Modern Theology 16:1 January 2000
ISSN 0266-7177

THE FINAL RECONCILIATION: REFLECTIONS ON A SOCIAL DIMENSION OF THE ESCHATOLOGICAL TRANSITION

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The Last Judgment—the Final Reconciliation

When asked, whether it is true that one day in heaven we will see again our loved ones, Karl Barth is reported to have responded, "Not only the loved ones!" The sting of the great theologian's response—be ready to meet there even those whom you dislike here—is more than just a personal challenge. It contains a serious and, as it turns out, inadequately addressed theological problem. How can those who have disliked or even had good reasons to hate each other here, come to inhabit together what is claimed to be, in Jonathan Edwards' memorable phrase, "a world of love"?[1] The not-loved-ones will have to be transformed into the loved ones and those who do not love will have to begin to do so; enemies will have to become friends.

A sense that such a social transformation is a condition of "heavenly" existence may lie behind a funeral practice in Germany in which a kind of a post-mortem reconciliation between the deceased and their enemies is enacted in the form of prayer. Participants in the burial service remember before God those whom the deceased may have wronged or who may have wronged them.[2] Popular piety is also aware of the issue. In tightly knit Christian communities one sometimes hears the injunction that their members had better learn to love each other now since they will spend eternity together. Sometime between a shadowy history and eternity bathed in light, somewhere between this world and the coming world of perfect love, a transformation of persons and their complex relationships needs to take

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place. Without such transformation the world to come would not be a world of perfect love but just a repetition of a world in which, at best, the purest of loves falter and, at worst, cold indifference reigns and deadly hatreds easily flare up.

Traditionally, the last judgment along with the resurrection of the dead was taken to be the site of the eschatological transition from this world to the world to come. But if the need for transformation of persons as well as of their complex relationships is a real one, the question is whether the last judgment, as usually conceived, can carry this weight. Consider Augustine, whose thought is particularly pertinent not only because his eschatology shaped significantly the later tradition[3] but because he uses the metaphor "peace", including social peace,[4] to describe the world to come and contrasts it to the violence of the kingdoms of this world. As he defines it in *The City of God*, the peace of the coming world is "perfectly ordered and harmonious enjoyment of God and of one another in God".[5] Notice, however, how Augustine describes the eschatological transition from the world of violence to the world of peace. "Now, it is through the last judgment that men pass to these ends, the good to the supreme good, the evil to the supreme evil",[6] writes Augustine. The last judgment is a divine act directed toward individuals which definitively executes the division of humanity into damned and saved and apportions appropriate rewards and punishments. If one operates, however, with a robust notion of social peace at whose center is the enjoyment of one another in God, as Augustine does, then it is easy to see how the last judgment can be indispensable to such a peace but difficult to see how it can be sufficient to usher it in.

According to Augustine, the last judgment concerns primarily matters of justice;[7] it separates "the good" and "the bad"[8] and ensures that "the true and full happiness" be "the lot of none but the good" and "deserved and supreme misery" be "the portion of the wicked, and of them only".[9] Unless, contrary to Augustine's claim, the good are already creatures of perfect love, the execution of such justice will not make them love in the world to come those whom they may not have loved now.[10] Granted, for Augustine the last judgment is but *one* aspect of the eschatological transition toward heavenly peace. Another is the resurrection—an aspect of the ontological *novum* that a comprehensive *transformatio mundi* represents—which heals the weakness of the flesh and clothes the person in *immortalitas* and *incorruptio*.[11] The last judgment and the *transformatio mundi* together would create sufficient conditions for mutual human enjoyment; together they are meant not only to make perfect love possible, but sin impossible. The two would indeed be all we need if the eschatological transition were a creation of a brand new world of love, rather than a transformation of the existing world of enmity into a world of love. But the contrary is the case. Unlike the present world, the world to come will not be created *ex nihilo* but *ex vetere*.[12] Hence either only those who are already fully reconciled in this world could be admitted into

the coming world or the reconciliation would have to occur as part of the eschatological transition itself. The first option seems excluded by Augustine's belief that one cannot have complete peace in this life.[13] The second, which Augustine does not explore,[14] needs to be developed if the eschatological transition is to reorder human relations such that human beings enjoy not only God but also one another.

Whereas justice is central in Augustine's theology of the last judgment, grace is central in Martin Luther's. The thought of judgment according to works is present, but it is integrated into the overarching judgment of grace.[15] For believers, the last judgment is not so much a process by which the moral quality of human deeds is made unmistakably manifest and appropriate rewards and punishments apportioned, but above all an event in which sinners are forgiven and justified. Christ the final judge is none other than Christ the merciful savior. "To me", writes Luther, "he is a physician, helper, and deliverer from death and the devil."[16] The Johannine Jesus says, "anyone who comes to me I will never drive away" (John 6:37). Luther interprets him to mean,

> Let it be your one concern to come to Me and to have the grace to hold, to believe, and to be sure in your heart that I was sent into the world for your sake, that I carried out the will of My Father and was sacrificed for your atonement, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, and bore all punishment for you. If you believe this, do not fear. I do not want to be your judge, executioner, or jailer, but your Savior and Mediator, yes, your kind, loving Brother and good Friend. But you must abandon your work-righteousness and remain with Me in firm faith.[17]

Divine judgment at the end of history completes divine justification, grounded in Christ's redemptive work, in the middle of history.[18]

Yet it is not clear how the final justification of the ungodly would *as such* create a world of love—not even if we take it to include what Friedrich Schleiermacher has called "complete sanctification".[19] No doubt, it would ensure that we would meet in the world to come even those whom we have not considered particularly lovable in the present one. But for us to *love* the unlovable, two things would need to happen. First, in a carefully specified sense we ourselves would need to "justify" them, and, given that they may consider us no more lovable than we consider them, they would also need to "justify" us, and we all would need to receive this "justification" from each other.[20] Second, above and beyond giving and receiving justification, we would also need to want be in communion with one another. To usher in a world of love, the eschatological transition would need to be understood not only as a divine act toward human beings but also as *a social event between human beings*, more precisely, a divine act toward human beings which is also a social event between them. Or so I would like to argue in this essay.

Put in the form of a question about the perpetrator and the victim of the first violence in primal history, the subject I will explore is this: If Cain and Abel were to meet again in the world to come, what will need to have happened between them for Cain not to keep avoiding Abel's look and for Abel not to want to get out of Cain's way? Put in a form of a thesis, the argument I will develop is this: If the world to come is to be a world of love, then the eschatological transition from the present world to that world, which God will accomplish, must have an inter-human side; the work of the Spirit in the consummation[21] includes not only the resurrection of the dead and the last judgment but also the final social reconciliation.

The thesis is novel, or at least severely under-emphasized and underdeveloped. Some contemporary theologians have come close to advocating it, however. Reflecting on the shape of social relations in the world to come, Friedrich Mildenberger suggests in his *Biblische Dogmatik* that we think of the last judgment as an act of purging, in which aspects of human relationships compatible with the perfected world remain and those incompatible burn up. In some ways, this is a contemporary restatement of the notion of judgment as purification rather than punishment, prevalent in the Eastern tradition. Mildenberger understands the eschatological purification, however, against the background of socially constructed identities. Since human identities are shaped by relationships and since relationships can be freighted with evil, for the perfect sociality to emerge evil residues of relationships must be removed for the perfect sociality to emerge.[22] He seems to imply, however, that the removal of sin can take place without the involvement of people who stood in those relationships, a kind of divine readjustment of individual identities structurally comparable to the one expressed in the image of earthly attachments being scraped off the soul as it is drawn to God, which Gregory of Nyssa employs in *On the Soul and the Resurrection*.[23] But to concentrate exclusively on individuals and disregard their relationships is to sacrifice in the account of the way a person is freed from sin the fundamental insight into how the identity of a human being as a person and as a sinner is constructed. If identities are constructed and have been injured in a social process, should then not their healing, too, involve a social process, even if one grants that much of the healing can happen internally to an individual person?

