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# REASSEMBLING AND REMEMBERING – THE POLITICS OF RECONCILIATION IN SOUTH AFRICA<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

This article proposes that the work of the French sociologist of science, Bruno Latour, that conceptualises the political process in a highly pluralist society, can provide a useful starting point for a discussion on the politics of reconciliation. It is especially Latour's suggestion of an object-oriented politics that will be explored and applied to the South African situation. Subsequently, however, it is argued that Latour's politics of "reassembling" should be complemented by a politics of remembering. The latter notion is understood in a Platonic-Augustinian fashion – following the interpretation of the contemporary philosophical-theological movement of Radical Orthodoxy – as a diffuse recognition of the other within the self, whereby the politics of reconciliation is, in an important sense, broadened to encompass the interior, psychic and, ultimately, spiritual aspects of the relation between the self and the other. The paper concludes with some remarks on the role of the church as the narrative embodiment of reconciliation conceived as reassembling and remembering.

## 1. A DIVIDED SOCIETY

The South African society is a deeply divided one. As any informed person will know, this description holds not merely in a manner similar to the way in which many or even the majority of societies in the

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<sup>1</sup> This article was first presented as a paper at the seminar on Radical Orthodoxy in South Africa, 7-8 May 2015, University of the Free State.

world might currently be described as diverse, because of the pluralist make-up of their populations. The latter is, of course, also superlatively true of contemporary South Africa. Since unification within its present geographical boundaries, the country has been home to many ethnic cultures. It could be said that the post-1994 reintegration of South Africa into the continental and worldwide commonwealth of nations has increased the diversity.

There are, however, at least two aggravating factors that warrant the characterisation of the South African society as deeply divided, not merely diverse. The first is the incredibly high level of economic inequality in the country. At between 0.6 and 0.7, South Africa's Gini coefficient is among the highest in the world (Bhorat 2015). The inequality is largely systemic and is perpetuated by unequal access to education and resources. Add to this the complication that the inequality is, at least partially, to be correlated with ethnic and geographical divisions (the former less and less so, the latter more and more), and it becomes clear that what Pillay calls "the unholy trio of poverty, unemployment and inequality" (Pillay 2017) makes for a society that is divided to the point of disfunctionality.

The second aggravating factor in considering the deep divisions in the South African society is, of course, the enduring legacy of the country's recent history. Apartheid means literally "keeping apart" and the wounds that this forced and institutionalised racial separation inflicted on the collective psyche of all the groups involved are still very evident. Despite more than two decades of post-apartheid South Africa, some surveys suggest that South Africans now mistrust people of a different race more than at the advent of universal suffrage in 1994 (Hofmeyr & Govender 2015; Joseph & Culwick 2015).<sup>2</sup>

These observations highlight the urgency and importance of work in the academic discipline of Transitional Justice Theory and its application to the current situation in South Africa (see, for instance, Borraine 2006; Moore 2016). Be that as it may, the present paper seeks to address a broader, more universal question – that of the relation between the self and the other – in the belief that the observations made, in this instance, will be applicable to the South African situation in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The question of reconciliation is thus posed by way of asking philosophically about the broadest possible way of relating the self and the other, and subsequently by asking how such reflection may be translated into a politics of reconciliation.

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2 See also Terreblanche (2014).

In what follows, I propose that the work of the French sociologist of science, Bruno Latour, that conceptualises the political process in a highly pluralist society, can provide a useful starting point for a discussion on the politics of reconciliation. It is especially Latour's suggestion of an object-oriented politics, a *Dingpolitik*, that will be explored and applied to the South African situation. Subsequently, however, it will be argued that Latour's prescription for mediating between the self and the other is not unproblematic, and that it could, in fact, at best, be regarded as half of the story. The pragmatism of an issue-oriented politics cannot on its own fulfil the mediating role ascribed to it by Latour and should be informed by a politics of remembering. The latter notion is understood in a Platonic-Augustinian fashion – following the interpretation of the contemporary philosophical-theological movement of Radical Orthodoxy (RO) – as a diffuse or inchoate recognition of the other within the self, whereby the politics of reconciliation is, in an important sense, broadened to encompass the interior, psychic and ultimately spiritual aspects of the relation between the self and the other. The paper concludes with some remarks on the role of the Church as the narrative embodiment of the supernatural perfection in Christ of reconciliation as remembering *and* reassembling.

