William T. Cavanaugh’s Eucharistic “Reimagination” of Space and Time

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Abstract
Asian churches, indebted to fervent and faithful missionaries, have long understood that the church is called to challenge the culture around us, including the world’s concept of the sacred-secular divide. Still, we, as part of the Protestant Church, have unknowingly adopted this worldly imagination in subtle ways, especially with regard to the church’s understanding of space and time. Using the works of William Cavanaugh, this article seeks for an understanding of space and time that primarily grounds itself in the Eucharist and therefore in the church’s identity as the Body of Christ, which is radically different from how the world defines it. It then explores some practical implications in discipleship and missions.

Keywords
Body of Christ, liturgy, eucharist, reimagination, sacred-secular, William T. Cavanaugh, space-time

Purpose
Let me start by saying that, as an Asian, I am personally greatly indebted to Protestant efforts in making sense of the world; indebted to the brave and God-fearing missionaries who dared to leave the comforts of home to enter a country and culture foreign and strange to them; indebted to theologians who toiled painstakingly with their heads, hearts, and hands to give the church increasingly robust theological groundings in a culture which might be completely foreign to them, without which I probably would not even have had the opportunity to know of Christ. Asian churches
are keenly aware that we are called to challenge the culture around us, which is deeply rooted in Asian religions.

Nevertheless, as with all other discoveries of God, there is still much work to be done. I argue that the advancement of Protestant theology has unwittingly advanced the notion that the sacred and the secular are separate\(^1\) and should be kept as such. Perhaps this is an unavoidable (mis)step when we choose to advance the gospel in a world with ever-increasing and ever-changing cultures. Andrew Walls famously said that the gospel is the “prisoner and liberator of culture.”\(^2\) Perhaps it is necessary for our gospel first to be partially highjacked by the ideas of the world before it can truly liberate it.

I think that there is another plausible reason why Protestant theology is susceptible to worldly influences, namely, that we tend not to have a strong eucharistic understanding of the Gospel.\(^3\) Without a rooted liturgical\(^4\) grounding, and without a thorough understanding of our identity as the Body of Christ, we are more likely to be swayed by the “successes” of the world and tempted to follow suit. Hence, I will attempt to draw on the rich eucharistic understanding of Cavanaugh and apply it to our current Protestant context in hopes of giving us a more robust understanding of God “imagination” of space and time.

## The Problem of the Protestant Understanding of Space and Time

The world imagines the secular and the sacred as separate and should be kept as such, so that attempts are made to limit the church’s actions in the

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3. This is by no means a sweeping statement about all Protestant theologians. Examples of those who have grounded their theology in the Eucharist include Frank C. Senn, John G. Davis, and Simon Chan, among others.

4. Following Cavanaugh and others, the term “liturgy” here is understood theologically with a specific eucharistic shape and content rather than as a form of worship associated with particular rites.
spatial realm (bodily to the interior, and geographically to the non-secular). It also tries to limit the church’s actions in the temporal realm, namely, to that of the nontemporal afterlife.

The church recognizes and denies the world’s imagination. For her very existence is that which is acted unto the secular in the temporal. However, we have taken on the world’s imagination in more subtle ways, in that the secular and the sacred occupy distinct spaces that require distinct actions—mission and worship, respectively—and distinct time, temporal and eternal, which are sequentially separated.\(^5\)

Such imagination creates unbridgeable distance between relationships: God, the church, and the world. The world is seen simply as a recipient of God’s grace with the church as its channel, and since the movement is always in one direction, the world is always served by the church.

**INTRODUCTION TO CAVANAUGH’S THOUGHT: REIMAGINATION**

Cavanaugh challenges the church to reimagination. Despite the term “reimagination,” this “reimagination” is both prior and real. This reimagination is the first imagination of the world and “really real,” for it is God’s very own imagination, which he creates and toward which he moves creation.\(^6\) The church is called to reimagine the world as God already imagines it.

However, it is a reimagination as there are underlying imaginations that the church has assumed and for which it needs correction, summed up as the (false) separation between the sacred and the secular.\(^7\) This false dichotomy held by the world perpetuates itself; for by separating the sacred from the secular, the world has successfully made impotent the very antidote of this false belief: the church’s reimagination of the world

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\(^5\) While Protestant theologians acknowledge that our current age is not merely temporal, our praxis demonstrates a contrary belief. See below.


