The Political vs. the Theological: The Scope of Secularity in Arendtian Forgiveness

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Abstract

The conventional interpretation of Hannah Arendt's accounts of forgiveness considers them secularistic. The secular features of her thinking that resist grounding the act of forgiving in divine criteria offer a good corrective to religious forgiveness that fosters depoliticization. Arendt's vision of free politics, however, calls for much more nuance and complexity regarding the secular and the religious in realizing forgiveness for transitional politics than the secularist rendition of her thinking allows. After identifying an area of ambiguity in Arendt's thoughts that invites further investigation of religious forgiveness, this study seeks to relieve her misgivings about religion's role in politics by engaging with Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology, which emphasizes worldliness and altruism in religious faith. Through constructive engagements with both thinkers, the article presents a balanced Arendtian position that is neither solely secularist nor complacent about religion in politics.

Keywords

Arendt, Bonhoeffer, forgiveness, secularity, political theology, transitional politics

Acknowledgement

This article critically revisits the secularist reading of Hannah Arendt's thoughts on forgiveness and offers an alternative interpretation informed by theological voices emphasizing worldliness. Arendt's thinking provides a rare example in contemporary philosophy of approaching forgiveness as a political discourse (Young-Bruehl 2006, 110–111). Among works on transitional justice, the secularist features of Arendt's idea of forgiveness appear as a useful corrective to problems associated with theological forms of forgiveness.[1] The oft-noted concern among secular critics is that, grounded in a transcendental source, religiously inspired forgiveness underplays political dissension—a basic element of democratic politics (Schaap 2005, 99–104; Verdeja 2009, 17; and Chakravarti 2014, 16–18). Christian forgiveness's messianic and eschatological elements make it especially problematic. Several scholars criticize ideas and practices guided by an alarming aspect of Christian forgiveness that fosters an ahistorical ideal of restoring harmony and enforcing some form of comprehensive social consensus (Griswold 2007; Konstan 2010; cf. Fiddes 2016; Giannini 2017). By contrast, Arendtian forgiveness attends to the agonistic moments of politics that resist institutional closure and thereby shifts forgiving's focus from restoring wrongdoers to a moral community to disclosing the commonness of a world composed of diverse perspectives (Grey 2019, 48–50; Janover 2005, 231–233; and Schaap 2006, 626–629). A secular form of forgiveness guided by this interpretation of Arendt emerges as an important alternative to religious forgiveness. I maintain that such a secular approach underrates a synergic opportunity that a religious engagement with forgiveness can bring to transitional politics and that Arendt's thinking cannot be conclusive about secular forgiveness's efficacy. I further claim that by engaging Arendt's

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[1] I use "transitional justice" to refer to attempts by post-conflict countries or societies to address large-scale or systematic human rights violations in their efforts to democratize. "Transitional politics" denotes the political condition in a democratic transition that faces issues of transitional justice. For their usage, see Colleen Murphy 2017, 1 and The International Center for Transitional Justice 2009.

political thoughts with worldly theology, notably articulated by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, we can envision a nuanced ethic for religious participation in politics, one attentive to religion-based domination yet not overwhelmed by this danger.

The secularist rendition of Arendtian forgiveness is not ungrounded in Arendt's works. As Margaret Canovan identifies, Christian miracle-working, along with Homeric heroics and a Roman foundation, affects Arendt's accounts of action (1992, 146). Arendt conceives of forgiveness as a type of action, "the one miracle-working faculty of man" (1998, 246). Describing it as a reaction that retains the initiatory feature of action, Arendt claims that its paradigmatic example is found in early Christianity (1998, 241; 2005, 58–59). For Arendt, Jesus is the first discoverer of forgiveness's role in human affairs (1998, 238). However, Arendt never describes Jesus in the theological language of Christ but as a historical figure of Nazareth. Indeed, places in which she "humanizes" the Judeo-Christian accounts of forgiveness are readily recognizable. Based on her idiosyncratic reading of the gospels, Arendt opposes the orthodox claim that forgiving is solely God's purview (Dolan 2004, 607). Jesus's teaching, she argues, actually attests to the human capacity to forgive. Arendt also rejects the Christian grounding of forgiveness in neighborly love due to its allegedly depoliticizing effect on the public space "in between" actors. Behind Arendt's secular assessment of Jesus and early Christianity are her worries about bringing a totalizing God, represented by the Decalogue, into politics and the resulting worldlessness among the believers who harbor hope for divine redemption.

