



# ARENDRT'S NATALITY INTERTWINED IN THE CHRISTIAN ESCHATON

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*This article is a tribute to the 500 years of Christianity here in the Philippines last year. It is written from a Protestant-Evangelical perspective by situating Hannah Arendt's natality in the public space where Christians themselves, although driven by their needs and wants to master necessity in the oikos, need to have relevant engagements. But this is hampered as the human condition gets distorted by the confluent factors in the private sphere that pave the way for coercion and violence in the public space. As a solution to this predicament, I propound that Arendt's natality may be assumed towards the Christian eschaton in its engagement with the sphere of activity.*

*This paper has four sections to posit the idea that even Christianity is in the process of being made new by the emergence of new people. The first section is a brief biblical reflection on when action becomes possible due to human being's potentiality. Nevertheless, this potentiality is impeded in religious and cultural practices on domestic life as presented in the second section. Then in the third section, a study is presented wherein a huge sector of Philippine Evangelical Christianity turns out to be apolitical about an immense national concern thereby evincing certain distortion. It seems that this distortion permeates from oikos proclivities. The fourth section is the intertwining of the Protestant slogan as a sense of natality: *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda!**

Keywords: *Hannah Arendt, natality, polis, oikos, Protestant-Evangelical Christianity*

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## INTRODUCTION

Margaret Canovan, in her introduction to the *Human Condition*, commented that the most heartening of Hannah Arendt's message is "its reminder of human natality and the miracle of beginning."<sup>1</sup> Arendt speaks of action as "the one miracle-working faculty of man" which means that the faith and hope in human affairs are in the uniqueness of new people continually coming into the world with the capability of "new initiatives that may interrupt or divert the chains of events set in motion by previous actions."<sup>2</sup> It is also true even with the social arrangements instituted in the various traditions of Christianity. As last year commemorated the 500 years of Christianity in the Philippines, I would like to situate Arendtian notions by extending its framework to analyze the inclination of Philippine Evangelical Christianity in its involvement in society. It should be noted, however, that the content of this paper would only include what appears to be explicit on my immediate thoughts as an evangelical myself. Moreover, not all sectors of evangelicalism are included in the study but only a subgroup of the fastest growing membership in the country.

This article is divided into four sections. The first section is a brief political reflection on the creation account of Genesis. The second section deals with the private sphere and some entailments of dominance in the household also evident in the biblical instructions on domestic life. In the third section, the public realm is presented, highlighting two dangers: identity isolation and the existence of the totalitarian rule. This permeates through the society, as evangelicals themselves are fellow city-dwellers in Arendt's sense. A conjecture about confluent

factors that make provision for the two dangers I perceive is also emphasized in this section, and a study is presented about a specific subgroup of Evangelical Christianity. In the fourth section, I posit as a synthesis that *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda* (or "the church reformed and always to be reformed") entails Arendt's core concept about human beings, i.e., natality.

## A SYMBOLIC ASSERTION OF POLITICS IN A PRIMODIAL ACCOUNT

I shall begin by discussing Stephen Palmquist's article on Arendt's theory of action.<sup>3</sup> From a literal reading of the creation account in Genesis, Palmquist comments that God's rest on the seventh day symbolizes a profound *political* statement. He asserts that God's rest or inactivity is an action responding to "the fact that on the sixth day, with the creation of human beings, the potential for *relationship* came into being."<sup>4</sup> He argues that it is:

God's commitment to give human beings the freedom to forge their own agreements about how to act toward each other. Politics did not arise on the first five days of creation, because no free moral beings had yet been created; no "action" (in Arendt's sense) could have taken place prior to the completion of the sixth day of God's creative work.<sup>5</sup>

Interpreted politically, human beings are then to resist "our natural desire to exercise power over other free beings as we relate to our fellow city-dwellers."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Palmquist, "Toward A Christian Philosophy of Work: A Theological and Religious Extension of Hannah Arendt's Conceptual Framework" in *Philosophia Christi* (vol.11, no.2, 2009), pp. 397-419. Palmquist extended Arendt's *way of activity* by arguing that it is incorporated with the *way of inactivity* philosophically and theologically. For him, "labor (or leisure), work (or play) and action (or rest)" presents the complete framework of the Christian Philosophy of Work. An evaluation of his assumptions is not within the scope of discussion in this paper. Nevertheless, I find his political interpretation of Genesis 2 an interesting commentary.

<sup>4</sup> Palmquist, "Toward A Christian Philosophy of Work," p. 416.