\(^7\) Cavanaugh, *Migration of the Holy*, 119–120. This false belief of the world is significant in most of Cavanaugh’s works. This has implications in various domains, for example with regards to state, consumerism, and globalization.
found primarily in the liturgy. It is then no surprise that many people find liturgy, sacrament, and doctrine to be irrelevant to the “real world” of social problems. Yet the liturgy is the true “work of the people,” as the original Greek leitourgia suggests, the ergon of the laos. Cavanaugh states that

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\text{[t]he liturgy does more than generate interior motivations to be better citizens. The liturgy generates a body, the Body of Christ…which is itself a sui generis social body, a public presence irreducible to a voluntary association of civil society.}^9
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The church is called to expose and challenge the world’s separation of the sacred and the secular by resisting the world’s imagination and to reimagine, which is to recover God’s imagination.\(^{10}\) Cavanaugh states this point clearly,

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\text{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….Once the imaginations underlying modern political processes have been exposed as false theologies, we can begin to recover true theological imaginings of space and time around which to enact communities of solidarity and resistance.}^11
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The Eucharist is the one privileged site for the Christian spatio-temporal imagination. The church is in space because in the eucharistic celebration, it is a liturgical body—that is, public, and “precisely as a body, the body of Christ is not confinable to a spiritual ‘meaning’ secreted away in the soul of the individual believer.”\(^ {12}\) This is a body wounded and broken by powers and principalities, and poured out in a blood offering upon the world, and also crossed by the resurrection, “a sign of the startling interruption of the Kingdom into historical time and the disruptive presence of Christ the

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8 William T. Cavanaugh, Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002), 4.
9 Cavanaugh, Theopolitical, 4.
10 Cavanaugh, Torture, 86–87.
11 Cavanaugh, Theopolitical, 4.
12 Cavanaugh, Theopolitical, 4.
King to the politics of the world.”13 In the Eucharist, we are one catholic, universal entity, and yet always and only enacted at the local level. With regard to time, it points both to the past death of Christ in the hands of world powers and his resurrection, as well as to the eschatological anticipation of the future kingdom of God. This understanding of time interrupts the uniform march of time on which the world depends, without termination or telos.14 In sum, the Eucharist challenges the world’s imagination of space and time with its own reimagination.

The world, too, has its own “liturgies,” using its powers to “discipline bodies, to habituate them and script them into a drama.”15 Its liturgy attempts to bifurcate itself into sacred and secular.16 The Eucharist exposes and resists the world’s liturgies by providing the true liturgy, one truly salvific and truly universal. Yet worldly liturgies have succeeded precisely because the church has neglected her own eucharistic liturgy—that which is intended to be truly and fully universal and public.17 Cavanaugh appeals to the church’s eucharistic reimagination; to recover our eucharistic liturgy; to see the world and our mission in God’s imagination by participating in God’s imagination.

**Reimagining Space**

How has the church inherited the world’s imagination of space? Our mistake lies in treating the secular and sacred as two essentially distinct activities occupying distinct “spaces” that can be either mixed or kept separate.19 This imagination leads to other (false) dichotomies, politics and religion, for example, or public and private, which essentially carry

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16 Cavanaugh, *Migration*, 120.
17 Throughout, I will employ Cavanaugh’s definition of “salvation” as “not a matter of pulling a few individual survivors from the wreckage of creation after the Fall, but is about the re-creation of a new heaven and new earth.” William T. Cavanaugh, “Church,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 394.
the same message: there is one space for the sacred and another for the secular, which should remain distinct.\textsuperscript{20}

However, since the sacred and the secular can never be kept separate, the eventual result is the attempted absorption of the sacred into the secular. The secular world produces its own imagined saviors and end goals (eschaton) and versions of salvations and sacrifices required to attain them. It claims goodness and justice, universality and impartiality.