## 2. LATOUR AND THE MALADY OF MODERNITY

As an introduction to, and situation of the work of Latour in the present article, it should be noted that the South African society has definitively been shaped by the historical moment of modernity. While important work is being done with regard to coming to terms with the event of colonisation, the culture of the colonising powers also merits attention. Leaving aside for the moment all other diversities, the culture imported and imprinted on the southern tip of Africa by the colonial powers – first the commercial colonisation by the Dutch East India Company in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and, subsequently, the imperial colonisation by Victorian Britain in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – was the culture of modernity. From the side of the Western culture implanted in South Africa, the latter has hardly, if any, cultural memory of a societal order other than a modern one: a society ordered according to the world view of the high Middle Ages, for instance.

It could furthermore be argued that the negotiated settlement reached at the beginning of the 1990s inscribed post-apartheid South Africa even more firmly into the neo-liberal world order bequeathed by the Reagan and Thatcher decades. Essentially, this came down to a pact between the leaders and top layer of the liberation organisations, on the one hand, and big business (the so-called mineral-energy complex), on the other

(Terreblanche 2014:82ff.). Significantly, the liberalisation of the South African society is regulated by a Constitution that is, despite the influence of the Freedom Charter, widely regarded as one of the most liberal in the world at present.

A defining characteristic of the work of Latour has been his critique of the modern mindset, specifically the opposition of nature and freedom. As he sees it, modernity is characterised by an ill-fated division between nature and culture. This division would have an arbitrary, constructed human culture over against a putatively pure state of nature (Latour 1993:10, 13). Modernity, then, is a project of purification: an attempt to separate the human from the non-human, the subject from the object. But then the question arises as to how to live within the divides that open up between these opposites? In this instance, the political implications of the nature-culture purification become apparent. Graham Harman, one of the foremost English language interpreters of Latour, suggests that the translation into political terms of modernity's dualism of nature and culture renders the opposition between truth politics and power politics (Harman 2014 Kindle Loc. 201).<sup>3</sup> A truth politics would be a political philosophy of knowledge as opposed to ignorance. Insight into the true inner workings of nature, culture and history enables and entitles those with access to this knowledge to prescribe an ideal political dispensation and process.<sup>4</sup>

Power politics, at the other extreme, does not base politics on some deeper underlying truth. In fact, the situation resulting from the contingent balance of powers may be regarded as the only truth. Power politics, therefore,

becomes a power struggle without any transcendent court of appeal: a war of all against all in which seizing power for one's own standpoint becomes an end in itself (Harman 2014 Kindle Loc. 234-235).

This notion of power politics is loosely to be correlated with what in political theory has become known as *realpolitik* (see, for instance, Küng 1997).

The point is that the modern mindset issues into a deadlock between truth politics and power politics. Truth politics upholds the truth of

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3 The discussion of Latour in the present paper is indebted to Harman's analysis. See also Harman's treatment of Latour (2009).

4 I use the term "ideal" deliberately, because I am of the opinion that the truth politics that Harman, along with Latour, identifies as one extreme is to be correlated with the notion of an idealist politics, well known in political theory.

human nature, or natural law over against the errors of history or of the present cultural dispensation. Power politics, on the other hand, favours the immanence of human culture over what it regards as the illusionary truths of a supposedly given human nature. Latour sets out to destroy this modern dualism of nature and culture, along with its political implications in the opposition of a truth politics and a power politics, by arguing, in the first place, that we have never, in fact, *been* modern. In other words, the modern division between nature and culture, with its concomitant subordination of culture to nature, or nature to culture, is an illusion. Instead, what we have is a flat ontology, a world wherein the human and the non-human, the natural and the artificial, the tangible and the intangible are all, in principle, equal actors. Latour's is a world comprised of an infinity of individual actors, each with its own potentiality (Latour 2005). These actors, animate and inanimate together, form conglomerates or networks of endless variation. The networks are inside and alongside one another, from the infinitesimal to the infinite. While Latour's flat ontology thus extends the notion of "society" to include every possible entity, it also exemplifies a kind of atomistic, nominalist ontology: every actant is only itself, and always a totally concrete event (Harman 2009:18).