Wolfhart Pannenberg seems implicitly to advocate the equivalent of what I call "the final reconciliation". Exploring how antagonisms between the individual and society will be overcome in the world to come, he writes in *Systematic Theology*, "God is the future of the finite from which it again receives its existence as a whole as that which has been, and at the same time accepts all other creaturely being along with itself."[24] The reception of one's own existence as perfected by God must go hand in hand with the acceptance of others. To be eschatologically fruitful, the notion of acceptance, which Pannenberg only suggests, would need to be unpacked and its full social

and temporal dimensions elaborated. But the notion points in the right direction because it implies that before the antagonism between individual and society can be overcome—before the world of love can be created—*relationships* between human beings must be transformed.[25]

My argument that the final social reconciliation is an integral element of the Spirit's work in the consummation will proceed in three simple steps. First, I will examine one notable example of "the final reconciliation" in philosophical literature—Socrates' comments about the last judgment in *Phaedo*—and via an appreciative critique of Socrates lay the groundwork for my own proposal. Second, I will offer positive theological reasons for advocating "the final social reconciliation" by relating it to the nature of human beings, the character of sin, and the shape of salvation. Finally, I will engage two questions which provide critical test cases for the plausibility of the thesis: (1) whether it is compatible with the affirmations that human beings were reconciled with one another in Christ and (2) that the subject of the eschatological transition is God rather than human beings. Before embarking upon my journey I should note that, though a particular notion of the last judgment is central to my arguments, I am able to develop the notion of the last judgment in this text only as it relates directly to the final social reconciliation.

Victims' Mercy—Perpetrators' Salvation

One rare but notable philosophical text which advocates the possibility and the need of a post-mortem reconciliation is the "eschatological myth" in Plato's *Phaedo*. As I will elaborate shortly, many aspects of that myth are theologically problematic. Christian theology will do well, however, to appropriate, reformulate, and develop some of its basic insights. Before engaging the text, I ought to clarify a hermeneutical question. I will eschew the debate of Plato scholars about the proper interpretation of the "mythical" character of the text. It is not clear in the dialogue how precisely the mythic "tale" relates to the preceding arguments. Socrates himself says that, though the tale of "the soul and her mansions" is not "exactly true", "inasmuch as the soul is shown to be immortal", we may "venture to think, not improperly or unworthily, that something of the kind is true".[26] Given that Socrates has *argued* for the immortality of the soul, and therefore for a particular "nature of the pilgrimage" which he was "about to make",[27] I will take him at his word and interpret the myth as a narratival rendering, made necessary by the limitations of discursive analysis,[28] of a future afterlife, rather than, for example, primarily an image of the present life.[29]

Toward the end of the eschatological myth Socrates, who is about to execute on himself the sentence of death by drinking poison, tells his friends about the sentences the dead will have passed on them when they "arrive at the place to which the genius … conveys them". Of the five groups in which

he divides humanity, the sentences for four groups are predictable, more or less. Those "who appear to be incurable by reason of the greatness of their crime" are "hurled into Tartarus" ("a chasm which pierces right through the whole earth"[30]) "which is their suitable destiny, and they never come out". Those "who appear to have lived neither well nor ill"—the great majority of people[31]—are "purified of their evil deeds" and "receive the rewards of their good deeds according to their deserts". Those "who have been preeminent for holiness of life" are "released from their earthly prison, and go to their pure home which is above, and dwell in the purer earth". Finally, those who "have duly purified themselves with philosophy, live henceforth altogether without the body, in mansions fairer far than these, which may not be described".[32]

Sandwiched between the third and fourth is the last group, whose sentence Socrates expounds most extensively. The group comprises those "who have committed crimes, which, although great, are not irremediable", such as those "who in a moment of anger, for example, have done some violence to a father or a mother and have repented for the remainder of their lives, or, who have taken the life of another under the like extenuating circumstances". Their sentence seems unusual at first sight and questionable in many of its aspects, but is nonetheless in some ways profoundly right. Here is how Socrates describes it:

> … these are plunged into Tartarus, the pains of which they are compelled to undergo for a year, but at the end of the year the wave casts them forth—mere homicides by way of [the river] Cocytus, parricides and matricides by Pyriphlegethon—and they are borne to the Acherusian lake, and there they lift up their voices and call upon their victims whom they have slain or wronged, to have pity on them, and to be kind to them, and let them come out into the lake. And if they prevail, then they come forth and cease from their troubles; but if not, they are carried back again into Tartarus and from thence into the rivers unceasingly, until they obtain mercy from those whom they have wronged; for that is the sentence inflicted upon them by their judges.

A possible healing of a particular kind of perpetrator, Socrates suggests, depends not only on the purgatorial pain suffered and on the perpetrator's plea for mercy, but also on the willingness of their victims to show mercy.

It is easy to locate the spots at which Socrates' account of "the last judgment", and in particular of the sentence for curable souls, is problematic,[33] at least from a Christian perspective. I will leave aside here, for instance, his well known privileging of a bodiless state in which a soul can comprehend Ideas as such, and not as they are immanent in sensible particulars; it does not rhyme with the resurrection of the body. Instead, I will concentrate on issues which concern the general character of the judgment and the specific sentence of curable souls. As will be evident, my perspective is decisively

shaped by a theological tradition with some reservations about the traditional notions of purgatory.

First, Socrates operates with what might be described as a mirroring relation between pre-mortem and post-mortem life. The soul is judged "on the basis of its degree of goodness while the soul animated the human body"; the task of the judge is simply to "ratify" the soul's moral status.[34] Especially since Luther, in Christian theology, on the other hand, the judgment is fundamentally a saving event, at least for the blessed. Second, Socrates believes that there are crimes so heinous as to render those who committed them incurable and that there are lives so pure as to earn those who led them mansions beyond description. In the Christian tradition no deed is imaginable that would as such hurl a person of necessity (Socrates' "destiny") into damnation, for the simple reason that deeds are not decisive when it comes to afterlife;[35] inversely, no deed and therefore no life is so holy or pure as to qualify a person for entry into heavenly bliss. Finally, when Socrates contemplates betterment for evildoers in the post-mortem state, change always involves pain inflicted from the outside and understood as a form of purification. Though in the traditional Catholic doctrine of purgatory, "physical" pain is seen as a form of purification, Protestant theology has emphasized transformation as a sheer gift of God involving no other suffering than the pain of self-discovery. All three points amount to a fundamental difference in the character of the last judgment.[36] For Socrates, the last judgment is situated in an economy of deserts; in the next life everyone gets what they have deserved in this life. In Christian theology, the last judgment is situated in an economy of grace—grace, however, which does not negate justice but affirms it precisely in the act of transcending it.[37]

The only place where Socrates seems to step out of the economy of deserts —though with one foot only, so to speak—is in the treatment of curable souls. They, too, suffer so as to be purified, but the suffering is not sufficient to change their lot. The perpetrators need to be shown mercy by the victims to be admitted to further purification and finally "sent back" (admittedly only "to be born as animals").[38] But here a major problem with Socrates' scheme surfaces. As one commentator notes, in Socrates' proposal everything depends on the "chance factors of the victim's sense of mercy and the wrongdoers' powers of rhetoric".[39] Surely something is amiss if two perpetrators commit comparable crimes but the one with a smooth tongue whose victim is merciful gets off the hook while the less eloquent one whose victim is vengeful suffers the consequences!