For example, consider the nation-state,\textsuperscript{21} which presents itself as “the keeper of the common and repository of sacred values, so that it demands sacrifice on its behalf.”\textsuperscript{22} It presents a distorted version of civic virtue and the goods of common life. It claims to be represented by a universal community under whose umbrella the church stands as one particular association. It advertises community through nationalism. It thrives on producing a distorted image of the Heavenly City and a “kind of parody of the church, meant to save us from division.”\textsuperscript{23}

The nation-state’s “universality” is achieved through absorbing other common forms of life, including the church. This “universality” is not based on common good, which it often claims but cannot achieve, as externally it carves the world up into competing national interests, and internally commits to destroying forms of commonality that “do not privilege the sovereignty of narrow individual self-interest.”\textsuperscript{24} It presents a common telos for all: “the love of self, even to the contempt of God.”\textsuperscript{25} Appealing to the works of Augustine, Cavanaugh reminds readers that “the earthly city has no way of solving the problem of the one and the many; pluralism for the earthly city remains tragic. The City of God is the universal reality, while the earthly city is partial and particular.”\textsuperscript{26}

This is not necessarily to say that the nation-state cannot or does not promote or protect some common goods—only that it is “simply not in the

\textsuperscript{20} Cavanaugh, \textit{Theopolitical}, 85–86.
\textsuperscript{21} Cavanaugh raises other examples, such as consumerism and globalization.
\textsuperscript{22} Cavanaugh, \textit{Migration}, 41–42.
\textsuperscript{23} Cavanaugh, \textit{Migration}, 41–42, 45.
\textsuperscript{24} Cavanaugh, \textit{Migration}, 41–42, 45.
\textsuperscript{26} Augustine, \textit{City of God}, xix.17.
common good business.” The result is simply a futile attempt to ward off social conflict by keeping individuals from interfering with one another.

In short, the world’s imagination of space claims to separate the sacred from the secular but in effect attempts to absorb the sacred into the secular. And the church can quite easily inherit this imagination. For example, Cavanaugh observes that

>...we have too often assumed that the nation-state defines the boundaries of a unitary common space that promotes the common good within the space. We have allowed those borders to define identity and belonging, and have turned those attachments into a kind of ersatz religion with its own ersatz liturgy. We have expected salvation from those identities...and we have thereby obscured our identities as members of a different body, the body of Christ.

This inevitably leads to a submission of public theology to what “the public” can consider reasonable, where “the public” is understood as nation-state. The church’s public mission is governed by what is deemed acceptable by the world, and “outrageous” claims such as “Jesus is the only Lord of all” are restricted to the private domain.

The supposed “secular” world invents its own liturgies that are every bit as “sacred” as those of the Christian liturgy, attempting to rival and absorb the church’s liturgy for our bodies and minds. The church is called to demystify such imagination with the realization that all that the world offers is not found in the world but in true communion with Christ. The church is called to expose the fact that any worldly imagination and solution does not and cannot work for the common good. The false dichotomies defined by the world are challenged with a proper understanding of the Christian tradition. For example, in contrast with the idea of the separation between the public and private, the Christian home is never simply a private space,

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27 Cavanaugh, Migration, 41–42.
28 Cavanaugh, Migration, 24.
29 Cavanaugh, Migration, 3. Another example is “civil society” advocates, who present a view of the secular and sacred using boundaries predefined by the world. See Cavanaugh, Theopolitical, 54–62.
30 Cavanaugh, Theopolitical, 80–81.
31 Cavanaugh, Migration, 115. See below for examples.
but always open to the community through the practice of hospitality, preeminently modelled in the Eucharist. Ephesians 2:19 uses both “public” and “private” language simultaneously: “you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God.” The church presents herself as a new family that is opened up to the widest imaginable public space, extending her meal of divine love to all.

The church reimagines space by embodying space as God intends it to be. One example is our homes, with the Eucharist becoming a sort of “home of homes.” The church is also truly catholic; it is not a mere part of a whole but itself a whole. It is open to all people, invested in all matters related to the fate of the entire world, and has both the desire and means to work toward the common good. The church sees herself as the eschatological fulfillment of Israel, the witness and embodiment of salvation to the world.

When describing themselves, the early Christians rejected language connoting guild or association (such as koinon or collegium) and instead used ekklesia, asserting that the church was not gathered around particular interests, but was interested in all things; an assembly of the whole. For them, the language of ekklesia was not rooted in the Greek city-state but in the assembly of Israel at Sinai. As ekklesia, the church is the public presence of God in history. The early Christians also used the language of citizenship in God’s kingdom to describe membership (Eph 2:19, Phil 3:20). Citizenship was available through baptism to all, including those typically excluded from citizenship in any other polis, namely, women, children, and slaves.

