a certain way to its environment. This form of knowledge-in-being in the world thus functions pre-consciously. See *Ibid.*, 41-73.

³² Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 50-1.

³³ *Ibid.*, 57-62.

However, Smith wants to emphasize that while all people are loving beings, it does not mean that everyone loves the same thing. Based on Augustine's works, Smith argues that all people desire God, but that their desire has been directed towards other objects of love and away from God.³⁴ For Smith the issue is accordingly not *if* people love. Instead, the fundamental issue is *what* people love.³⁵ This is consequently an issue that, according to Smith, is imperative, because one is not always aware of which practices one is part of and concordantly which *telos* one is pursuing.³⁶ Or, as Smith argues, which liturgies one is partaking in.

Smith explains that liturgies are by nature two things. First, they are *social* practices. Liturgies cannot be completely separated from a social context and for that reason they are often centered on different institutions, such as the Church, the modern state or, as I will later highlight, shopping malls. Second, liturgies are *teleological*, as they originate from a certain vision of the world at its best. Smith further argues that a person primarily becomes aware of this vision by actively performing the liturgy. For this reason, Smith argues, mainly from a reading of the works of the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu,³⁷ that liturgies serve a pedagogical function by training the individual to identify which *telos* is desirable. Liturgies are therefore, as Smith describes it, "pedagogies of desire."³⁸

³⁴ Ibid., 46-52, 77; James K.A. Smith, "Formation, Grace, and Pneumatology: Or, Where's the Spirit in Gregory's Augustine?," *Journal of Christian Ethics* 39, no. 3 (2011), 562-3. See also James K.A. Smith, *The Fall of Interpretation: Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutic*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012 [2000]), 138-157; James K.A. Smith, "The Gospel of Freedom, or Another Gospel? Augustinian Reflections on Empire and American Foreign Policy," *Political Theology* 10, no. 3 (2009).

³⁵ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 52. See also Smith, "Formation, Grace," 562; Smith, "Secular Liturgies," 176-7.

³⁶ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 55-9; Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 34-6, 82-3, 97-8. See also James K.A. Smith, "Keeping Time in the Social Sciences: An Experiment with Fixed-Hour Prayer and the Liturgical Calendar," in *Teaching and Christian Practices: Reshaping Faith and Learning*, ed. David I. Smith & James K.A. Smith (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 140. Cf. Smith, *The Fall*, 47-8.

³⁷ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 75-98. See also Smith, *The Fall*, 52-3.

³⁸ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 56-9, 62, 70-3; Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 12.

Accordingly, liturgy is not, according to Smith, reduced to an activity within the Church. Instead, liturgies exist where practices exist that direct human love towards a certain *telos*. Furthermore, this makes liturgies potentially harmful, as they are able to direct the individual towards a certain *telos*, even those that he or she opposes, without he or she knowing it.³⁹ This line of thought can be clarified with Smith's example of the shopping mall.

According to Smith, a shopping mall is an arena that is constituted by "invisible" liturgies. When visiting a shopping mall, a person does not partake in a neutral procedure that is irrelevant for understanding the world and acting in it. On the contrary, according to Smith he or she becomes part of a liturgical pedagogy that forms him or her towards becoming a certain kind of person. Precisely as the Church, the shopping mall directs a person's desire towards a *telos*. But instead of a loving God, Smith argues that the person is at shopping malls directed towards a consumeristic vision of the good.⁴⁰ Concordantly, Smith argues that each time a person is exposed to consumerist liturgies, he or she is formed towards becoming a person who values everything according to e.g. current trends.

Such a liturgical formation happens if a person is aware of the process or not. For this reason, Smith believes that a person needs to become aware of the formative potential of different liturgies so that he or she can resist those liturgies that corrupt his or her desires. However, it is not enough to merely become aware of these formative liturgies. According to Smith, harmful liturgies must also be counteracted with counter-liturgies. Again, the solution is not to "think correctly," but to obtain such liturgical habits that are capable of directing one's desire towards a more excellent *telos*. For this reason, Smith believes that the Church's

³⁹ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 85-8.