Part of the problem is that Socrates has arranged things in such a way that the perpetrator and the victim have to sort out *by themselves* the issues between them. A third party, the judges, only defines the process and sets it in motion. The judges' standing on the sidelines is in fact part of the sentence. In the absence of an appropriate third party arbitrariness reigns. It is not clear, for instance, at what point the unwillingness of the victim to offer

mercy and deliver the perpetrator from Tartarus turns into vindictiveness. Furthermore, though a "mechanism" is in place by which a perpetrator can be purified, Socrates does not even reflect on the possible need for the victim to be transformed, for instance, to be freed from bitterness and vindictiveness.

The problematic character of the judgment as a whole and of the sentence inflicted on curable souls notwithstanding, profound eschatological insights are contained in the sentence. I am thinking of its two central and interrelated features. First, *the action of the third party, though indispensable, is alone not sufficient to deal with the problem*. Socrates is aware of the perverse interpersonal bond that violence suffered creates between the perpetrator and the victim. For the perpetrator to be released, something needs to happen *between* the perpetrator and the victim, not just *in* each of them (for instance, repentance, in the case of the perpetrator, or inner healing, in the case of the victim). Without a particular kind of interaction between them it is difficult to imagine the perpetrator's restoration. Second, *justice understood as desert does not suffice to restore the perpetrator*. Though justice is indispensable, required also are the psychological and interpersonal phenomena of repentance and forgiveness, of a sense of guilt and the offer of mercy.

Socrates seemed concerned primarily with the fate of the perpetrator as an individual; his or her reintegration into community is not so much in view (though if one were to make a somewhat daring hermeneutical leap and read Socrates' statement in *Phaedo* against the backdrop of the Athenian Stranger's laws for dealing with pollution from involuntary murder in Plato's *Laws*—a period of exile and readmission into the society[40]—a vision of reconciliation between the perpetrator and the victim would be implied). If the interaction between the two in the form of a request for forgiveness and offer of mercy is essential for healing of the perpetrator, it is *a fortiori* essential for the *restoration of the relationship between them and the creation of the community of unmarred and unadulterated love*. I propose therefore that we take up Socrates' two basic insights about the healing of curable souls—the indispensability of a social process and the insufficiency of justice conceived as desert—and place them in the context of an economy of grace, which governs Christian soteriology and eschatology. The basic contours of the resulting account of the final reconciliation would look something like this.

First, the reconciling event would not apply to some crimes of some people but to any (social) sin of any person; it would include all injustices, deceptions, and violences, whether minuscule or grand, whether committed intentionally or not, and whether the perpetrators were conscious of them or not.[41] As a result, a clear division between the group of perpetrators and the group of victims would be broken,[42] yet without blunting a sharp condemnation of the evil committed. Second, the judge as the third party would not simply define and set the process in motion but would, in the precise function of a judge who suffered the victim's fate and was judged in the perpetrator's place, be at the very center of their reconciliation. Third, reconciliation between

perpetrator and victim would be de-coupled from its necessary relation to the pain of the perpetrator, except for the pain of remorse; healing would be ascribed to the power of God's Spirit working through the display of truth and grace. Fourth, transformation of both perpetrators and victims would be affirmed; perpetrators would be liberated from their sin and (likely?) attempts at self-justification, and victims from their pain and (possible?) bitterness and vindictiveness.

So far have I made two circles of arguments for the final social reconciliation as an aspect of the eschatological transition wrought by God's Spirit. The first centered on a discrepancy between the traditional accounts of the eschatological transition (the last judgment and the resurrection of the dead) and the terminal point to which the transition was leading (the world of love). The second circle consisted of a critical engagement with Socrates' vision how curable perpetrators are saved from the pains of Tartarus. So far my aim was to create a circumference of plausibility for strictly theological arguments. Much will depend on whether *these* arguments, to which I now turn, are persuasive (or, if not, on whether persuasive ones can be found).

Social Reconciliation at the End

In the following I will progress from the background arguments, taken from anthropology and hamartiology, to the central arguments, taken from soteriology and above all eschatology. The constraints of this essay require me to move faster through the territory I need to cover than I would want. I will stop to highlight and argue for only what is absolutely essential for my purposes without situating my claims within an overarching account of the doctrines in question.

The central anthropological question in relation to the final reconciliation concerns the construction of human identity.[43] If identity—not personhood, which I take to be exclusively a gift of God[44]—is constructed in a social process, then one should expect that the transition to a world of love will not circumvent social process. This holds true whether one understands the person as "a structure of response sedimented from a significant history of communication"[45] or if one distinguishes clearly between the "pattern of sedimented communication" and the "organizer of the pattern", as I prefer. In either case, personal *identity* is shaped by how others relate to persons and by how persons internalize others' relation to them; by how persons actively relate to others and by what they do to themselves and with themselves, including their material practices, in relation to others; by narrower and wider public resonances they help shape and are in turn marked by them,[46] by identification with and divergence from others' investments in specific cultural forms broadly conceived, ranging from language and religion to political and economic institutions and activities.[47] The specific identity of persons results from conscious or unconscious complex relations to culturally

situated others. Whatever the concrete shape of these relations turns out to be, selfhood, as Paul Ricoeur has argued in *Oneself as Another*, "implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other".[48] Significantly, given the temporal character of human lives, the shaping of the self in interaction with others has a diachronic and not only a synchronic dimension. Remembered and suppressed past interrelations with others and anticipated future interrelations all flow into one's ever-changing present identity.[49]

The social construction of personal identity correlates with the essentially social character of personal sin.[50] As the preceding anthropological reflection suggests, it would be a mistake to oppose abstractly social sin and personal sin.[51] Personal sin is always socially mediated (though not socially *caused*!); and social sin—evil enshrined in societal institutions, cultural and religious symbols, ideologies which legitimize these institutions and symbols, and collective decisions grounded in ideologies[52]—is as sin always personally embodied (though not reducible to a specific person's attitudes and actions). Though all sin is, by definition, sin against God, most sin is committed in a multi-directional and multi-layered interaction between people, an interaction with both diachronic and synchronic dimensions. It manifests itself, for instance, as "the monstrous injustice of generational succession", to use Oliver O'Donovan's formulation in *The Desire of the Nations*,[53] in which later generations both benefit from the sufferings of earlier ones and suffer the consequences of their misdeeds. Or it takes the form of conflict between persons and communities in which violence, injustice, and deception are the order of the day, and in which the weak suffer at the hands of the strong and the rage of today's victims gives birth to tomorrow's perpetrators. Moreover, sin itself creates a bond between persons which goes beyond the bond that their interrelations in and of themselves create. Evil committed and suffered both severs relationships and weaves a thick network of perverted ties that keep victims and perpetrators returning to each other—in thought, in person, in progeny, or in succeeding generations—to commit new offences in an attempt to rectify the old ones. This partly explains the power of sin, which is located neither simply inside nor simply outside of the person but both in a person and in social relations.

Insofar as a person is involved in a history of sin, the socially constructed identity of a person is a socially constructed identity of a sinner-and-sinned-against-one, an identity that is also temporarily structured through complex interrelations of remembered or suppressed pasts, experienced presents, and anticipated futures. If this is true of the identity of a person in a world of sin, then we can expect the transformation and healing of persons to be socially mediated (an expectation, which, as I will argue shortly, leaves a wide range of possibilities for construing the relation between divine and human action in the process of transformation). And in fact salvation according to Christian soteriology is fundamentally a social reality, whatever

else it is in addition to that. Communion with the Triune God is at the same time communion with all those who have entrusted themselves in faith to that same God. As Eberhard Jüngel argues in *God as the Mystery of the World*, "at the very same time that I discover this new fellowship with God" I also discover others "to be my neighbors, who belong to that same fellowship".[54] Reconciliation with one's estranged neighbors is integral to the reconciliation with God. The divine embrace of both the victim and the perpetrator has, in a sense, not come to completion without their own embrace. But how can people who have transgressed against each other embrace? How can their common past be redeemed so that they can have a new future? If one assumes personal continuity between a person as a sinner and as a recipient of grace and affirms the irreversibility of life, creation of a completely new past is out of the question. Rather, their past must be redeemed through reconciliation between them. Dealing adequately with sins suffered and committed is *a social process*, involving individual persons and their fellow human beings.