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32 Cavanaugh, Theopolitical, 85–86.
33 Cited in Cavanaugh, Theopolitical, 86–87.
36 Cavanaugh, Theopolitical, 86–87.
38 Cavanaugh, Migration, 42–43.
The gathering of Israel was concretized by particular detailed practices structured by the Torah and oriented toward the exclusive worship of God. These practices were fully “public” as no aspect of life was excluded from them; for the people to fully worship God, it mattered what they did with their money, body, neighbor, and even feces; there was no disjunction between one’s outer behavior and inner religious piety. Hence, too, the church has an obligation to be a fully public presence for all matters that affect the salvation of the world. Moreover, only the church is able to work toward the common good by participating in the life of the triune God, who is the only good that can be common to all. The church belongs to a body that is international (universal) and eternal, challenging the narrow particularity of national interests and anticipating the heavenly polity on earth. Salvation history is not a subset of human history; it is the story of God’s rule, not yet completely legible, over all of history. That is not to say that God’s activity is confined to the church, for the boundaries between the church and the world are porous and fluid. Nevertheless, the church is called to take seriously her task of promoting spaces in which participation in the common good of God’s life can flourish.

Using Augustinian language, the earthly city and the City of God are two intermingled performances: one a tragedy, the other a comedy. They tell different stories about different ends, using matter and motion in different ways. There is no division of goods or space between the spiritual and the temporal. Both cities use the same space and resources, but toward different goals. They are concerned with the same questions: what is the goal of humanity and how to achieve it. They use the same resources but to enact different yet intermingling dramas. For the City of God is the story enacted in history showing how God has taken the tragedy of the earthly city and incorporated it into the drama of redemption. The church does not allow the earthly city to define one’s public space, but constantly

40 Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical*, 87.
45 Augustine, *City of God*, xix.21-25.
redefines what is truly public, interrupting the tragedy of the earthly city by enacting the comedy of redemption in Christ.\textsuperscript{46}

While Augustine does not consider the City of God synonymous with the church, he states that as Christ’s Body, the church is ontologically related to the City of God, not as an institution but as a set of practices. In other words, the City of God is not so much a space as a performance. Just as the earthly city is a tragic performance of the \textit{libido dominandi}, so the City of God is a performance of God’s salvation of the world through Christ.\textsuperscript{47} And this performance is most profoundly found in the Christian eucharistic liturgy, which, through the participation of the worshipper, reimagines the world in Christ.\textsuperscript{48}

Seeing the City of God as a performance helps us realize our participatory role in history which God is unfolding on earth through our public actions unto the world.\textsuperscript{49} In fact, unlike the earthly city, the church is truly public; a true \textit{res publica} based on justice, which must include giving God his due in sacrifice. According to Augustine, it is the Eucharist that allows the church to be truly public, as it offers true sacrifice to God and makes the church into Christ’s Body.\textsuperscript{50}

The eucharistic liturgy is a “spatial story”—an operation on matter and place, performed by God with human cooperation, producing a different kind of space. It is not a symbol detached from its meaning used to convey “attitudes” or “values” for the believer to internalize and to bring into another space outside the church.\textsuperscript{51} As Cavanaugh puts it, “just as eating and drinking together do not merely symbolize a family but help to constitute a family, so eating and drinking the body and blood of Christ transform(s) the partakers into a body with a social dimension.”\textsuperscript{52} Citing David Schindler,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{46} Cavanaugh, Migrations, 64–66.
\item \textsuperscript{47} Augustine, \textit{City of God}, xvi.2, xx.9.
\item \textsuperscript{48} Cavanaugh, \textit{Migration}, 121.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Cavanaugh, \textit{Migration}, 66.
\item \textsuperscript{50} Augustine, \textit{City of God}, xix. s 21-23, x S6.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Certeau, \textit{The Practice}, 34–42, 115–130.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Cavanaugh, \textit{Theopolitical}, 92–93.
\end{itemize}
The home-cooked meal…is itself a different economy, one which transforms material objects and reconfigures space and time…the Christian is called to extend this space into ever wider circles…to “domesticate” the world, to heal the homelessness and anomie of the modern condition by extending the “community of persons” that exists in the family—and that mirrors the Trinitarian life—to the whole world.\(^\text{53}\)