<sup>5</sup> Palmquist, "Toward A Christian Philosophy of Work," p. 416.

<sup>6</sup> Palmquist, "Toward A Christian Philosophy of Work," p. 416.

<sup>1</sup> Margaret Canovan's introduction to Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago University Press), [1998] 1958, xvii.

<sup>2</sup> Arendt, *Human Condition*, p. 246.





Although I do not agree with the entirety of Palmquist's assertions due to its vague literal or representational interpretation, I am convinced that in the very foundation of human life lies the intrinsic value of plurality, equality, and freedom.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the story of creation immediately included a political status in the distinction of a man and a woman with their unique features, but in unity as equal bearers of the image of God.<sup>8</sup>

Palmquist's article also included an early account of Arendt's characterization of private life: labor (or life-sustaining activity) – Cain as a tiller of the ground and Abel as a keeper of flocks; work (or creative activity) – in the maintenance of the Garden and the instruction of subduing the earth with the legitimate human use of world resources; and the possibility of action (or activity directed toward human relationships) in the plurality of a man and a woman. The focus in the proceeding section is the third one (i.e., action in the plurality of a man and a woman) that got distorted by domestic male domination as it was shaped by culture, religion, and tradition in the progression of history. The Judeo-Christian tradition plays a major role in this formation. Then this domination is suffused to the society at large that somehow legitimizes coercion. One may then ask about the various factors that may be confluently entailed in this progression.

## THE PRIVATE LIFE

As briefly discussed above, the intended equality for the image of God bearers was distorted in the early suppression by male domination present in ancient cultures and primitive religious ways. It is very evident in the Hebrew Scripture and in

<sup>7</sup> This is profoundly expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

<sup>8</sup> The profound expression of the UDHR about the equality of all human beings and every individual's intrinsic worth and value are precisely identified and anticipated by the U.S. Declaration of Independence as something "endowed by their Creator."

Greek culture as well. The "private" as it is related to the household (or *oikos* in Greek), now assumes one rulership as they live together driven by their needs and wants. Its natural community is "born of necessity, and necessity ruled over all activities performed in it" that led Arendt to say, "force and violence are justified in this sphere because they are the only means to master necessity – for instance, by ruling over slaves..."<sup>9</sup> In turn, this sphere now becomes the space where inequality is truly apparent.

Also, the meaning of a purely private life is its deprivation. As Arendt stressed, it is getting bereaved of "the reality that comes from being seen and heard by others, to be deprived of an 'objective' relationship with them that comes from being related to and separated from them through the intermediary of a common world of things, to be deprived of the possibility of achieving something more permanent than life itself."<sup>10</sup> Being compelled to the necessities required for survival and 'economic' living, the private spheres care less of the world that existed before it and would exist long after they are gone. It then became purely isolated from the concerns of 'earthly' living in general outside survival.<sup>11</sup> This gives sense to the individualism inculcated in family life.

The traditional evangelical position inherited this concept of private life in the rulership of the head of the household, namely the male.<sup>12</sup> It is taught in churches that women ought to submit to their husbands with the analogy that Christ is the head of the church. Husbands are heads

<sup>9</sup> Arendt, *Human Condition*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>10</sup> Arendt, *Human Condition*, p. 58.

<sup>11</sup> Arendt, *Human Condition*, pp. 68-69. See also Maurizio Passerin d'Entreves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 148-49.

<sup>12</sup> Alex Fry's research on women ordination in the Church of England documents some positions by ordained evangelical clergies. Apparently, these evangelicals hold on to the bible interpretations of famous preacher John Piper and the likes in their domestic inclination about husband and wife. One respondent emphasized that: "it's my responsibility and role to function as the head of the household, and it's my wife's role to submit to my leadership in marriage."





of families and have authority over their wives (Ephesians 4:23-24). Furthermore, women are not allowed to speak at church gatherings, for it is a disgraceful act. Consequently, they have to speak to their husbands at home whenever they would have critical concerns (1 Corinthians 14:33-35).

In defense of this way of religious life, evangelicals declare equality among sexes by saying that the principle about male and female as equal bearers of God's image is never compromised. They are spiritually equal, which is quite a sufficient basis for mutual respect between the sexes. Nevertheless, it is God who wants men to be men and women to be women, as the Bible teaches the submission of wives to their husbands.<sup>13</sup>

However, this kind of religious thinking has been criticized by feminists as, Simone de Beauvoir says, "a myth invented by men to confine women to their oppressed state."<sup>14</sup> Margaret Walters surveys the feminist movements in history in different countries, especially those who are outside religious circles. These movements vehemently protest that it may be immediately assumed that male domination causes violence in domestic life that is initiated in the abuse of wives.<sup>15</sup> This somehow confirms the claims of Arendt that in the private sphere, force and violence are justified.