As an illustration of the essential sociality of the healing process, consider the story Simon Wiesenthal tells in *The Sunflower* about receiving a deathbed confession from an SS soldier for killing a Jewish family trying to flee a building to which the Nazis had set fire.[55] Plagued by guilt, the perpetrator wants forgiveness from a Jew. Though deeply moved, Wiesenthal leaves him without a word, partly on the grounds that victims alone can forgive the crimes done against them. The perpetrator's request and Wiesenthal's refusal are instructive. The request comes out of a painful awareness that the remorseful perpetrator cannot deal with the evil he committed on his own. He needs his victim's mercy so much that, in the absence of his victim, he feels compelled to search for a substitute. Wiesenthal's refusal to show mercy stems from the correct insight that a third party cannot forgive and mend the relations between the offender and the offended.[56] But what about God? Should not God's forgiveness be all that is needed? Though God, being God and therefore not a mere "third party", can forgive, divine forgiveness of sinners would be falsely understood if it was thought that it could substitute for the victim's giving and the perpetrator's receiving of forgiveness. If divine forgiveness could substitute for inter-human forgiveness, it would, in Matthean terms, make it unnecessary for persons who remembered that their brother or sister had something against them to go and be reconciled to them before offering their gifts "at the altar" (Matt. 5:23–24).

If, because of the character of human beings and their sin, salvation includes social reconciliation, then the eschatological consummation of salvation should include it too. The inference gains even more plausibility if we keep in mind that, unlike, for instance, the Marxian vision of a communist revolution, the eschatological consummation is not simply about the future—about the creation of a new future. It is rather about the future of yesterday, today, and tomorrow, about the future of all lived times.[57] If the past suffused with enmity is to be redeemed, then social reconciliation of those

who died unreconciled will be included in the eschatological transition. In addition to this more formal eschatological argument, good arguments for the final social reconciliation are inscribed in the three central features of the last judgment. The last judgment is an enactment of God's grace (as well as of justice), it is a social event, and it aims at its own personal appropriation. I will briefly describe each of these features of the last judgment, but expound more extensively its neglected interpersonal character.

First, on the Last Day a judgment of *grace* will be passed—again, grace understood not as excluding justice but as affirming justice in the very act of transcending it. The judge will be none other than the Christ, who died in the place of those who sinned and suffered the fate of those who were sinned against. Since "the judgment day is *his* day (Phil. 1:6; 1 Cor. 1:8)" and "the seat of judgment is *his* seat (2 Cor. 5:10)", the last judgment "cannot, under any circumstances, be perceived as interfering with or rendering problematic the judgment which leads to the justification" of the ungodly,[58] rightly argues Eberhard Jüngel, along with a chorus of other contemporary theologians. It would be a mistake, however, to think of the judgment of grace as a lenient judgment. To the contrary. "There is no more severe judgment possible than that which is effected by grace and measures everything against grace."[59] On the judgment day all persons' sins will be narrated in their full magnitude. But since this will happen in the context of grace,[60] they will be freed from guilt and transformed by that same Christ who has already become their "righteousness and sanctification" (1 Cor. 1:30).

Second, in Old Testament eschatological prophecies judgment is a *social* event. The Lord will judge between Israel and its oppressive leaders (Ezek. 34:17, 20, 22) and "between many peoples" and "strong nations far away" (Micah 4:1–3; Isa. 2:4). Behind these prophecies lie a notion of judgment, fixed in the legal formula, "Let Yahweh judge between you and me",[61] whose goal is "the restoration of *shalom* which prevailed prior to the prevailing strife or dispute".[62] Especially with *shalom* as its goal, judgment cannot simply take place in relation to each of the parties for themselves with the consequence of establishing their guilt or innocence and punishing or rewarding them, but *must also take place with respect to both together with the consequence of redefining their relationship*.

Significantly, the expectation of a "judgment between" seems to be one of the Old Testament sources of the belief in an afterlife, which emerges somewhat tenuously on the margins of its traditions.[63] Arguably, a major reason why this expectation inches itself to the surface in the Old Testament has to do with the experience of injustice (see Ps. 73).[64] To describe the nature of the injustice in question it is insufficient simply to point to innocent suffering. The social dimension of this suffering needs to be brought clearly into focus. The injustice does not consist only in the fact that the "upright" suffer rather than enjoy good fortunes; more precisely, it consists in the fact that they suffer *whereas* the "arrogant" prosper. In Psalm 73, the statement: "[A]fterward

you will receive me to glory", is the response to *this social problem* (Ps. 73:24; cf. Job 21:7–15; Jer. 12:1–4).[65] The expectation of enduring communion with God for the upright (Ps. 73:23–28) is meant not simply as a recompense of sorts for suffering, but also as a response to the injustice that their suffering represents when set over against the good fortunes of the arrogant, especially their oppressors.[66] The emergent notion of the final judgment in the Old Testament concerns relations *between* people.

A compelling account of the last judgment's social character—indeed, of its political and world-historical character—can be found in the thought of Jonathan Edwards. Starting with the presupposition that all human beings through all generations "have moral concerns one with another" because they are "linked together", Edwards argued for the last judgment as a universal public event. The "causes and controversies" between individual persons (such as between a parent and a child), between rulers of nations (such as between Roman emperors and the kings they conquered), between peoples (such as between "the Spaniards and Portuguese" and "all the nations of South America"), indeed between whole generations (even those which lived "a thousand years" apart) will be settled by God as the lawgiver and judge.[67] As the frequency of the preposition "between" in Edwards' text attests, the last judgment is fundamentally a social event. Given the interconnections between human beings, all have a case against all and each has to receive justice with respect to all.

Third, as a transition to the world of perfect love, the last judgment is unthinkable without its *appropriation* by persons on whom it is effected. The divine judgment will reach its goal when, by the power of the Spirit,[68] all eschew attempts at self-justification, acknowledge their own sin in its full magnitude, experience liberation from guilt and the power of sin, and, finally, when each recognizes that all others have done precisely that—given up on self-justification, acknowledged their sin, and experienced liberation. Having recognized that others have changed—that they have been given their true identity by being freed from sin—one will no longer condemn others but offer them the grace of forgiveness.[69] When that happens, each will see himself or herself and all others in relation to himself or herself as does Christ, the judge who was judged in their place and suffered their fate.[70]

In a kind of reversal of the parable of the unforgiving servant at which the parable itself aims (Matt. 18:23–35), at the Last Day the grace truly received by the power of the Spirit will translate itself into an unreserved and irrevocable gift of grace to others and, since one is always both a victim and a perpetrator, the reception of grace by others. Indeed, to accept God's judgment of grace fully means to offer grace to offenders and to receive grace from the offended. For those, however, for whom the judgment day does not become the day of giving and receiving grace, it will become a day of wrath leading to a hellish world of indifference and hate.[71] Seeking to justify themselves as Christ the judge reveals the truth about their lives, they will, in Matthean

terms, seize their debtors "by the throat", demand payment, and, since it will not be forthcoming, condemn them "into the prison" until they do pay (Matt. 18:30). They will have thereby shown themselves as not having received divine grace and will therefore be "handed over" by God "to be tortured" until they pay their "entire debt" (Matt. 18:34). To refuse to show grace to the offender and to receive grace from the offended, is to have rejected God's judgment of grace.