The church is a public space as Christians perform stories that transform the way space is configured. And the preeminent “spatial story” is that of the formation of the Body of Christ in the Eucharist.\(^\text{54}\) The Eucharist enacts a body that performs the gospel story both in and on places, shaping the spaces in which the gospel is being performed in the process.\(^\text{55}\) In the Eucharist, the participants are not merely watching the gospel story being told but are performing it as a body in movement, gestures, and practices.\(^\text{56}\) This spatial story acts as resistance against the dominant earthly imagination of space, yet not by having its own territory (space) to defend but by traveling on pilgrimage through these predefined territorial boundaries and transforming them into alternative spaces through its practices toward its heavenly home.\(^\text{57}\) It journeys by telling a comic story within face-to-face encounters of neighbors and strangers in local eucharistic gatherings, without necessarily leaving a particular location, because the entire world and more (Heb 12:22-4) are gathered in the Eucharist.\(^\text{58}\)

The world imagines a collapse of spatial barriers in globalizing capitalism, but it does so by juxtaposing people from all over the world in the same space-time, which situates diverse localities in competition with one another and illusively fosters a world’s people as contemporaries


\(^{54}\) Cavanaugh, Theopolitical, 94–95.

\(^{55}\) Certeau, The Practice, 115–130.

\(^{56}\) Certeau, The Practice, 125. For examples of performing the gospel story in movement, gestures, and practices, see Frank C. Senn, Embodied Liturgy: Lessons in Christian Ritual (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), chapter 11.


\(^{58}\) Cavanaugh, Theopolitical, 117–118.
who are “different from each other, but merely different.” The Eucharist imagines the collapse of spatial barriers radically differently, for in the Body of Christ, we are not juxtaposed but identified: “if one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it” (1 Cor 12:26). This results not in competition but in greater honor and care for the weakest member, who is identified with oneself. It is wholly other rather than merely different, for the suffering is identified with Christ (Col 1:24), who nonetheless remains other to the church.

The pilgrim church cannot achieve this reimagination through the pursuit of influence over worldly powers but instead embraces discipleship, following our Lord the Prince of Peace, and hence, our methods will more resemble martyrdom than military victory. As Cavanaugh reminds us,

> We must cease to think that the only choices open to the Church are either to withdraw into some private or “sectarian” confinement, or to embrace the public debate policed by the state. The Church as Body of Christ transgresses both the lines which separate public from private and the borders of nation-states, thus creating spaces for a different kind of political practice, one which is incapable of being pressed into the service of wars or rumours of wars.

Christian discipleship is the antidote to the world’s attempts to discipline bodies in its likeness.

The church is called to challenge the world’s imagination and to reimagine it in light of the gospel performed in the Eucharist. Spiritual and temporal authority are still differentiated, but it is a difference of time, not space; spiritual authority deals with the eternal, temporal authority with the provisional measures necessary between the first and second

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comings of Jesus Christ, with all matters of secular rule still projected within salvation history.\textsuperscript{63} Cavanaugh observes,

Augustine does not map the two cities out in space, but rather projects them across time. The reason that Augustine is compelled to speak of two cities is not because there are some human pursuits that are properly terrestrial and others that pertain to God, but simply because God saves in time. Salvation has a history, whose climax is in the advent of Jesus Christ, but whose definitive closure remains in the future. Christ has triumphed over the principalities and powers, but there remains resistance to Christ’s saving action. The two cities are not the sacred and the profane spheres of life. The two cities are the \textit{already} and the \textit{not yet} of the kingdom of God.\textsuperscript{64}

This leads us to the next part: reimagining time.