The other salient characteristic of Latour's Actor Network Theory is the epistemological state of the actors with regard to one another. In this respect, Latour takes it as axiomatic that no actor has direct or unmediated access to any other actor. Actors are ignorant with regard to the real being and meaning of other actors and can only interact with other actors, as it were, on the outside. Actors have no other recourse but to engage in constant interpretation and translation when it comes to other actors, animate and inanimate, with whom they are in contact. Thus, mediation is everywhere (Latour 1988:167) and that means relation is everywhere. Seen from another perspective, Latour's theory is all about the relations that actors engage in and that, to a large extent, constitute them as actors.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. MEDIATION ALONG THE WAY OF ASSEMBLING THE PUBLIC OBJECT

The two features mentioned earlier, namely the "democracy of objects", to use the title of a book by Levi Bryant (2011), and the ubiquity of translation,

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5 This would be one of the places where Harman parts ways with Latour. For Latour, actors are all but exhausted in their actions of translating, harnessing, co-opting or subjecting one another in the networks that they find themselves. Harman, on the other hand, argues for a reserve in an object that is not exhausted in its outward relations (2014).

allow the contours of Latour's political thought as well as its application to the notion of reconciliation to take shape. In a sense, at least for the early Latour,<sup>6</sup> everything is politics. This is well illustrated in Latour's interpretation of how Louis Pasteur's scientific theories came to dominate their field in the nineteenth century (Latour 1993). At about 1870, Latour argues, Pasteur is not a very influential scientist. He stands virtually alone in his controversy with Liebig over the cause of fermentation and with Pouchet over spontaneous generation (Latour 1993:16; Harman 2009:19). However, what Pasteur, as one actor among many, does throughout his career is to painstakingly assemble a formidable network of other actors around him that prop up and further his cause. Not all of these allies are human. Some of them are influential politicians that grant him funding, but others are innovative pieces of scientific equipment, and then there are the immaterial laboratory protocols of his time and even the bacteria themselves. At the end of his life, Pasteur's scientific achievements stand virtually unchallenged. However, what should not be overlooked is the absolute dedication with which Pasteur lobbied some actors, coerced and cajoled others, translated the potentiality of others to fit into his network, and so on. Pasteur builds a consensus by translating the potentialities of a motley variety of actors into the network of his scientific theory.

For Latour, politics is the process of building consensus through translation. In his words, politics is the "progressive composition of the common world" (Latour 2004:18). The common world is the *res publica*, with the emphasis on the *res* – the thing, the public object consisting of many actors, animate and inanimate, material and immaterial, all painstakingly assembled into a network. Latour just as much wants to steer clear of questions regarding essential identity as he wants to avoid questions pertaining to natural or historical rights. Instead, he favours a pragmatic approach to politics: public issues – so-called objects of concern – are what generate and constitute politics. Issues are the matter that exercise a gravitational pull and around which the political process gravitates. On the other hand, what materialises *in* the political process is the thing that is assembled *by* the process – the conglomerate of a wide variety of actors. The process itself is the issue that is assembled and around which it gravitates.

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6 Harman discerns three stages in Latour's political thought up to the present. In the latest, third stage explicated in Latour's *An enquiry into modes of existence* (2013), politics is one sphere among others. This paper focuses more on the implications of what Harman calls the "middle Latour" – the view that emerges specifically in Latour's *Politics of nature* (2004).

How is this public thing – this polity – assembled? In his *Politics of Nature*, Latour explains that the political process materialises at the centre of four poles. Alternatively, one could say that, according to Latour, there are four aspects to the one political thing. The political fourfold emerges out of the deconstruction of the modern dichotomy between facts and values (Latour 2004:108). On the one hand, Latour replaces the notion of “facts” with what he calls the power in the political process to take into account. On the other hand, he proposes that the notion of “values” be replaced with the power to arrange in rank order. Both the power to take into account and the power to arrange in rank order are subdivided into a more subjective and a more objective side, resulting in four powers of translation that together compose the body politic.