In an article by Steven R. Tracy on "Patriarchy and Domestic Violence," he presented various cultural and religious conceptions in relation to male dominance that leads to the abuse of women and their unfreedoms. Though he does not agree that patriarchy is its ultimate cause, he

considered it as a significant contributing factor and presented a brief historical survey on how it contributed to gender inequality.<sup>16</sup>

Although not the ultimate cause, Tracy argues that patriarchy has provided the very foundation of male domination that leads to abuse of women. Violence has been accommodated in ancient cultures that continue on to the present. The Code of Hammurabi, for instance, was one of the earliest texts that shows male superiority that leads to laying out punishments for a wife who fails to do her submissive role and thus brings shame on her husband. It says, "if she was not careful, but was a gadabout, thus neglecting her house (and) humiliating her husband, they shall throw that woman into the water."<sup>17</sup> It is not clear if it is the husband who should carry out the punishment but it is obvious that wives who violate subordination to their husbands deserve to be maltreated accordingly. In first-century Palestine, women were also on a very low rung of the social ladder. There are old rabbinical sayings that it is better that "the words of the Law be burned rather than delivered to women" and "Blessed is he whose children are male, but woe to him whose children are female." Women's testimonies were regarded as so worthless that they weren't even allowed to serve as legal witnesses in a Jewish court of law. In Republican Rome, wives who committed adultery could be killed by their husbands while husbands who cheated on their wives would face no legal threats.<sup>18</sup> Apart from rigorous research, perhaps we cannot know how strictly the aforementioned cultural norms were implemented. But the point in case is that gender inequality is present in those times as it is written in ancient sacred texts.

<sup>13</sup> In connection to the previous note, another respondent says: "I think that God has put an order into creation that men are meant to humbly lead women and that that's very evident in 1 Timothy 2. I think Paul's saying to the church there 'This is what happened, look what happened in the beginning, it went wrong when man failed to exercise his leadership'."

<sup>14</sup> As quoted by Margaret Walters, *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 99.

<sup>15</sup> Walters, *Feminism*, pp.121-22.

<sup>16</sup> Steven R. Tracy, "Patriarchy and Domestic Violence: Challenging Common Misconceptions" in *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* vol. 50, no.2 (2007): pp. 573-94.

<sup>17</sup> Tracy, "Patriarchy and Domestic Violence," p. 586.

<sup>18</sup> Tracy, "Patriarchy and Domestic Violence," p. 586.





For the Christian tradition, the post-apostolic theologian Augustine taught that wives should see their husbands as their earthly lords. Women, as instruments should submit to their husbands “whereby they were made servants; so, being always mindful of their condition, they ought not to set themselves in opposition to their furious lords...”<sup>19</sup> For Islam, the Koran states that “men are placed in charge of the women, since God has endowed them with the necessary qualities and made them bread earners.” Hence, “[t]he righteous women will accept this arrangement obediently, and will honor their husbands in their absence, in accordance with God’s commands.”<sup>20</sup> Tracy strongly points out that “Islamic patriarchy is primarily responsible for 140 million women around the world having undergone female genital mutilation.”<sup>21</sup>

Admittedly, Tracy’s survey only contributes indirectly to Arendt’s thesis about the private life driven due to its needs and wants. But these are cultural factors that contribute to coercion inside the *oikos*. In the concluding section of this paper, this is part and parcel of what is being reformed in the Christian tradition, as will be highlighted in Karl Barth’s notion of the sphere of activity. But let me first discuss the realm of the public where, according to Arendt, politics occur.