\textbf{Reimagining Time}

The world imagines time in both a linear and a cyclical fashion. It imagines itself moving linearly out of the past, through the present, and into an endless future, conceiving rules and structures predicated on its own perpetuity.\textsuperscript{65} It also imagines cyclical liturgies, constantly establishing present reality by reference to past sacrifice resulting in triumph over chaos. For example, when referring to American Nationalism, Cavanaugh, drawing on the work of Marvin and Ingle, puts it as such:

There is a fear that the “greatest generation” has passed and that the current generation has not undertaken sacrifices to equal those in the “Good War.” Therefore, what is needed is a return to the original sacrifice, kicking the “Vietnam Syndrome,” and new good wars to unite the country.\textsuperscript{66}

While it might not always come in the form of “a good old war,” the world’s imagination of time, regardless of its form, remains the unavoidably cyclical nature.

\textsuperscript{63} Cavanaugh, “Church,” \textit{Blackwell}, 398.
\textsuperscript{64} Cavanaugh, \textit{Migration}, 59–60.
The world’s imagination of time is overcome in the Eucharist, which embodies the three temporalizations implicit in 1 Cor 11:26: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” The present communion functions as the memorial of the past death of Christ and his future coming in glory. The Eucharist is first God’s imagination, and we participate in that imagination insofar as we are imagined by God, incorporated into the Body of Christ through grace.

Unlike worldly imagination, the Christian imagination of time has an end (finis), and even stranger, that end has already come, yet with time still continuing. This end is Christ, who announced that the kingdom of God is already-but-not-yet; it awaits final consummation in the future but is already present in the form of signs, that is, the Eucharist. Cavanaugh explains this coming together of time in the Eucharist:

The church is ever in its infancy, made new by its Eucharistic participation in Christ’s death and resurrection, the very founding moments of the church. And yet in the Eucharist the church also stands at the brink of its own final end, the parousia and the future consummation of the Kingdom.

In the Eucharist, the church stands at the brink of its own final end, the parousia and the future consummation of the kingdom. Hence fittingly, the Eucharist takes place on Sunday, the day of the Lord’s resurrection, which stands as a promise of the general resurrection of all in the final judgment. Christ’s resurrection also marks his decisive victory over sin, ushering in the new age that we are already living. Christ’s appearances of resurrection are no longer spatially limited, but occur wherever the Eucharist is celebrated. We celebrate the Eucharist on Sundays to keep the resurrection day separate from the world’s days of the week, hence keeping the church in tune with a different time, denying the endless

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67 Cavanaugh, Torture, 227–228.
68 Cavanaugh, Torture, 273–274.
70 Cavanaugh, Torture, 226.
71 Cavanaugh, Torture, 226–227.
uniform march of the world’s time with the promise and realization of history’s end.\textsuperscript{73}

Time is reimagined, with the future fulfillment of the past governing the present. The Eucharist remembers the whole life of Christ, including past events of Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection, but also an imagination and ardent longing for the future completion of Christ’s kingdom.\textsuperscript{74} While the church does not live outside of worldly time, it cannot remain there, for we are sojourners. Each eucharistic celebration hence serves as the link between heavenly and earthly time, where we recall the temporary status of our earthly life and locate ourselves in the simultaneity of past and future.\textsuperscript{75}

Correspondingly, the Christian community is reimagined; just like medieval Christians who considered biblical figures their “contemporaries” connected to the present through divine providence, a eucharistic community would mean one that spans not only all of space, but also all of time.\textsuperscript{76} All are brothers and sisters connected through being members of the Christ’s Body, past, present, and future. Through Christ our High Priest, who brings all of reality into one point, the Eucharist, the heavens open up and gather the church of all times and places, and we experience this heavenly liturgy as a foretaste.\textsuperscript{77}

Nevertheless, it is a foretaste and not the kingdom’s final fulfillment. The Eucharist recognizes that Christ has already definitively triumphed over sin and evil. But not all have accepted this reality, so both earthly and heavenly cities continue to coexist until the final consummation of history.\textsuperscript{78} The persecution of Christians, especially the deaths of the martyrs, keeps this notion in focus. In the Eucharist, the church expresses hungry anticipation for the completion of Christ’s kingdom. We recall our temporary status of earthly life and locate ourselves in the eternal kingdom. The future

\textsuperscript{73} Cavanaugh, \textit{Torture}, 227.
\textsuperscript{75} Cavanaugh, \textit{Torture}, 224, 228.
\textsuperscript{76} Anderson, \textit{Imagined Communities}, 22–24.
\textsuperscript{78} William T. Cavanaugh, \textit{Field Hospital: The Church’s Engagement with a Wounded World} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).
kingdom is incompletely present, and the church “strains forward to what lies ahead” (Philippians 3:13).79