With the personal appropriation of the divine judgment of grace between people we have entered the space in which the last judgment is becoming the social event of the final reconciliation. But just as forgiveness of even those offenses for which true repentance was made is not yet reconciliation between enemies, so appropriation of the divine judgment is not yet social reconciliation. Reconciliation has not yet taken place when individuals have changed in relation to the transgression inflicted and suffered. Though it is indispensable for each to assent to God's truthful and just resolution of all disputes and give to others and receive from others the same grace of forgiveness contained in Christ's judgment of grace, still more is required to enter the world of love. For if nothing more than all this happened, each could still go his or her own way, fully satisfied that justice has been served and mercy shown. Reconciliation will not have taken place until one has *moved toward one's former enemies* and *embraced them* as belonging to the same communion of love.[72] With that mutual embrace, made possible by the Spirit of communion and grounded in God's embrace of sinful humanity on the cross, all will have stepped into a world in which each enjoys the other in the communion of the Triune God and therefore all take part in the dance of love freely given and freely received.

Reconciliation—Divine Act and Human Agency

An important test-case for the plausibility of my proposal concerns its compatibility with the affirmations that human beings were reconciled with one another in Christ and that the subject of the eschatological transition is God rather than human beings. The main function of these affirmations in relation to the eschatological transition is to give certainty to its outcome. Everything has already been accomplished *de jure* in Christ (to use Karl Barth's favorite way of putting it), and whatever still remains to be done so that it would be realized also *de facto*, is an unfailing divine work. The thesis about the final social reconciliation seems to introduce uncertainty because it presupposes limited and fallible human beings as participants, and that not only in relation to God but in relation to one another. I will argue in the following that this is in fact not the case. In order to develop my argument adequately, I would need to offer a positive account of the relation between the divine act and human agency in the eschatological transition. Since such an account is well beyond the scope of this essay, I will address the issue by

indicating minimal requirements with respect to human participation which need to be satisfied for the proposal to work. The advantage of this procedure is that, if successful, it will open a wide space for the proposal's reception by making plausible its compatibility with the most radical assertion that the work of salvation is finished and that the will's turning to God and holding onto God is itself God's work.

One can object to my thesis about the final social reconciliation by arguing that inter-human reconciliation is already included in the *finished* work of Christ. Do we not read in Ephesians that Christ "has made both groups [the Jews and the Gentiles] into one" and that he has abolished the law so as to create "in himself one new humanity" and "reconcile both groups in one body through the cross" (2:14–16)? What room could there be for the eschatological reconciliation, given that one new and fully reconciled humanity is already created in Christ? We can imagine the same objection from the perspective of Karl Barth's powerful re-statement of the doctrine of reconciliation —or at least from a particular reading of it. From the side of humanity, reconciliation in Christ, whose history is identical with the history of humanity, means that "we are lifted up, that we are awakened to our own truest being as life and act, that we are set in motion by the fact that in that one man God has made Himself our peacemaker and the giver and gift of our salvation".[73] What other reconciling activity between human beings would need to happen at the end of history that has not already happened in its middle—indeed, before its beginning—by the inclusion of all humanity into the history of Jesus Christ?

Does the objection stand, however? Consider again the epistle to the Ephesians. It resists a reading that would render reconciling activity of flesh-and-blood people superfluous. One of its main purposes, if not the main purpose, was in fact to encourage the recipients to "make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (4:3). As to Karl Barth's doctrine of reconciliation, readings of his thought according to which the force of divine action renders human participation superfluous have proven implausible.[74] The very text I quoted above continues, "What remains to us of life and activity in the face of this actualization of His redemptive will by Himself … is not for us a passive presence as spectators, but our true and highest activation."[75] Barth's affirmation of the reality of the human acting subject is robust. He is only "unwilling so to emphasise" this reality "that it becomes detached from its gracious origin and its sustaining energy in the act of God".[76]

Now, one may not wish to state together with Barth that the history of God's act of reconciling us to himself simply "*is* our true history",[77] without immediately pointing to the obvious ways in which our history has yet to be transformed. One may find, for instance, the implication implausible that a Serb and a Kosovar—to take an example from the war that is raging as I write these lines—now deeply at odds with each other, *have been reconciled to*

each other even before they existed, let alone before they had any quarrel with one another. I certainly do. But even if one advocated as radical a position as Barth's, the thesis about the final social reconciliation can stand. Given his stress on sanctification and vocation, on "the resurrection and the Holy Spirit in which the outgoing, self-realizing character of reconciliation is articulated",[78] Barth cannot let reconciliation simply float above people, disconnected from their concrete relationships. No doctrine of reconciliation can be adequate which denies that an inter-human reconciliation ought to happen that is "in some non-trivial sense … the very own act of the persons in need of mutual reconciliation".[79] If so, then the idea that human beings have been reconciled in Christ to God and one another does not render the notion of the final social reconciliation problematic. It leaves room for an understanding of the final social reconciliation as the Holy Spirit's perfecting of the inter-human reconciliation which God has accomplished in Christ and in which human beings have been involved all along in response to God's call.

Since reconciliation between two parties requires their involvement because it cannot take place "above" them, the notion of the final social reconciliation leads inevitably to the question of agency. If they are involved, how is their involvement related to divine involvement, which in the tradition so unmistakably and universally dominates the scene of the last judgment? Commenting on the character of the eschatological consummation, Oswald Bayer draws on the prophetic, dominical, and apostolic metaphor of the eschatological feast, and claims:

> Solche Gemeinschaft, in der Trennung, Vereinsamung und Isolierung ueberwunden sind, ist nicht erarbeitet und erworben, nicht von der Weltgeschichte erwirtschaftet, sondern von Gott gewaehrt, geschenkt, von ihm zuvor "bereitet", wie es zugespitzt in der Erzaehlung vom Grossen Weltgericht heisst (Mt. 25:34).[80]

The basic contrast Bayer draws is a familiar one. It is between divine action and human "work". And certainly, if it is anywhere appropriate to stress divine action, it is so with respect to the final consummation. Does the contrast, however, call into question the thesis about the final social reconciliation? It would, if it sufficed simply, negatively, to draw the contrast between divine action and human agency. But it does not suffice. Take, for example, the metaphor of the eschatological feast, on which Bayer's comments lean. If the feast were just about having one's hunger sated, then it would do to highlight only the contrast. If the feast is about celebrating, however, then it is essential also to explore how divine action is positively related to humans coming to enjoy one another's presence. Whatever one's position on synergism may be,[81] it should be uncontested that human beings are not simply passive objects—like blocks of wood—of God's action. That "the sons of the kingdom" are "not preparing the kingdom" but "are being prepared"

for the kingdom does not in any way, following Luther,[82] undermine the claim that God "*does not work in us without us*".[83] Indeed, no stronger claim regarding the relation between divine action and human agency vis-à-vis final social reconciliation can be found.

Just as God's action of preparing the children for the kingdom is indisputable, so God's "not-acting-in-them-without-them" is indispensable. Contrary to Bayer, the communion cannot be created "before" the actual reconciliation of enemies who belong to the communion. True, in Matthew's account of the judgment of the nations, Jesus does say to those on his right, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom *prepared* for you from the foundation of the world" (25:34). But the kingdom here refers here to the "space and time" of the communion and the conditions for the communion, not to the communion of the kingdom's denizens itself. For Jesus refers to something that is not constituted by the entry of persons, whereas the communion is by definition constituted by it. God has prepared "the kingdom" without any human participation, but human beings do participate in the entry into the kingdom. "Enter!" they are told by the judge. Though Matthew does not have the final reconciliation in view, my argument in this essay is that the final reconciliation is an essential dimension of this entry.