## THE PUBLIC SPACE

As related to the Greek word *polis*, the term “public” signify two closely-related characteristics: one, “everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest publicity;”<sup>22</sup> and two, that it is “the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our private owned

place in it.”<sup>23</sup> The first would mean that although appearances constitute a reality that is heard and seen by ourselves and others, this may still lead to an “uncertain shadowy kind of existence unless and until they are transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized, as it were, into a shape to fit them for public appearance.” This entails “even the greatest form of intimate life – the passions of the heart, the thoughts of the mind, and the delights of the senses.”<sup>24</sup>

Second, the public, considered to be the common world, is a space to live together as human beings are gathered to be related and to be separated at the same time. This spatial quality of public life enables citizens to meet together, exchange their opinions with a great possibility of sharing their subjective differences to come up with collective solutions to such problems they see objectively. This means that through this common space of appearance, public concerns could be articulated and addressed through a variety of perspectives. As Maurizio Passerin d’Entreves asserted:

For politics to occur it is not enough to have a collection of private individuals voting separately and anonymously according to their private opinions. Rather, these individuals must be able to see and talk to one another in public, to meet in public space so that their differences as well as their commonalities can emerge and become the subject of democratic debate.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, how the world is sustained is basically through these two concepts of the public realm – public transparency and commonality. Under these conditions, Arendt contends, “can worldly reality truly and reliably appear... The end of the common world has come when it is seen only under one aspect and is permitted to present itself in only one perspective.”<sup>26</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Tracy, “Patriarchy and Domestic Violence,” pp. 586-87.

<sup>20</sup> Tracy, “Patriarchy and Domestic Violence,” pp. 587-88.

<sup>21</sup> Tracy, “Patriarchy and Domestic Violence,” p. 588.

<sup>22</sup> Arendt, *Human Condition*, p. 50.

<sup>23</sup> Arendt, *Human Condition*, p. 52.

<sup>24</sup> Arendt, *Human Condition*, p. 50.

<sup>25</sup> d’Entreves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt*, p. 146.

<sup>26</sup> Arendt, *Human Condition*, pp. 57-58.





Also, plurality plays a vital role in the sphere of action. As mentioned above, it is in the public realm where people meet together, sharing differences; and with the divergent ideas exhausted, collective decisions are made. Arendt characterized plurality in terms of equality and distinction:

If men were not equal, they could neither understand each other and those who came before them nor plan for the future and foresee the deeds of those who will come after them. If men were not distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was, or will ever be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood. Signs and sounds to communicate immediate, identical needs and wants would be enough.<sup>27</sup>

Equal people should represent different perspectives in the peculiarity of their human persons to have real communication. That is to say that only through means of persuasion, an action is done just as in a *polis* where everything was decided not through force and violence but words and persuasion. An action is decided, delivered and executed through the speech-action deliberated in the plurality of the individuals involved in the collective exhaustion of ideas in the political activity. It should be done in such a way that speech and action are “considered to be coeval and coequal, of the same rank and the same kind.”<sup>28</sup>

The political realm of public men is also true with Christian polity. Under the guidance of a presupposed faith of course and an inevitable governing body, there should be a space where transparency and commonality are explicit. People who engage in Christian polity should be free from the necessities intrinsic to the private

life, thereby allowing that no self-interests and selfish gains would arise in the sphere of action. As the former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams puts it, “they cannot be committed to a policy of coercion and oppression because that would again seek to put the power of the human believer or the religious institution in the sovereign place that only God’s reality can occupy.”<sup>29</sup>

The church should even be involved in dialogues with non-Christian or even with non-religious entities. It is in this kind of activity that we acknowledge our human condition of plurality presupposing the fact that *we share the earth with people who are our equals yet distinct from us*. Williams reminder is that we first need to ask, “how do we live in a way that shows an understanding that we genuinely live in a shared world, not one that simply belongs to us?”<sup>30</sup> In fact for Williams (having the Reformation and the Enlightenment in mind), much of ‘modernity’ in Europe “did not come from nowhere; they were centrally theological disputes, even when they were resolved in ways inimical to the authority and public influence of faith.”<sup>31</sup> He goes on to say that in this way, Christians celebrate its heritage “to affirm a legacy and a possibility of truly constructive pluralism.”<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, being involved with the socio-political space is a legitimate engagement of Christians by the mere fact of being human that is in sharp contrast to the dogmatic delineation of the church and the state. This was the case when the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches (PCEC) joined the 1986 People Power Revolution wherein they declared that: “where Caesar conflicts with Christ, we declare

<sup>27</sup> Arendt, *Human Condition*, pp. 175-76.

<sup>28</sup> Arendt, *Human Condition*, p. 26. These issues may include even doctrinal differences, e.g. infant baptism, women’s ministry in the church and other non-essential aspects of the faith. It should be represented by various individuals who could communicate in different presupposition and perspectives. But at the same time, this should include even the Christians disposition on politics.

<sup>29</sup> Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), p. 309

<sup>30</sup> Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, p. 199.

<sup>31</sup> Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, p. 79.