⁴⁰ For Smith's description of the liturgies in the shopping mall, see *Ibid.*, 19-24, 93-101. For other examples of non-Christian liturgies, see *Ibid.*, 103-118; Smith, "Secular Liturgies," 167-8.

liturgies become important, as they make it possible to resist harmful liturgies by offering formative practices that directs a person towards a true *telos*.⁴¹

The conclusion of Smith's reasoning is consequently that liturgies are not something that can be avoided, but will be a distinctive feature in human life, whether you are Christian or not. Smith summarizes:

[We] are, ultimately, *liturgical animals* because we are fundamentally desiring creatures. We are what we love, and our love is shaped, primed, and aimed by liturgical practices that take hold of our gut and aim our heart to certain ends. So we are not primarily *homo rationale* or *homo faber* or *homo economicus*; we are not even generically *homo religiosus*. We are more concretely *homo liturgicus*; humans are those animals that are religious animals not because we are primarily believing animals but because we are liturgical animals – embodied, practicing creatures whose love/desire is aimed at something ultimate.⁴²

To say that man is a liturgical creature is in itself a critique of the image of man as primarily a thinking creature. Instead, the practical foundations of a person's life and the formative potential these practices hold are highlighted. Despite Smith's critique of an overemphasis on theoretical-cognitive assertions, he does not argue that it is not possible to understand and to describe a *telos* with man's theoretical-cognitive faculties. However, he argues that a *telos* can only be a meaningful part of human existence through the practices that makes it possible to pursue an object of love.

⁴¹ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 163-4; Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 32-3, 180-1; Smith, *Awaiting the King*, 168-170. For a more detailed description of Smith's understanding of Christian liturgy, see *Ibid.*, 133-214; Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 4-6. Although Smith believes that the Church's liturgies can act as counter-liturgies, he is critical of a tendency to let consumeristic liturgies inspire the development of the Christian liturgy. He believes that such developments occur because liturgical reformers do not understand that consumeristic liturgies are liturgies, which in turn allows them to uncritically mix these liturgies with Christian liturgies. There is therefore a risk that the Christian liturgy will direct the congregation's desire towards a consumeristic *telos*, which in turn corrupts the Christian liturgy's ability to function as a counter-liturgy. See Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 103; Smith, *Discipleship in*, 87-95. See also Smith, *Who's Afraid*, 103-7; Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 9, 14-5, 39-41, 139-142, 149-186; Smith, *Discipleship in*, 35-40.

⁴² Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 40. For Smith, because man is *homo liturgicus*, man also needs to be understood as essentially religious by nature. By pursuing a *telos* by means of liturgy, Smith believes that the concept of a strictly non-religious life becomes intangible, as liturgical formation functions in the same way regardless of whether you are a Christian or not. "Secular" liturgies therefore become a self-contradiction, because these liturgies are not distinguishable from religious liturgies. That is why Smith feels confident in claiming that "we have never been secular," as humans, as *homo liturgicus*, has never ceased to be religious. See Smith, 'Secular Liturgies'. See also Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 122; Smith, *Discipleship in*, 27-34.

III. Liturgy as Resistance and Liturgy as Dialogue

Through their discussions on liturgy, both Cavanaugh and Smith expand the concept by arguing that liturgies can be found outside of a Christian context. They also suggest that the performance of Christian liturgies is often in conflict with non-Christian liturgies. Thus, there are several similarities between them. However, according to my reading of their works, they differ in what standing they give non-Christian liturgies in relation to Christian liturgies.

The conclusion of Smith's reasoning is that liturgies outside of the Church are in essence liturgies and are therefore not distinguishable from Christian liturgies in this regard. He may claim that their configuration is often inferior in comparison with Christian liturgies,⁴³ but they are still perceived of as liturgies. However, from the perspective that Cavanaugh develops, the liturgies of the modern state are understood as a parody of the Church's liturgies, and therefore cannot really be regarded as liturgies at all. The liturgies of the modern state are an expression of an attempt to imitate the role the Church had during the middle ages. However, the modern state is not successful in this endeavor, as the liturgies of the modern state are not founded on a true soteriology. Consequently, while Cavanaugh's understanding of liturgy in the end does not allow for liturgies outside of a Christian context to be regarded as liturgies, Smith's concept advances the idea that the difference between Christian and non-Christian liturgies is only a matter of quality, not essence. Liturgies therefore, according to Smith's understanding, move along a scale between true and false liturgy, which entails that non-Christian liturgies may potentially be compatible with Christian teleology.

⁴³ See Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 163-4.