Let me conclude by commenting briefly on the import of my endeavor here. Formally, I have attempted to suggest a better fit between the account of the eschatological transition on the one hand and the Christian belief that "heaven" is a world of love as well as the beliefs about the construction of identity, the character of human sin, and the shape of salvation on the other hand. If persuasive, the thesis about the final social reconciliation is a modest contribution to greater consistency among Christian doctrines.

Materially, I have highlighted three important and interrelated aspects of the eschatological transition. First, over against an almost exclusive concentration on individual human beings and their destinies in most accounts of the eschatological transition, I have argued that we should also take seriously human beings as social beings, whose personal identities are inextricably bound up with their near and distant neighbors. Second, I have endeavored to move away from the dominance of justice as desert in the eschatological transformation.[84] Concern for justice is absolutely indispensable, of course, but it is salutary and theologically adequate only as a constituent part of the more overarching notion of grace. I take this to be a basic insight about social relations inscribed in the logic of God's treatment of sinful humanity as evident in the doctrines of atonement, of salvation, and of the last judgment. Third, I have attempted to thematize more clearly the character and import of human participation as an inter-human activity within the overarching account of the eschatological transition accomplished by the power of the Spirit.

The combined emphasis on divine grace as the defining origin and sustaining power of the whole process, on human participation as a fruit and

indispensable medium of that grace that transforms sinful persons and their relationships, and on the community of love in the Triune God as the goal of the process explains the introduction of the category "social reconciliation" into the transition from a world of sin to the world of perfect love. The final reconciliation is the eschatological side of the vision of social transformation contained in the movement of the Triune God toward sinful humanity to take them up into the circle of divine communal love.[85] The notion of the final reconciliation strengthens that vision and thus shapes social practices.[86]

NOTES

1 The title of Jonathan Edwards' fifteenth sermon in the collection *Charity and Its Fruits* is "Heaven is a World of Love" (*The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, John E. Smith [ed], [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957–], VIII, pp. 366–397). Cf. Amy Plantinga Pauw, " 'Heaven is a World of Love': Edwards on Heaven and the Trinity", *Calvin Theological Journal*, 30 (1995), pp. 392–401.

2 Professor Jürgen Moltmann has drawn my attention to this custom. In the printed burial service for the prominent Tübingen New Testament scholar, Professor Ernst Käsemann, we read: "Wir denken vor Gott in der Stille: an den Verstorbenen, an jene, die eng mit Ernst Käsemann verbunden waren, an jene, denen Ernst Käsemann nicht gerecht geworden ist, an jene, die ihm nicht gerecht geworden sind, and jene, die darauf warten, dass wir uns lossagen von den Herrschern, die ueber uns herrschen …" (*Transparent* 52/98, p. 19).

3 See Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 131ff.

4 On the social character of Augustine's eschatology see Henri Irenée Marrou, *The Resurrection and Saint Augustine's Theology of Human Values*, trans. M. Consolata (Villanova, PA: Villanova University Press, 1966), p. 33.

5 Augustine, *The City of God*, in Whitney J. Oates (ed), *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine* (New York, NY: Random House, 1948), xix, 17.

6 Ibid., xix, 18.

7 Ibid., xx, 1–3.

8 Ibid., xx, 22.

9 Ibid., xx, 1.

10 In his critical engagement with the doctrine of the last judgment, Friedrich Schleiermacher rightly noted that the notion of the last judgment as separation of the believing and unbelieving requires as supplement a notion of the "inner separation" of believers from "those elements of sinfulness and carnality which still cling to them". Such inner separation, he claimed, "would simply be completed sanctification" (*The Christian Faith*, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart [Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1976], p. 714 [#162]).

11 See Stanislaw Budzik, *Doctor pacis. Theologie des Friedens bei Augustinus* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia Verlag, 1988), pp. 310–322.

12 See John Polkinghorne, *The Faith of a Physicist: Reflections of a Bottom-up Thinker* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 167; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 265.

13 Cf. Augustine, xx, 9.

14 Augustine's comments on purgatorial punishments (ibid., xx, 25; xxi, 24) may leave space open for this second option. The later developments of the doctrine of purgatory thematize only the individual's standing before God—and in relation to *that* problem they also speak of the relation of the pilgrim church and the church triumphant to the church suffering. Individuals' standing before one another—the history of their mutual sin and the need for reconciliation—is dealt with at the threshold of purgatory. Though the souls in purgatory "love each other with a supernatural charity which has its source in God", which makes purgatory "a region of that perfect fraternal charity, so easily missed on earth", there nonetheless is "scarcely a soul in Purgatory that is not expiating some faults against charity"

(Martin Jugie, *Purgatory and the Means to Avoid it*, trans. M. G. Carroll [Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1949], p. 41). But given that they perfectly love each other nothing needs to change in their relationship while in purgatory; since they are in purgatory, they are not in need of reconciliation. If former enemies, they are rather eager "to show the sincerity of their reconciliation" (p. 42).

15 See Ole Modalsli, "Luther über die Letzten Dinge", in Helmar Junghans (ed), *Leben und Werk Martin Luthers von 1526 bis 1546: Festgabe zu seinem 500. Geburtstag* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), I, pp. 334–344.

16 Martin Luther, "Sermon on Luke 7:11–17", in Eugene F. A. Klug (ed and trans.), *Sermons of Martin Luther: The House Postils* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), iii, p. 34.

17 Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Jaroslav Pelikan (ed), trans. M. H. Bertram (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), xxiii, p. 58.

18 For a powerful contemporary restatement of this position see, for instance, Eberhard Jüngel, "The Last Judgment as an Act of Grace", *Louvain Studies* 15 (1990), pp. 389–405.

19 Schleiermacher, p. 714.

20 The refusal to *receive* "justification" from the other entails a refusal to see oneself as the other sees one and to accept the way the other relates to one. It constitutes therefore refusal of communion, at least until perspectives have been readjusted. This anthropological phenomenon makes plain why soteriologically unbelief, understood as refusal to receive divine justification, constitutes a rejection of communion between God and oneself, especially since, unlike judgments of our human neighbors, God's judgment of us entailed in the offer of justification is, by definition, infallible.

21 For a discussion of the eschatological consummation as the work of the Spirit see Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), vol. 3, pp. 550–555.

22 See Friedrich Mildenberger, *Biblische Dogmatik. Eine Biblische Theologie in dogmatischer Perspektive. Band 3. Theologie als Oekonomie* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1993), pp. 279–280.

23 Gregory of Nyssa writes: "Wrapped up as it is in material and earthly attachments, it [the soul] struggles and is stretched, as God draws His own to Himself. What is alien to God has to be scraped off forcibly because it has somehow grown onto the soul" (*On the Soul and the Resurrection*, trans. Catharine P. Roth [Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993], p. 84).

24 Pannenberg, p. 607.

25 After I had already argued for the final reconciliation in "Sin, Death, and the Life of the World to Come" (prepared for the consultation on "Eschatology and Science" at the Center of Theological Inquiry, Princeton), I came across an article by Josef Niewiadomski, at the end of which he briefly suggests something like "the final reconciliation" as an inter-human process. He imagines the last judgment as an event in which all victims and all perpetrators will face each other and in which the evil suffered and inflicted will be fully manifest to each person. Were it not for God's immeasurable goodness and unlimited willingness to forgive, such an encounter of victims and perpetrators would amount to a day of wrath in which all, prone as human beings are to self-justification and accusation of others, would condemn each other to hell. "Each would insist on his or her own status as a victim, each would demand retaliation and each would seek to place on others the punishment that he or she ought to receive" ("Hoffnung im Gericht. Soteriologische Impulse für eine dogmatische Eschatologie", *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie*, 114 [1992], pp. 113–126, p. 126). Yet, faced with the radical grace of divine forgiveness, "hardly anyone will withhold forgiveness and continue to insist anachronistically upon his or her own right and revenge" (p. 126). The judgment day will therefore be a day on which divine mercy toward humanity will elicit individuals' mercy toward each other. As will become clear at the end of my essay, my proposal differs from Niewiadomski's in two major respects. First, he does not ground the appropriation of the final judgment of grace pneumatologically, and, second, he fails to make the critical step from forgiveness to reconciliation.