<sup>32</sup> Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, p. 84.





that Jesus is Lord. Divine law supersedes human law. Therefore, our obedience is not absolute. Whenever government rules contrary to the will of God, then civil disobedience becomes a Christian duty.”<sup>33</sup>

Unfortunately, the fastest-growing sector of the evangelical movement in the country nowadays turns out to be apolitical on matters of socio-political concerns. The political disposition of this movement, interestingly, seems to have been swayed to the opposite direction due to over-spiritualization that I shall briefly discuss below in an article by Jayeel Cornelio and Ia Marañon after highlighting the two dangers I see that undermine the human condition.

#### *DANGER 1: IDENTITY AS INTOLERANCE*

Although plurality is an important trait of the human condition, it seems not to be given salience due to idiosyncrasy and the nature of the church to be identity-preserving. Arguably, it is the primary reason why there is so much intolerance in a religious life. When a system of religious thought confers identity, it is usually an identity that establishes extreme boundaries, drawing borders to distinguish one group from the other. Outside these borders, Regina Schwartz says, outsiders threaten to get in. As a result, those who are inside of a religious conviction tightens their grounds all the more.<sup>34</sup>

This is evident in the Abrahamic faith that has been disseminated in the broad spectrums of Judaism and Christianity. Israel, who was commissioned to carry out the uniqueness of its identity as the worshipers of the one true

<sup>33</sup> David Lim as quoted by Jayeel Cornelio and Ia Marañon, “A ‘Righteous Intervention’: Megachurch Christianity and Duterte’s War on Drugs in the Philippines” in *International Journal of Asian Christianity* 2 (2019): pp. 211-230.

<sup>34</sup> Regina M. Schwartz, “Monotheism and the Violence of Identities” in *Raritan: A Quarterly Review* vol. 14 number 3 (1995).

God, stood their ground by trying to make themselves set apart from the nations around – the Egyptians, the Canaanites, the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Hittites, etc. This preoccupation with divine faithfulness is an essential part of the ideology of identity in the sense that as someone or some people are set apart, they are the only ones living for God. It is laid down to their children generation after generation. The famous Shema both on the traditions of the Jews and the Christians declare, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one... Impress them on your children... Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads... (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). To an extreme extent, the commitment to the Shema would lead someone to be intolerant of the teachings of others outside the boundaries of its religion.”<sup>35</sup>

These kinds of identity preservations, also present in other religious traditions, undermine the idea of plurality and freedom. On one hand, it does not acknowledge the possibility of the rightness of some distinct identities of the people outside ones’ religious faith. On the other, it violates the freedom of the people who are inside these religious faiths to deliberately choose distinct alternatives.

#### *DANGER 2: TOTALITARIAN RULE*

On another detrimental side, a Christian polity could somehow be so imposing to the extent that a totalitarian rule becomes manifested. This is notably true in the existence of a “divine vicariate” of leaders. Now it is the church’s identity trying to creep into the realm of society. Through the presence of a charismatic political leader, an ideology is laid down so that unified

<sup>35</sup> See also Regina M. Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (The University of Chicago Press, 1997) for a comprehensive discussion of this argument.





commonalities can coexist harmoniously and cooperatively. That is, for example, secular faith in the syncretism of the church of Christ and the civic nation. Thus, it becomes a pseudo-religion justifying a false society.<sup>36</sup> The movement becomes so strong that the people are compelled to do the demands of its leader. Arendt saw clearly that the advent of modern tyranny depended on the demise of a Christian political world where rulers were vicars of God rendering justice to “everyone within their territories” and commonwealths were “communities of obedience to the divine and human law.”<sup>37</sup> The totalitarian propaganda “establishes a world fit to compete with the real one” that is considered “not logical, consistent and organized.” Arendt argues then that “[t]he consistency of the fiction and the strictness of organization make it possible for the generalization eventually to survive the explosion of more specific lies.”<sup>38</sup>

Totalitarianism only seems to be a tool for equality and unity but it actually undermines both. For Arendt, equality can only work when unequal people have equal rights. This can only be established when differences are brought and organized into the political realm. Moreover, Arendt cautions on the reality that the “more equal conditions are, the less explanation there is for the differences that actually exist between people; and thus all the more unequal do people become.”<sup>39</sup>