Because the church lives from the future, she inhabits a space and time that is never guaranteed by power or institution but must be constantly asked for and gifted by the Holy Spirit.80 It comes epicletically, in the church’s faithful constant renewed pleading that the Holy Spirit enacts the kingdom of God in its midst.81 Cavanaugh illustrates this:

The Eucharistic is our daily bread precisely in the sense that it is manna, a free gift of God which cannot be stored up for the next day. The Eucharist is not an available thing of which one can take possession...always oriented by the past and straining towards the future. The Eucharistic community lives on borrowed time.82

The Eucharist is God’s free gift, yet, unlike other gifts that demand consumption upon reception, the Eucharist turns the notion of a gift inside out: “instead of simply consuming the body of Christ, we are consumed by it.”83 The Eucharist, through Christ’s self-giving of his body, forms the true Body of Christ in time, his corpus verum, which the church both is and is meant to be.84 In the Eucharist, Christ is always being given to the church, but never the possession of the church, as it demands the church to become his Body and to be food for others.85

The church experiences time differently from the world. The eschaton is experienced as a foretaste now, with the judge who comes at the parousia coming to redeem as well as to vanquish. On one hand, the church’s discipline saves members from being condemned along with the world in the future, forming disciples through the Eucharist into a body that stands in opposition to the forces of the world. On the other hand, the church

79 Cavanaugh, Torture, 226–228.
80 Cavanaugh, Torture, 272–273.
81 John Zizioulas, Being as Communion (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985), 204–8.
82 Cavanaugh, Torture, 228.
83 Cavanaugh, Consumed, 54.
84 Marion, God without Being, 176–182.
disciplines because she and her members experience Christ’s judgment as a foretaste now. In Corinthians (1 Cor 10:16-17, 11:27-32), the future coming of the Lord’s glory is already felt in the community in the present, and members of the Body who do not “discern the body” risk condemnation meant for those who oppose Christ; “Paul is not speaking metaphorically, the Eucharist can kill you.” Hence, the eucharistic formation into a body is meant both to save Christians from being condemned with the world and to form a body that stands in opposition to the world. The Christian is called to live now as if Christ’s redemption and judgment has already taken place, embodied in their lives, and thereby bringing the kingdom, however incomplete, into the present.86 Cavanaugh shows the relationship between the church’s discipline and Christ’s forgiveness:

Discipline, therefore, is not opposed to forgiveness but is its embodiment. What Christ has done in reconciling creation to Himself requires and makes possible a real bodily reconciliation in time. As His body, the church is called to exemplify that reconciliation in its own flesh, and visibly to show forth to a world mired in violence and division what Christ has done.87

Excommunication then, like all other forms of discipline, is seen as a form of mercy rather than judgment. By denying the Eucharist to the offender, excommunication delays the offender’s judgment in hope for future reconciliation. As with the early church, excommunication is for medicinal purposes: to prevent the sinner’s own damnation, and to cure the sinner rather than to forsake him. The church recognizes the sinner as already excluded from communion in the Body of Christ by his own actions, and the excommunication makes visible the seriousness of the offense to both the offender and the rest of the Body, and the path toward proper reconciliation with the Body while shielding the offender from the adverse effects of continued participation in the Eucharist in the absence of true reconciliation. As Cavanaugh illustrates, “excommunication does not abandon the sinner to her fate; in fact, precisely the opposite is the case. It is failure to excommunicate the notorious sinner that leaves her to eat and drink her own condemnation.”88

86 Cavanaugh, Torture, 235–239.
87 Cavanaugh, Torture, 240.
But what exactly warrants excommunication? Cavanaugh argues that offenses that merit excommunication are of a different kind rather than a matter of degree. Excommunication is not reserved for the individual who outdoes others in terms of the number or degree of his sins. First, excommunication, by definition, is for ecclesiological offenses; the offender is sinning against the Body of Christ. Second, excommunication is not meant to keep the pilgrim church on earth from being sinless and to reserve the Eucharist for an elite group of people with surpassing personal holiness, but to preserve the Eucharist as a sign of the church’s present participation in the future kingdom. Hence, excommunication is limited to sins that impugn the identity of the Body of Christ and threaten its visibility. This is vital because the church’s witness to the world, proclaiming and advancing Christ’s salvation, is dependent on her visibility.