The objective, factual side of the power to take into account has the responsibility of detecting entities currently excluded from the collective. In other words, part of the hard work of maintaining this conglomerate that is the body politic is the work of detecting actors that are as yet excluded from the body politic. This work of drawing attention to objective states of affairs is, according to Latour, typically what scientific research does. In a country such as South Africa, one might also consider the work of various advocacy groups and NGOs, as well as the input of investigative journalism to bring the excluded state of particular actors, to use Latour’s word, under the public attention.

The more subjective, value-laden side of the power to take into account is the process of consultation. This activity of translation tries to listen to all actors with as open a mind as possible. Whereas the objective side of the power to take into account is concerned with not artificially limiting the quantity of recognised beings, consultation, the more subjective side of taking into account, is concerned with the quality of their franchise (Harman 2014: Kindle Loc. 1402). In South Africa, one may, perhaps, consider the public hearings that are from time to time conducted regarding matters of public concern and where interested parties are invited to make presentations.

The other great contributor to the formation of the body of public concern, according to Latour, is the power to arrange in rank order. The more subjective side of this power may be described as the function of hierarchisation. The point is that the actors constituting the public conglomerate must, eventually, be organised into a functioning whole. This necessarily implies downplaying the importance of some, while foregrounding that of others. This aspect of the political process continually asks how actors fit into the collective as it exists now, that is *at the moment*. In terms of the South African society, one may consider that certain legitimate claims to historical or particular identity may

be subjugated to concerns regarded at that time as being of greater overarching importance. The process whereby the electorate votes for the agenda of a specific political party above other parties in the election may also be regarded as an instance of arranging in rank order.

Finally the power to arrange in rank order has a more objective side. Ultimately, certain states of provisional closure and stability have to be attained and this is the role that institutionalisation plays in the composition of the body politic.

[O]nce the candidacy of the new entities [that were proposed by the power to take into account] has been recognized, accepted, legitimized, admitted among the older propositions, these entities become states of nature, self-evidences, black boxes, habits, paradigms (Harman 2009:104).

In this regard, the role of the Constitution and the judiciary in the South African society come to mind as examples of what Latour has in mind.

And so we have a fourfold of powers that act as the translators whereby actors are linked into the network that constitutes the body politic. At this point, it may be useful to note that Latour invokes the image of a circle or loop for the political process. The four aspects of the political fourfold never complete their activities of translation. Rather, they go round in a loop (Latour 2004:188), ever trying to strengthen the network and to build more and more actors into the common object. In the words of Harman,

no collective can stay motionless, since every Republic is always a bad piece of work and the unformatted exterior always a looming threat (Harman 2014: Kindle Loc. 1522-1523).

For Latour, reconciliation, understood in broad terms as a relatively stable coexistence of the self and the other, takes place in the process of translation, whereby actors are continually being re-assembled into the circles around common issues, and ultimately into the circle of the body politic itself.

#### 4. TRANSCENDENCE AND THE BODY POLITIC

At this point, it might be useful to examine the notion of an exterior and an interior to the body politic. By and large, Latour shies away from any notion of transcendence. For him, there can be no reference to a transcendent good that guides the political process. There is only the process itself. In this sense, the legacy of Thomas Hobbes and his notion of *Leviathan*

looms large (Harman 2014 Kindle Loc. 151). But there is also a sense in which Latour repudiates Hobbes, in that he does recognise what he calls small transcendences to the political assemblage (Latour 1993:27; Harman 2014: Kindle Loc. 1211-1249). The point is the commonality is never a *fait accompli*; there are always actors and conglomerates of actors that are still excluded and, in that sense, remain transcendent to the body politic. That is why the political loop must keep on revolving in its attempt to translate the transcendent actors into the commonality. Harman (2014 Kindle Loc. 1258-1261) summarises the point succinctly:

[B]oth Truth Politics and Power Politics are theories of immanence that take no account of our basic ignorance. And though Latour often moves in this direction himself through his sympathies for Hobbes, he is also aware that we are never sure in what the polity consists. Latour attempts to make room for surprise and surplus in his politics no less than in his ontology.

Latour thus tries to steer a middle ground between truth politics and power politics by ameliorating the power politics that comes naturally to him with a politics of ignorance: we do not know whom we are excluding and, therefore, we should always keep on reassembling.