#### CONFLUENT FACTORS ACCOMMODATING THE DANGERS

I turn now to discuss the factors that paved the way for the two dangers just discussed, albeit

obliquely. In 2019, Cornelio and Marañon had a study on the apolitical silent dispositions of the fastest-growing sector of the evangelical movement, i.e., the megachurches, concerning the proliferation of killings of drug suspects due to the drug war campaign of the current administration. The megachurches are unnamed in the article in the interest of confidentiality. Cornelio and Marañon note that these megachurches’ “institutional dispositions are very different from that of independent evangelical churches and older denominations that have taken root as *small congregations in suburbs or rural areas*.”<sup>40</sup> In fact, it is outrightly different from the larger umbrellas of Philippine Christianity – the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) and the PCEC from where these megachurches may be institutionally classified.<sup>41</sup> Both institutional entities actually criticized the government’s devaluation of human lives. But the megachurches see it as God’s “righteous intervention” through a “God-ordained administration, whose actions seek the safety and welfare of the public.” Hence, their congregations are encouraged to just “submit to authority” and be wary of taking sides regarding the extrajudicial killings because it is “a divisive political matter that cannot be mentioned at the pulpit.”<sup>42</sup>

Most of these megachurches, represented by their pastor interlocutors, consider the war on drugs as a “moral crusade” that may inevitably have killings as a “collateral damage.” It is also an opportunity to evangelize those whose lives would be spared.<sup>43</sup> But what’s highly interesting about the study is the highlight of the social status of those in these megachurches:

<sup>36</sup> Joan Lockwood O’ Donovan, “A Timely Conversation on Civil Society, Nation and State” in *A Royal Priesthood?: The Use of the Bible Ethically and Politically*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, et al. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 2002), p. 363.

<sup>37</sup> O’Donovan, “A Timely Conversation,” p. 363

See also Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1958), pp. 227-49.

<sup>38</sup> Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, p. 362.

<sup>39</sup> Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, p. 54.

<sup>40</sup> Cornelio and Marañon, “A ‘Righteous Intervention,’” p. 216. Italics mine.

<sup>41</sup> Cornelio and Marañon, “A ‘Righteous Intervention,’” pp. 213-15.

<sup>42</sup> Cornelio and Marañon, “A ‘Righteous Intervention,’” p. 219.

<sup>43</sup> Cornelio and Marañon, “A ‘Righteous Intervention,’” pp. 217, 221.





[T]hese megachurches are religious spaces for aspirational Filipinos. So even if they have special ministries catered for the urban poor ... they generally compete for exactly the same segment of the population that benefits from the country's economic development. The proclivity for social stability is thus to be expected.<sup>44</sup>

Although some of the members may not be affluent, "these megachurches imbibe the middle-class disposition."<sup>45</sup> In wanting social security, peace, economic stability, individual purpose, and private happiness, they succumb to the swift justice that may be brought about by the government's "righteous intervention." These are the confluent factors aligned to the private life Arendt argues about.

Driven by the needs and wants of each particular *oikos*, the two dangers mentioned above got accommodated somewhat obliquely. That is, rather than being socio-politically engaged themselves, it seems that the megachurches subconsciously take an opposite direction due to theological misconceptions and over-spiritualization. Bible scholar N.T. Wright calls this the "Platonized version of the gospel in which the whole emphasis falls on a detached spirituality in the present and detached future salvation in which the created order is abandoned altogether."<sup>46</sup>

These findings of Cornelio and Marañon's study are indeed interesting, but to lay down the theological specifics is not the current intention. Nonetheless, by the assumption of these misconceptions and over-spiritualization, a different sort of identity preservation is taken up by the megachurches thereby passively succumbing to a totalitarian rule.

The megachurches, in grabbing the opportunity for drug suspects to be evangelized, maintain

the identity that the drug menace is a spiritual condition that may be cured through conversion of people.<sup>47</sup> So now, this is opposite to what Schwartz critically notes above. Instead of tightening their grounds, they open their borders for these people to belong – which is good in itself. But what seems to be the problem is the over-spiritualization of a 'heavenward' theology behind the intention. This is what Wright considers the "Platonized version of the gospel" wherein the "assumed 'goal'" of every man and the purpose of evangelism is "going to heaven."<sup>48</sup> The approach seems to be more welcoming for repentant people to get converted so they would get to heaven when they die. The assumption is an awful abandonment of the dwelling where our engagements are highly necessary as 'human' beings. Certainly, the obliqueness is interesting.