These differences in how they develop the concept of liturgy have implications for the understanding of the Church's political agency through liturgy. Cavanaugh develops the concept of liturgy in a manner that primarily perceives of the Church's liturgy as an act of resistance, something that imagines a distinct and alternative politics from the modern state. The politics that the Church communicates in public life is therefore not a politics among many others. It is a capital P Politics that all other political actors should adapt their politics to. The liturgies of the modern state, in so far as it is even possible to claim that they are liturgies, therefore needs to be counteracted with the Church's liturgy. Cavanaugh writes:

I am increasingly convinced that for Christians the only fruitful way of moving forward [...] is to tap the theological resources of the Christian tradition for more radical imaginings of space and time. No longer can we accept the positioning of Christian theology by secular political theories in the name of a false and murderous civic peace. [...] Once the imaginations underlying modern political processes have been exposed as false theologies,⁴⁴ we can begin to recover true theological imaginings of space and time around which to enact communities of solidarity and resistance.⁴⁵

Smith, on the other hand, develops the concept of liturgy in a manner that, generally speaking, recognizes the Church's liturgy as just another liturgy among many others in the public sphere. As they are not in essence distinguishable from non-Christian liturgies, Christian liturgies do not have any privileged position in public life. This might explain why Smith, unlike Cavanaugh, makes the argument that liberalism should not be dismissed. Instead, he even argues that liberalism as a political theory reflects many of the values that Christianity emphasizes – e.g. personhood and freedom. Furthermore, liberalism as a political theory was at least an attempt to correct the Church's inability to create a peaceful society, due to the so-called religious wars during the seventeenth century. Liberal states should

⁴⁴ "False theologies" refers to the political theorist Carl Schmitt, who argued: "All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts". Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005 [1922]), 36.

⁴⁵ Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*, 4.

therefore not be vilified, but seen as an important partner for dialogue in the pursuit of the common good.⁴⁶ Smith accordingly maintains:

[The] church is less a contrast society we retreat into than a re-centering community of practice that we are sent *from*. As an imaginations station whereby our social imaginary is shaped by the gospel, the church isn't an end in itself, an alternative place, but rather a pedagogical community of the Spirit where we are equipped for *discernment*.⁴⁷

Accordingly, from the analysis it is possible to identify two distinct perspectives on the Church's liturgy – *liturgy as resistance* and *liturgy as dialogue*. Assuming the position of liturgy as resistance, the Church should be skeptical towards alternative liturgies (if they can be regarded as liturgies at all), which entails that the dialogue between Christian and non-Christian actors risks being reduced to critique. The perspective of liturgy as dialogue, on the other hand, embraces the fact that the Church is engaged in liturgy together with other actors in the public sphere, which entails recognition of their potential value in the pursuit of the common good. The perspective of liturgy as dialogue therefore offers greater prospects of engaging with and appreciating non-Christian practices.

The polemical character in Cavanaugh's concept of liturgy is therefore more in agreement with postliberal political theology and radical orthodoxy. Both of these theological movements are characterized by a critique of the hegemonic position of liberal capitalism in the western world.⁴⁸ They accordingly challenge this hegemonic position by not accepting the liberal order as either a given or necessary. The life of the Church is understood as an alternative political order – an order that is attuned to the practical and narrative resources of the Church.⁴⁹ Accordingly, the primary concern for these theologians is not to discuss how to

⁴⁶ Smith, *Awaiting the King*, 114-120.

⁴⁷ Smith, *Awaiting the King*, 96.

⁴⁸ See Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000), 14-5; Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005), 56-63.

⁴⁹ Smith emphasizes that these political theologians “share in common [...] an assertion regarding the antithesis between Christian revelation and the direction of given cultural forms [...] as well as a refusal to concede the criteria for responsible public discourse to the supposed neutrality of the secular.” James K.A. Smith,

be a Christian within an already established political order,⁵⁰ but to understand how the life of the Church is able to create an alternative public that coincides with Christian teleology.⁵¹

Generally speaking, the risk with such a political theological stance is that it might widen the division between the Church and the rest of the world.⁵² Such a division furthermore risks distancing the Church from those rational and practical resources that are able to evolve the Church's liturgy. As especially Smith argues, non-Christian liturgies can potentially corrupt Christian liturgies in their ability to direct the person's desire towards a true *telos*. However, the opposite can also be true. It is also possible to learn from non-Christian liturgies for the purpose of developing the Church's liturgies, something that accordingly can be seen as part of the Church's efforts in liturgical inculturation.⁵³

The Church should therefore, according to the reasoning above, to some extent embrace non-Christian liturgies. However, the analysis also highlights the need for discernment. Any appropriation should not occur uncritically, as there is the risk of adapting such liturgical expressions that corrupt the Church's liturgy – something that an understanding of liturgy as resistance avoids.

Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping the Post-Secular Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 41-2.