By now, it should have become clear how Latour's pragmatist approach aims at bridging the gap between the self and the other. The continuous political loop, consisting as it does of animate and inanimate things, draws the excluded other inside. The political process itself bridges the gap between the self and the other. This is the essence of Latour's *Dingpolitik*: being drawn into the assembly of the political thing also closes the gap between the self and the other. It is conceivable that this holds for the body politic, in general, but also for smaller scale regional issues. Applied to South Africa, it might mean that communities, which hitherto found themselves over against each other for the various reasons mentioned earlier, could be drawn together – reconciled – through involvement in common issues. In this respect, the fight against the big wildlife-poaching syndicates, for example, comes to mind, as well as the improvement of the ailing water and electricity infrastructure in rural areas.

Latour's aversion to the untenable dichotomies of modernity is to be lauded. Mediation is indeed everywhere and the translation of excluded actors along the way of an issue-based politics may go a long way towards bringing the self and the other together and thus towards fostering reconciliation in a pragmatic kind of way. In addition, the focus on the political object points towards a new realism past the abstract and formal governmental representation characteristic of late modern democracies (Milbank 2013:140).

However, in conclusion of this part of the article, two related critical questions must be asked of Latour. The first question, also raised by Harman, is whether Latour's politics, despite his protestations, does not fall back into a version of power politics after all. Ultimately, the assembly of the body politic is not an impersonal process. Some actors are more powerful or adept at translation than others. And, like Pasteur in Latour's case study, they harness the other actors into *their* project. Secondly, it should be asked whether the political process itself can indeed fulfil the role of the common good that draws the self and the other together. Is politics for the sake of politics a strong enough force to do that? (Milbank 2013:144).<sup>7</sup>

In the remainder of this article, it is argued that a deeper harmony of reconciliation between the self and the other is to be had than the merely negative peace of pragmatic co-existence. Latour's pragmatic externalism should, in important ways, be complemented by a focus on the interior realities of the actors in the public process. This would involve a repudiation of both Latour's atomistic nominalism and his epistemological agnosticism.

## 5. THE THEOLOGICAL POLITICS OF REMEMBERING

Latour's work is an attempt at mediation between the self and the other against a broader ontological backdrop of exteriority: even though actors can incorporate other actors into themselves, every actor is only itself, and always a totally concrete event. Actors do not really know much about other actors; they only try to incorporate them as well as they can into their own schemes. Hence, the need for universal translation. Upon consideration, the exteriority indicated in Latour's work is the exteriority of being and thought that are conceived as separately transcendent to each other, to use a phrase by Keller (2007:131). The critical question to be asked of Latour is, therefore, whether his own criticism of modernity is thorough enough, and whether his basic ontological assumptions are not, after all, expressive of a modernist stance. The genealogy of this stance has been traced to the proposal of Duns Scotus of a univocity of being, and to William of Ockham's nominalism, among others. The philosophical-theological movement of RO has, among others, done important work in this regard.<sup>8</sup>

The other salient contribution of the RO movement could be described as the imagining of another kind of modernity: an *alternative modernity*. In attempting this, RO takes up the work of Hamman and Jacobi in

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7 See also O'Donovan (2015).

8 See, for instance, Milbank (2006).

the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Milbank 1999:23), of romanticism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Milbank 2013:7), and the *ressourcement* of the *Nouvelle Théologie* in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Milbank 2005). The point is that there exists an important intellectual tradition stretching from Greek antiquity, through its synthesis with Christian thought, to a certain apex in the high Middle Ages that foregrounds the partial co-inherence and co-implication of being and thought, rather than their mutual absolute exclusion. This, it should be noted, has important implications for a politics of reconciliation.

First, it is possible and plausible to argue for the fundamental unity of being as opposed to an atomistic, nominalist ontology. Thomas Aquinas, in his appropriation of Aristotelian thought for neo-Platonic Christian theology, finds it necessary to make a real distinction between the essence of finite things and their being, their *esse*. *Esse* is not included in the essence of a particular being, but is participated in by that being. In fact, all finite beings participate in *esse*, which leads Aquinas to speak of *esse commune* or *ens commune*. This is no crude reification, however. For Aquinas, the *esse commune* is not some-thing; it is the perfect actuality of every act and the perfection of all perfections (Lopez 2014:79). Ultimately, the unity of finite being rests in its analogical participation in the being of God. Whereas God is *ipsum esse subsistens*, *esse commune* signifies “something complete and simple, but not subsistent” (Lopez 2014:80).