In a sense, at the same time, it is still intolerant by supporting a tyrannical crusade against the seemingly incorrigible types of people (although, in fact, they were never really given the chance to go through a judicial process). For wanting security from these people, it is also critical to note that what I consider as *oikos* disposition is a worldview that "arrests any proclivity to recognize the structural injustices that account for the proliferation of drug abuse and accompany the war on drugs as it has taken place in urban poor communities around the country."<sup>49</sup> In fact, many megachurch people just rationalize that "'past sins' are still to be answered for even after conversion."<sup>50</sup>

What are the confluent factors again then? It all has something to do with what Arendt argues to be necessary components of the private life wherein force and violence are justified to master

<sup>44</sup> Cornelio and Marañon, "A 'Righteous Intervention,'" p. 216.

<sup>45</sup> Cornelio and Marañon, "A 'Righteous Intervention,'" p. 225.

<sup>46</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus's Crucifixion* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2016), p. 156.

<sup>47</sup> Cornelio and Marañon, "A 'Righteous Intervention,'" p. 219, pp. 221-22.

<sup>48</sup> Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began*, p. 345.

<sup>49</sup> Cornelio and Marañon, "A 'Righteous Intervention,'" p. 221

<sup>50</sup> Cornelio and Marañon, "A 'Righteous Intervention,'" pp. 220-21





necessity and secure affluence. This inclination in the *oikos* creates havoc in the *polis*. Peace, social security, economic stability, etc. are characteristics of the middle-class private sphere that ‘some’ (not all) members of the megachurches may value. But this in turn accommodated the coercive approach of the government in battling against the drug menace no matter how unbiblical it is because it horribly tramples on the *imago Dei* in the drug suspects. But of course, there are also many middle-class people who speak out against the killings. Perhaps they value the *Imago Dei* more than the confluent factors of the private life. And there are surely other factors that are beyond the conjectures being posited herein.

### *A CHRISTIAN DENOUEMENT*

With the cultural factors discussed, together with the socioeconomic and political disposition (and all the other theological misconceptions) that permeate from the *oikos*, this resonates with Wright’s idea about the problem of evil that “the people through whom God’s solution was being taken forward, was composed of people who were themselves part of the problem.”<sup>51</sup> But just as in Arendt’s notion of natality, there will always be the miracle of new beginnings wherein new initiatives may “interrupt or divert the chains of events set in motion by previous actions.”

Moreover, political action is *an activity directed toward maintaining human relationships*. So I want to return to the most heartening notion of Arendt as, paradoxically, the denouement in Christian teaching. Rights, freedom, justice and love are intrinsic to human life. When people are deprived of such ties, they end up representing nothing but their own individualities.

<sup>51</sup> N.T. Wright, “God, 9/11, the Tsunami, and the New Problem of Evil,” May 18, 2005 lecture at the Church Leaders’ Forum, Seattle Pacific University.

In situations as such, a man is nothing but a man who has lost the very qualities which make it possible for other people to treat him as a fellow-human dwelling on the same earth.<sup>52</sup> This seems to be the unfortunate condition of the drug suspects in our current situation. Therefore, devaluation of human lives by coercion is a transgression itself against the very purpose of our existence. From a Christian standpoint, being human is no other than being the image of God.

### NATALITY AND THE CHRISTIAN ESCHATON

Let me quote Arendt extensively for the synthesis of this paper:

The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, “natural” ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born. Only the full experience of this capacity can bestow upon human affairs faith and hope, those two essential characteristics of human existence which Greek antiquity ignored altogether, discounting the keeping of faith as a very uncommon and not too important virtue and counting hope among the evils of illusion in Pandora’s box. It is this faith in and hope for the world that found perhaps its most glorious and most succinct expression in the few words with which the Gospels announced their “glad tidings”: “A child has been born unto us.”<sup>53</sup>

Arendt’s conception of freedom is “the capacity to begin, to start something new, to do the unexpected, with which all human beings are endowed by virtue of being born.” As Passerin d’Entreves sums up Arendt’s notion: “Action as the realization of freedom is therefore rooted in natality, in the fact that each birth represents a new beginning and the introduction of novelty in the world.”<sup>54</sup> While she recognizes that all

<sup>52</sup> Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, p. 297.

<sup>53</sup> Arendt, *Human Condition*, p.247.