⁵⁰ This is a question that the theologian Elizabeth Phillips argues was to a greater extent embraced by the first-generation of political theologians like Dorothee Sölle, Jürgen Moltmann and Johann Baptist Metz. They endeavored to make theology relevant for understanding the political context in which they existed, as well as creating the conditions for Christian engagement within this context. See Elizabeth Phillips, *Political Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 42-50.

⁵¹ See *Ibid.*, 50-4.

⁵² See Jeffrey Stout's critique of 'new traditionalism' in Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004). It has also been argued that such a distance is no longer possible in a post-9/11 world. As the theologian Julie Clague argues, 9/11 changed the conditions of political theology, as the attacks highlighted that theology could not and should not carry on isolated from other religions and disciplines. Consequently, that is also a reason why, she argues, that theologians have started to emphasize a renewed dialogical engagement with other religions and disciplines for the purpose of confronting a post-9/11 reality. Julie Clague, "Political Theology Ten Years After 9/11," *Political Theology* 12, no. 5 (2011), 645-7. Cf. Michael Jon Kessler, "Political theology in a Plural Context," in *Political Theology for a Plural Age*, ed. Michael Jon Kessler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁵³ See Anscar J. Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation: Sacramentals, Religiosity, and Catechesis* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992).

Based on the analysis above, it is therefore possible to conclude that the Church should develop an attitude towards non-Christian liturgies where aspects of both a liturgy of resistance and a liturgy of dialogue are embraced. The church cannot uncritically engage with alternative liturgies, but needs to be aware of how and that these liturgies shape the church's life in a way that sometimes conflicts with Christian teleology. Critique is therefore necessary for the Church, but cannot be an end in itself. Accordingly, if no non-Christian liturgical expressions are accepted, the Church risks isolating itself from the rest of the world. The Church then risks becoming politically irrelevant outside of a Christian context, thus losing its ability to convey its vision of good to the rest of the world. Furthermore, the Church will then also not be able to learn from the liturgies that flourish in public life. I therefore conclude that discernment will be important, but also openness towards the good that non-Christian liturgies potentially offer.

IV. Concluding Remarks: The Political Theology of Cavanaugh and Smith

Until this point, the article has only analyzed how Cavanaugh and Smith have developed the concept of liturgy and the analysis should accordingly not be seen as a complete description of their political theologies. However, if their political theologies are further highlighted, it is possible to argue that they would agree with my reasoning in the previous paragraph.

Although Smith's understanding of liturgy, as I argued, is more suited for engaging with and appreciating non-Christian liturgies, it can be argued that Smith also subscribes to the concept of liturgy as resistance. Specifically, he makes the Church's liturgies normative for judging all other liturgies. He therefore offers a reference point for how the Church can be

able to determine what constitutes good, respectively bad liturgical expressions.

Consequently, as Cavanaugh, Smith argues that the life of the Church is normative for judging non-Christian liturgical expressions.⁵⁴ That is furthermore why Smith specifies that the fundamental question for political theology is “the possibility and *limits* of human solidarity.”⁵⁵

Cavanaugh, on the other hand, has especially in his later works tried to establish a theological foundation for public engagement that is more in line with liturgy as dialogue. This is particularly evident in his later works on idolatry. Like Smith, he emphasizes that man by nature is a worshipping being, and that idolatry therefore, from a biblical perspective, comes from worshipping the wrong things. This does not mean, however, that non-Christians always worship wrong things (or even that Christians always do). He instead emphasizes that other traditions potentially also possess practices that honor God, although unconsciously. Accordingly, Christians should, Cavanaugh argues, appreciate them instead of only criticizing them.⁵⁶

Therefore, both Cavanaugh and Smith sees the life of the Church as normative in the public sphere, at the same time as they acknowledge that the Church needs to engage with and learn from non-Christians in the public sphere. It is accordingly by applying both Cavanaugh’s understanding of liturgy as resistance and Smith’s understanding of liturgy as dialogue, that it is possible to find theoretical resources for understanding and developing the Church’s liturgical engagement with an increasingly pluralistic public sphere.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Cf. Smith, *Awaiting the King*, 53-89.

⁵⁵ Smith, *Awaiting the King*, 6. My emphasis.

⁵⁶ See William T. Cavanaugh, “Secularization, Violence, and Idolatry,” in *Field Hospital: The Church’s Engagement with a Wounded World*, William T. Cavanaugh (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016).

⁵⁷ I would like to thank William T. Cavanaugh and Andreas Nordlander for reading and commenting on an early draft of this article.