26 Plato, *Phaedo*, 114d, in *Dialogues of Plato*, trans. B. Jowett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1875).

27 Ibid., 61d.

28 See David A. White, *Myth and Metaphysics in Plato's Phaedo* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1989).

29 So Kenneth Dorter, *Plato's Phaedo: An Interpretation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982).
30 Plato, 112a.
31 Cf. ibid., 90a.
32 Ibid., 113c–114c.
33 Some critiques of Socrates' account of the curable souls' redemption rest on a misreading, however. Kenneth Dorter, for instance, objects that it presupposes that the victims must be in the Acherusian lake (in whose proximity flow the rivers Cocytus and Pyriphlegethon from which the perpetrators call upon the victims) and that therefore those perpetrators cannot be forgiven whose victims are not in the lake because they have lived a virtuous life or have purified themselves by philosophy, thus standing in no need of purification (Dorter, p. 172). But the reason why the perpetrators call for the victims in the vicinity of the Acherusian lake need not lie in the fact that the victims are in the lake, but that *the perpetrators need to go into the lake* (to be further purified and then "be born as animals" [Plato, 113a]) if the victims have mercy on them. They call upon the victims, Plato says, "to have pity on them, and to be kind to them, *and let them come out into the lake*". Even more problematic is the suggestion of Renna Burger, predicated on the same misconception. She argues that "Socrates, who may never have to pay a penalty for injustice in the Acherusian lake, would thus condemn to eternal punishment in Hades the Athenian demos, who condemned him to death in one day and then lived to repent it" (*The Phaedo: A Platonic Labyrinth* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982, p. 202; similarly Peter J. Ahrensdorf, *The Death of Socrates and the Life of Philosophy: An Interpretation of Plato's Phaedo* [Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995], p. 192). But Burger fails to note that, according to the myth, the condemnation of Socrates does not qualify as a remediable crime in the first place because involuntariness is an essential feature of such crimes, and therefore does not apply to the case at all.
34 White, p. 261.
35 The unpardonable sin—blasphemy against the Holy Spirit—was, following Augustine, taken to refer to the final impenitence, not to an act of sin, however heinous. "This blasphemy", argued Augustine, "cannot be detected in anyone … as long as they are still in this life"; and except for "an impenitent heart against the Holy Spirit, by which sins are cancelled in the Church", he claimed, "all [other] sins are forgiven" (Sermon 71,21, in *The Works of Saint Augustine. Sermons III*, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle [Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1991], pp. 259f.).
36 For a restatement of the doctrine of purgatory at whose core is "the pain of self-discovery", see David Brown, "No Heaven Without Purgatory", *Religious Studies* 21 (1985), pp. 447–456.
37 See Miroslav Volf, "The Social Meaning of Reconciliation" (forthcoming).
38 Plato, 113a.
39 Dorter, p. 173. Dorter misreads Socrates when he ridicules his position in the following way: "Thus the more spiteful the victim the longer the punishment, in which case one seems best advised to seek out benevolent people as one's victims" (p. 173). The logic is impeccable, the only trouble being that a condition for a crime to qualify as remediable is precisely that it was not premeditated!
40 Plato, *Laws*, 865ff.
41 *All* (social) sins are offenses against others and therefore make those who commit them into perpetrators and those who suffer them into victims. Such a notion of "perpetrators and victims", which is mandated by Christian theology, is at odds with the dominant contemporary construals of perpetrators and victims. It is an important aspect of the public responsibility of Christian theology to problematize these construals.
42 There is no reason to think that in Socrates' account of the post-mortem destiny of curable souls a victim could not also be a perpetrator. However, the principle seems to hold: the greater the sin required to qualify one as a perpetrator, the clearer the division between perpetrators and the rest. A theologically adequate doctrine of sin, whose one characteristic is not to let any evil—not even an evil thought—remain uncondemned, works against a clear division of humanity into perpetrators and victims.
43 For recent theological accounts of the construction of identity see Ingolf U. Dalferth and Eberhard Jüngel, "Person and Gottebenbildlichkeit", in F. Boeckle *et al*. (eds), *Christlicher Glaube in moderner Gesellschaft* (Freiburg: Herder, 1981), xxiv, pp. 57–99;

Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. M. J. O'Connell (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985).

44 See Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), pp. 181–189.

45 Alistair I. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 114.

46 See Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, trans. J. F. Hoffmeyer (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), pp. 312–314. Cf. Niklas Luhmann, *Ecological Communication*, trans. John Bednarz, Jr. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 15–21.

47 Cf. Miroslav Volf, "Cultural Identity and Recognition: On Why the Issue Matters", in Michael Welker (ed), *Brenpunkt Diakonie. Rudolph Weth zum 60. Geburtstag* (Neukirchen-Vlyun: Neukirchener Verlag, 1997), pp. 201–218.

48 Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 3.

49 For a discussion of the temporality of human consciousness in general under the category of "transversality" that reaches forward as well as backward, but from the perspective of a consistent contesting of any notion of a transcendental ego, see Calvin O. Schrag, *The Resources of Rationality: A Response to the Postmodern Challenge* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. 148–179.

50 In traditional, broadly Augustinian, hamartiology, sin as *peccatum originale* is also understood as social in the sense of being a socially shared problem on account of the solidarity of the human family. To underscore a different sense in which sin can be seen as social, David Kelsey has introduced the distinction between "social" and "societal", the latter indicating that the social character of sin has to be understood also "in terms of the 'public' realm of actual societies' arrangements of social power" ("Whatever Happened to the Doctrine of Sin?", *Theology Today* 50 (1993), pp. 169–178, pp. 170f.). The distinction is analytically helpful. I have decided not to use the term "societal" to describe important aspects of sin, however, though not for what the term implies about sin but for what it seems to leave out. It fails to take seriously enough cultural and sub-cultural social practices and symbols. When speaking of the social character of sin, I will use the term "social" to refer to both societal arrangements of power and narrower social relations, practices, and symbols.

51 On the interrelation between personal and social sin from the perspective of Catholic theology, see Mark O'Keefe, "Social Sin and Fundamental Option", *Irish Theological Quarterly* 58 (1992), pp. 85–94. Cf. also Siegfried Wiedenhofer, "The Main Forms of Contemporary Theology of Original Sin", *Communio* (US), 18 (1991), pp. 514–529.

52 On these elements of social sin see Gregory Baum, *Religion and Alienation: A Theological Reading of Sociology* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1975), pp. 200–203.

53 Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 287–288.

54 Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, trans. D. L. Guder (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), p. 354 (slightly revised translation).

55 Simon Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1976), pp. 9–99.

56 Together with Milton Konvitz I wish, however, that Wiesenthal had explained his refusal to the perpetrator and then gone on to offer him solace (see Wiesenthal, p. 160; cf. L. Gregory Jones, "Stumped Repentance", *Christianity Today*, October 26, 1998, pp. 94–97). Indeed, I wish he had offered him even forgiveness, though not for the crime against the family killed but for the injury done to *Wiesenthal* by the crime against the family and the Jewish people. But, of course, it is easier to be wise after the situation than in it.