<sup>54</sup> Passerin d’Entreves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt*, 66.





activities (labor, work and action) are in some way related to the concept of natality, action is the most closely connected to it because by acting, individuals reenact the miracle of beginning inherent in their birth. For Arendt, “the beginning that each of us represents by virtue of being born is actualized every time we act, that is, every time we begin something new”<sup>55</sup> and therefore, “the fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable. And this again is possible only because each man is unique, so that with each birth something uniquely new comes into the world.”<sup>56</sup>

Though Arendt would definitely not agree with my insertion as I finally synthesize, since evangelicalism is one main stream of the Protestant tradition, I am convinced that her concept of natality reverberates in the Protestant slogan of *Ecclesia Reformata, Semper Reformanda* (or “the church reformed and always to be reformed”). Although pertaining to Christian tenets, Karl Barth in *Dogmatics in Outline* said that the Christian faith is “involved in a sphere of activity.”<sup>57</sup> In writing about the Christian Dogmatics he said:

The Christian Church *lives on earth and it lives in history*, with the lofty good entrusted to it by God... the Church is conscious of its limitations that it owes a reckoning and a responsibility to the good One who has entrusted this good to it. It will never be able to do this perfectly; ...will always be a thinking, an investigation and an exposition which are relative and liable to error. Even dogmatics with the best knowledge and conscience can do no more than question after the better, and never forget that *we are succeeded by other, later men*; and he who is faithful in this task will hope that those other, later men may think and say better and more profoundly what we

were endeavouring to think and to say. With quiet sobriety and sober quietness, we shall do our work in this way.<sup>58</sup>

Arendt’s miracle of a new beginning in her notion of natality is humbly and implicitly declared by the Protestant tradition as “we are succeeded by other, later men” committed to the endeavours of the faith.<sup>59</sup> In fact, this tradition is now aware of the horrors its own tradition brought to itself and the world during the horrendous wars of the twentieth century. Through sound knowledge and public discourses, and even through the memories of horrors and errors committed by the church on one hand and its apolitical stance on the other, come ideas of a new beginning for the reformation of the Church towards its eschatological purpose of representing the coming Kingdom of God. This of course entails redeeming the gospel from its Platonized version, as Wright puts forward that “God’s kingdom is not a place called “heaven,” detached from “earth,” *but the rule of heaven coming to birth on earth.*”<sup>60</sup> So with Arendt’s natality in mind and God’s eschatological purposes “on earth as in heaven,” I end positing that the Church will continue to reform itself towards its purpose of showing forth the essential nature of the age to come in the reign of Christ.

<sup>58</sup> Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 10-11. Italics mine.

<sup>59</sup> I see this as an important insertion in the discussion. Nevertheless, it might be a disruption to the thought flow of the article. So this just appears as a note.

At the end of the first section on Private Life, I emphasized that patriarchy and the domestic violence that may be accommodated with it is part of what is being reformed in the Christian tradition. So I reiterate this idea because the intertwining of Arendt’s natality in the “sphere of action” with Karl Barth’s “sphere of activity” just mentioned is the thrust of the paper.

It is interesting that although Tracy surveyed the correlation of patriarchy and domestic violence that germinated from religious and cultural traditions, he exhibited the reforming characteristic of the Protestant tradition in spite of its ambiguities that Protestant men who are regular church attendees have the lowest spouse abuse rates because of (p.584):

(1) their regular exposure to balanced biblical teaching and preaching on family life detoxifies abusive misbeliefs about male headship;

(2) Christian community offers salutary models of loving, non-dominating masculinity;

(3) the experience of the Christian community increases men’s sense of confidence and masculinity which in turn decreases their need to control women and children.

It seems then that through dialogue and collective ideas, that surely involve feminist thinkers, the church brings about new beginnings in understanding better the word of God concerning manhood and womanhood. It then permeates from the private sphere to the public space.

<sup>60</sup> Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began*, p.218.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>56</sup> Arendt, *Human Condition*, p.177.

<sup>57</sup> Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (USA: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1959), 9.





## CONCLUSION

In this paper, I argued that Arendt's concept of natality in the sphere of action is implicitly embedded in the Christian eschaton's sphere of activity. I did this by first establishing from a biblical account that politics emerged in the creation of human beings. Then I set the distinction between the private space wherein, as Arendt explains, violence is legitimized to master necessity and the public sphere where deprivatized individuals in their differences as well as their commonalities have political engagements. But as the inclinations in the private life (that I called the *oikos* disposition) intrude the public realm, a distortion in the political space is manifested. Arendt's solution is her notion of natality. But another distortion is that the *oikos* disposition seems to have instigated the fastest growing Evangelical subgroup in the country to be apolitical. Amidst these distortions, faith and hope are bestowed in the concept of new beginnings both present in Arendt and the Protestant slogan: *Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda!*

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