Such a view of the common being participated in by all finite beings, in its turn, leads to a very specific view of the relation between finite beings. First, a real ontological distance between two separate beings may be granted, since each has its own relatively stable essence. This distance is good, as it manifests something of the mystery of alterity:

I am not the other, the other is not I; the other is not reducible to or measurable by me; and I am not reducible to, or measurable by the other. (Ward 2005:71).

Yet, on the basis of the common being that separate beings participate in, the distance of alterity and exteriority could be said to constitute an invitation to communicate. This communication differs from the translation of the exterior of the other that Latour speaks of: because of the shared participation in being, notions of interiority and exteriority, to some extent, become diffuse and intermingled. The point is that the other is always already also part of the self: the community of being is prior to the separation of the self and the other, and this must be taken into account when translating the relation of the self and the other into a politics of reconciliation.

The ontological “invitation to communicate”, based on the unity of being, can now be analysed from the perspective of knowledge and the interior life, thereby further demonstrating the partial co-inherence and co-implication of being and thought. Classical thought, as appropriated by Christian theology, provides ample resources. In his *Meno* dialogue (Meno 82b ff.), Plato demonstrates that, in order to recognise something as something – that is in order to *know* something – an inchoate, preliminary knowledge of the thing to be known must already be present in the knower (Sedley & Long 2010:23). For Plato, the basis of knowledge of an other is not sense perception, which is prone to illusion, but *anamnesis*, the remembering of the ideal form in which the other participates, that is somehow already present in the knower. Aristotle, for his part, held that the form of an entity somehow migrates to the intellect of a knowing subject, because the soul is in a sense all things. In Aristotelian thought, “eidos is common to both material nature and rational mind” (Milbank 2013:145). Augustine later on proposes three determinations of being – being, life and knowledge – and holds that these three refer to one another: they go around in a circle (Milbank & Pickstock 2007:7; Milbank 2013:137). Furthermore, according to Augustine, the partial knowledge of the other in the self, given through divine illumination, awakens the desire in the self to know the other increasingly better. The dim, preliminary remembering of the other in the self awakens the desire to draw closer in fuller knowledge. And so the command to communicate that is, as it were, given in the being of separate things, reverberates in the desire for knowing the other awakened by the remembering of the other in the self (Milbank 2003:9). Such an interior dimension of “remembering” is crucial for a politics of reconciliation that starts from a philosophical conception of the relation between the self and the other.

If, for the Christian-Platonic tradition, relation is inherent in the created nature of being, it nevertheless has to come to grips with the patent brokenness of relation that experience encounters. As is clear in South African society, for instance, the relation between the self and the other is often characterised more by mistrust than by a desire for intimate understanding of the other by the self, and vice versa. Milbank (2003) explains that, for Augustine, the Fall constituted a loss of the vision of God, with a concomitant loss of the inchoate vision of the other in the self in general. As a result, the desire of the will is held in thrall to all kinds of temporal, non-ultimate passions. The cessation, or at least inhibition of the interplay between the already and the not yet of cognition leaves the will to circle vainly in its own orbit.

Milbank (2013:9) argues that the loss of the “magnetic poles of the already of power and the not yet of fully attained knowledge” is precisely what God restores in grace. In this instance, RO appropriates the Thomistic insight that God, by grace, paradoxically restores to nature what is its own through creation, even by granting it a supernatural perfection. If the human soul and society in general are, by nature, structured towards ever-increasing unity in diversity, God only gives this natural end freely and graciously in the gift of the incarnation of the Son of God and in His life, death and resurrection.

Christian theology, then, sees in the divine gift of the incarnation of the Son of God also the gift of forgiveness in His sacrificial and vicarious suffering. In the words of Milbank (2003:61):

As unique sovereign victim, perhaps, the God-Man was alone able to inaugurate forgiveness; for here was not a single instantiation of human nature, victimized like all humans by other humans, but rather a human victim suffering the maximum possible victimage, by virtue of its personification by the divine *Logos*, all-wise and all-innocent and therefore able to let the human nature plumb the full depths and implications of suffering. In this way a single suffering became also a sovereign suffering, capable of representing all suffering and of forgiving on behalf of all victims.