57 See Miroslav Volf, "After Moltmann: Reflections on the Future of Eschatology", in Richard Bauckham (ed), *God Will be All in All: The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), pp. 233–257, p. 253.

58 Jüngel, "The Last Judgment", p. 395.

59 Ibid., p. 397.

60 As Hans Urs von Balthasar notes, it is precisely through the look at the one whom one has "pierced" (Rev. 1:7) that one will realize the magnitude of one's sin ("Die goettliche Gerichte in der Apokalypse", *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift Communio*, 14 [1985], pp. 28–34, p. 33). For the cross as the site of recognition of sin's magnitude see Martin

Koehler, *Die Wissenschaft der christlichen Lehre von dem evangelischen Grundartikel aus im Abrisse dargestellt* (Leipzig: A. Diechert, 1893), p. 270: "Am Kreuze Christi ermisst der Gerechtfertigte die Bedeutung der Menschensuende, und erst in und mit dem Verstaendnisse des Heilswerkes vollendet sich die unter dem Gesetze des alten Bundes erwachsende Suendenerkenntnis." For a development of this theme in a broader Christological context see Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (eds), (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), pp. 358–413.

61 See Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36: A Commentary*, trans. J. D. Scullion (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 1985), p. 241.

62 Temba L. J. Mafico, "Judge, Judging", in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* vol. III, David Noel Freedman (ed), (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 1104–1106, p. 1105.

63 See Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988), pp. 88–90. Cf. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, pp. 563–568.

64 On Psalm 73 in relation to eschatology see Ratzinger, ibid., pp. 88–90. Cf. Diethelm Michel, "Weisheit und Apokalyptik", in A. S. Van der Woude (ed), *The Book of Daniel in the Light of New Findings* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993), pp. 413–434, pp. 420–422. For a view contesting an eschatological reading of the Psalm, see Martin Buber, *On the Bible: Eighteen Studies*, Nahum N. Glatzer (ed), (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1968), pp. 199–216.

65 In *The City of God* the *social* problem that the suffering of the upright and the prosperity of the arrogant present is an important backdrop for the discussion of the last judgment. Augustine writes: "For that day is properly called the day of judgment, because in it there shall be no room left for the ignorant questioning why this wicked person is happy and that righteous man unhappy. In that day true and full happiness shall be the lot of none but the good, while deserved and supreme misery shall be the portion of the wicked, and of them only" (xx, 1).

66 This eschatological expectation—assuming that it is such—correlates well with the way the Old Testament poses the problem of theodicy. It concerns primarily social rather than strictly individual evil, such as illness (see Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997], pp. 385–399; cf. Walter Brueggemann, "Theodicy in a Social Dimension", *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 33 [1985], pp. 3–25).

67 Jonathan Edwards, entry #1007, from the forthcoming third volume of the "Miscellanies", Amy Plantinga Pauw (ed), in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Harry S. Stout (ed) (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press). Cf. Robert W. Jenson, *America's Theologian: A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 179. It was Robert Jenson who, in a private conversation, originally drew my attention to Edwards' explication of the last judgment as a social event.

68 Behind this formulation, as well as other's that thematize the role of the Holy Spirit in the consummation, lies a transposition into the eschatological mode of the Holy Spirit's role in the appropriation of salvation (cf. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, pp. 147ff.), including the role as the one who convicts of sin (cf. John 16:8–11).

69 As the above account of the last judgment's appropriation underscores, the social character of the judgment does not stand in opposition to its personal character. The connection of the two is suggested in Romans 14, where the Apostle Paul writes that "all will stand before the judgment seat of God" and that "each of us will be accountable to God" (Rom. 14:10, 12; cf. 2 Cor. 5:10; Eph. 6:8) (see von Balthasar, ibid., p. 229). The mention of the eschatological judgmental "all" and "each" in a text which condemns judging others may be significant. Between the lines it suggests that the divine judgment of each includes also a judgment about that person's judgment of others and calls implicitly for an alignment of persons' judgment of others with God's judgment of them (see James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16* [Word Bible Commentary, 38b; Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1988], p. 814). Put more generally, the last judgment concerns each person's standing before God, but in such a way that it includes the judgment about what each has done to and suffered from others, and how he or she has integrated relations to others into his or her identity. Hence, to put things personally, when I appropriate God's judgment, I appropriate it as a judgment of me not only in my relation to God but in my multiple and multidirectional relations to all and therefore also as a judgment of all in relation to me.

70 Balthasar introduces the idea of personal appropriation of the judge's perspective when he suggests that the saints will be able to judge "the world" and "angels" (1 Cor. 6:2–3) only when "jeder Einzelne, auch die erwaehnte Heilige, durch seinen Blick auf den Durchgebohrten so gelaeutert ist, dass sein Blick auf die Welt und die Engel sich dem des Menschensohns angeglichen hat" (Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Gericht", *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift 'Communio'* 9 [1980], pp. 227–235, p. 231).
71 Cf. Niewiadomski, p. 126.
72 In the discussion of former enemies entering purgatory, Father Hubert suggests that if the person has not fully forgiven his offenders, on purgatory's threshold "he immediately and completely forgives the injustice. For in purgatory love 'does not brood over an injury' even for an instant. His dispositions toward the offender are those of an unfeigned and tender charity and he prays much for him. If during the purgatory of the onetime injured person, the offender himself goes to purgatory, an immediate and perfect mutual friendship between both is effected under the mighty sway of love. Thus do they imitate their Saviour who forgave his enemies" (*The Mystery of Purgatory* [Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1975], p. 32). In my terminology, this immediate effecting of perfect mutual friendship is reconciliation; the change of individuals' dispositions toward the offender is not, at least not *yet*.
73 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, p. 14.
74 See especially John Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); John Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998).
75 Barth, ibid., pp. 14f.
76 Webster, *Barth's Ethics*, p. 97—italics added.
77 Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, p. 547—italics added.
78 Webster, p. 97.
79 George Hunsinger, in a personal communication.
80 Oswald Bayer, "Das Letzte Gericht als religionsphilosophisches Problem", *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie* 33 (1991), pp. 199–210, pp. 209f.
81 For Oswald Bayer's explication of Luther's position in contrast to Melanchthon see "Freedom? The Anthropological Concepts in Luther and Melanchthon Compared", *Harvard Theological Review* 91 (1998), pp. 373–378.
82 Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Helmut T. Lehmann (ed) (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1972), xxxiii, p. 153 (De servo arbitrio).
83 Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, xxxiii, p. 243. To put my claim in Luther's terms but rather abstractly, in the final reconciliation former enemies act in the precise sense in which human beings must act if God is not simply to act upon them but act in them in such a way as not to act without them.
84 A recent notable eschatology which takes seriously social relations and stresses the primacy of grace in the eschatological transition is Moltmann's *The Coming of God* (see especially pp. 250–255).
85 As the three combined emphases suggest, my reflection on eschatological transition here is part and parcel of specifying the eschatological side of the ecclesial and broader social reflections expressed in my books *After Our Likeness* and *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996) and in the article " 'The Trinity is Our Social Program': The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement", *Modern Theology* 14 (1998), pp. 403–423.
86 This text was presented as part of the 1999 Laidlaw Lectures series at Knox College, Toronto. I am indebted to Ivica Novakovic, my research assistant, for his extraordinary competence and helpfulness. Professors Robert W. Jenson, George Hunsinger, Patrick D. Miller, Amy Plantinga Pauw, Rusty R. Reno, and Judith M. Gundry-Volf offered helpful comments on a previous draft of the text. I wrote this essay as a Pew scholar and member of the Center for Theological Inquiry, Princeton, New Jersey, where I benefited from the comments of my fellow members.