Some disclaimers are necessary before we proceed. First, excommunication is not the only key to the church’s visibility. In fact, rather than a solution, it is more a recognition that something has gone terribly wrong. Second, the eucharistic imagination is an eschatological imagination, and hence, incomplete. Therefore, all forms of church discipline, including excommunication, are done provisionally and in humility. Fallible human beings always have the potential to abuse authority. But that should not stop the church from fulfilling her mission, and in the epiclesis, we plead for the Spirit to come upon the church and shape her imagination.

**Reimagining the Setting of Protestant Mission**

The Protestant tendency to see time dichotomized as the temporal followed by the eternal inevitably leads to another dichotomy of the Eucharist and mission. Sunquist, for example, observes a view of the meaning and function of the church as mission being temporary (until the

eschaton) and worship as eternal. Such a view also leads to competition among the various purposes of the church, that is, among worship, evangelism, and social efforts. Given that time is limited and temporary, the various activities of the church are forced to compete with one another for the church’s time and efforts.

This leads to worship being commonly seen as of subordinate importance to that of evangelism or social efforts. After all, if evangelism cannot continue to eternity while worship will, it is clear which is the more urgent task at hand. On one hand Protestants acknowledge worship as the goal when we are living in eternity, but on the other, it is often reduced to a means to an end, the fuel that gives the church the capacity to carry on her mission outside the church. Sunquist describes the relationship of mission and worship as such: “as a healthy organism breathes in and breathes out, so the church goes out in mission and returns to receive needed oxygen in community worship.” This contradiction arises because Protestants see the temporal and eternal separately, with each having its own goals: worship as the goal of eternity and mission as the goal of the temporal. Few Protestant theologians would admit that our current age is only that which is temporal. Yet, our utilitarian understanding of worship and its subordination to mission as its fuel reveals our embodied theology. Consider how, for example, what often is first to be taken out of worship is the eucharistic segment, which seems to embody little function for the church’s task toward the world compared to the message that equips or the songs that inspire.

Ironically, by doing so, worship, intended as an expression of intimacy between the Christ and his bride, is stripped of its beauty and forced into a “purpose-driven” mold. In our zeal to be useful to God we forget that worship is intimate precisely because it is “impractical”—that it has no expectation of benefit, blessing, or reward. It is done entirely for God. For, in the words of Schmemann, “beauty is never ‘necessary,’ ‘functional’

94 Scott W. Sunquist, Understanding Christian Mission: Participation in Suffering and Glory (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 281. While Sunquist acknowledges this view, he also proposes seeing worship and mission as simply “a different order of the eschaton.”

95 Scott W. Sunquist, Understanding, 281.

or ‘useful’…we do all this not out of necessity, but out of love.’’\footnote{97} This is not to say that it does not form us practically, as we are inevitably formed into Christ in our worship.\footnote{98} But that is not the goal of worship.

The Eucharist challenges us to see time and space differently. For in every eucharistic celebration we are reminded how the eternal interrupts the temporal, and that we are citizens of the eternal kingdom travelling as pilgrims in the temporal one, and that for the church to truly fulfill her mission, to bring God’s peace and justice into the world, we must give each his or her due, which is only made possible when God is given his due sacrifice.\footnote{99} The world imagines the church and the world to be two separate spaces that require two distinct actions, but it is toward both the church and the world that the church is called to direct her missionary efforts. While it might seem strange to Protestants to think of mission as done not only on behalf of God and for God’s sake but also towards God, yet is not Christ the recipient of every kind deed towards the hungry, the lonely, and the sick? Christ receives truly, and not merely via proxy, our loving actions toward the needy (Mt 25:35-45), of whom none are more needy that those who have yet to know Christ. Rather than vying for the same space, time, or energy, all our actions become both worship toward God and our mission for him. The dichotomy between the sacred and the secular that the world works so hard to build up is shattered in the Eucharist.

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\footnote{97} Alexander Schmemann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1982), 30.