Of cardinal importance in this regard is to bear in mind that Christ is *Logos* and flesh, divine wisdom and a particular human being. In Him, being and word are supremely one, and thus the forgiveness and reconciliation effected in his body can spread in a kind of semiotic contagion (Milbank 2003:62; Ward 2005:57). Along this line, a great deal of work has been done by various authors associated with the RO movement to theorise the relation between the historical, physical body of Christ, the sacramental body of Christ in the Eucharist, and the political body of Christ in the Church.<sup>9</sup> The incarnation, suffering and resurrection of the Christ is an enfleshed word that spreads in a semiosis throughout creation. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Church, then, is the historical, concrete instantiation of the repaired relation between the self and the other, flowing from the repaired relation between creation and God. Spreading semiotically through the body of Christ, a renewed desire for friendship and community with the other becomes possible in the Spirit, even though knowledge (vision) of the other remains partial.

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9 Taking up the work done in this regard by Henri de Lubac, among others. See De Lubac (2006).

## 6. POLITICS AS REASSEMBLING AND REMEMBERING

I have now argued for the possibility and importance of an interior, psychic and spiritual perspective for the relation between the self and the other, and, more specifically, for a politics of reconciliation. I have also indicated that a great deal of work has been done to draw out the political implications of such a position. In concluding this article, I attempt to appreciate Latour's proposals from the perspective of an "erotic politics of the church" (Ward 2005:92ff.), that is, a politics of desiring communion with the other.

In this article, appreciation has been expressed for Latour's proposal for a pragmatic *Dingpolitik*. The pragmatic focus on issues of concern can play an important mediating role between the self and the other. This is particularly true if the body politic can be conceived as continually being reassembled, as increasingly more actors are drawn into the process. In addition, there is an important element of truth in Latour's assessment of the epistemological situation of actors in a democracy of objects: the self cannot presume to know the interior of the other fully. The other remains ineradicably mysterious. In a pluralistic society, marked by deep estrangement between various parties, such an approach may go some way to steer past naked power politics. Yet it remains unclear how such an approach does not, finally, collapse into power politics after all. How is the pragmatic success of the process to be evaluated? Whose good becomes the common good?

It has become clear that the exteriority, or absolute agnosticism of actors with regard to one another, characteristic of Latour's thought, is untenable and unwarranted. A provisional commonality, based on an obscure intimation of the other within the self, is possible. The boundary between the exterior and the interior is not that absolute. Spreading in an embodied semiosis from the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Christ, the Church proffers to be a polity of the co-inherence of exterior and interior realities – of transcendence and immanence. This reality of the Church, it could be argued, allows it to steer clear of both the Scylla of truth politics and the Charybdis of power politics. On the one hand, the Church is not an ahistorical idea enforced, as it were, from the outside onto the affairs of men and beasts. The Church is very much a real historical event, and a great deal has been written about the realism of the Augustinian vision of the City of God in the worldly city (Niebuhr 2012). On the other hand, the realism of the Church is not the realism associated with that *Realpolitik* that is power politics. Being a concrete historical event, the Church inevitably, to some extent, becomes inscribed in economies of

violence (Milbank 2003:42, 43). But the way in which the Church opposes violence with a force of its own should embody an eschatological hope of complete ontological reconciliation.

Of course, the idea is not that the Church should become the whole of the body politic. That would be to misconstrue the natural created order, as well as the historical situation of the “already and the not yet” of Augustine’s *civitas Dei* in the *civitas terrena*. But, as an embodiment of the repaired possibility for remembering that is forgiveness, the Church can and should act as an agent (in Latour’s sense) of reconciliation in society. By way of a contagion-like semiosis, the reconciliation spreads throughout the broader body politic. Thus, the Church is itself a polity, and is part of a polity. As such, the Church can serve as an example of how not only a continual reassembling, but also a remembering perfected in forgiveness can function in the polity beyond the Church (cf. Hauerwas 2014). Perhaps, along these lines, the Church can then be considered an influential Latourian actor that engages and translates other actors in the body politic, all the while going around in the political circle.

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