However, whether the secularist interpretation of Arendt can fully reflect the crucial demand for nuance and complexity regarding secularity and religiosity that her vision of free politics generates in actualizing forgiveness for transitional politics is questionable. When we detail the levels of harm and their corresponding reversals, Arendt's thinking shows much more ambiguity

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on religious involvement in forgiveness than the secularist interpretation allows. Through clarifying the scope of secularity in Arendt's idea of forgiveness and relieving some of her anxiety about religion-based domination, I reconstruct her thoughts such that they are neither reducible to a solely secularist formulation of forgiveness nor a complacent stance on practicing religious forgiveness in public. In contrast with the secularist Arendt, the Arendt formulated in this study is more appreciative of a positive role of religion in transitional politics via the dynamism her ambiguous accounts of forgiveness create.

Specifically, the article has two analytic tasks. One is to identify an understudied area in the scholarship that engages with Arendt's idea of forgiveness. Although Arendt frequently appears in works on transitional politics or restorative justice, the fact that Arendt herself only discusses forgiveness as it relates to the activity of action rarely receives proper attention. Arendt's oeuvres outline different types of harm (such as trespassing, crime, and radical evil), raising the question of what Arendtian forgiveness says about cases outside her action-driven politics. This analysis challenges the secularist interpretation of Arendtian forgiveness by investigating whether a qualified form of religious engagement in forgiveness is acceptable and even necessary to achieving Arendt's vision of free politics.

The upcoming examination of Arendtian forgiveness will be clear that forgiveness is only one method for addressing thorny issues of transitional politics. More conventional tracks for addressing past wrongdoings include punishment and retribution. In addition, studying whether pursuing punishment and forgiveness is possible in any synthetic form (for example, restorative punishment) is worthwhile for the discussion on transitional justice (Lang 2008, 107–110;

Philpott 2012, 219–223).[2] Such an issue, however, will not be an extensive concern in this essay, which attends to forgiveness itself. With this focus, *The Human Condition*, where Arendt explicates the relevance of forgiveness to her free politics, comes to the fore in analysis (1998, 236–243).

Another methodological point for the following analysis is that the interpretive orientation adopted here is critical, characterized as a "with Arendt, contra Arendt" approach (Benhabib 1996, 4, 123). Arendt's endeavor to accentuate the agential human activity, action, derives from her observation that modern prejudices against action contributed to totalitarianism's rise (Canovan 1992, 103). One must comprehend Arendt's accounts of forgiveness alongside her objection to the traditional bias against action and her appreciation of action as compatible with natality and plurality. Yet, while confirming the connection between Arendt's secular accounts of forgiveness and her emphasis on human agency, the article also questions secular forgiveness's applicability in challenging situations. Thus, the approach is sympathetic yet critical, examining whether secular Arendtian forgiveness stands by itself or needs some form of religiosity in non-ideal conditions like transitional politics.

Once the first task is complete (that is, that Arendtian forgiveness has some dimension that can benefit from religious engagement is proven), the article will turn to the broad issue of how to conceive of God—or whether ways of conceiving of religiosity other than as unworldly believers being bounded by a totalizing God, as Arendt often describes, are possible. For this task, the essay engages with Arendt's contemporary Bonhoeffer, who saw the rise of the Nazi regime and developed a distinctive theological view on resistance and reconciliation (Hale and Hall 2020). Bonhoeffer's "person" notion of God as both a transcendent actor and a being who

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[2] Hannah Arendt 1998, 241 does not view punishment as opposite to forgiveness, for both options put the past to rest. For her, though, punishment is not as capable of creating newness as forgiveness.

remains in human history affects his balanced thoughts on divine/human agency (DeJonge 2018). If Arendt's idea of forgiveness cannot be solely secularistic when applied to transitional politics, examining her secularism via theological voices that attend to human agency and worldly engagement will generate constructive insights into her concerns about otherworldly Christianity and religion-based domination. Bonhoeffer's theology serves this purpose.

What makes the Arendt–Bonhoeffer nexus appealing is their common commitment to worldliness. If Arendt offers a vision of free politics that citizens caring for the public world actualize beyond the conventional political practices of domination, enforcement, and violence, Bonhoeffer provides an alternative vision of Christianity, such as "worldly Christianity" or "religionless Christianity," that differs from the traditional portrayal of otherworldly religion. Central questions here are how to sustain the common world (for Arendt) and religion's role in the secular world (for Bonhoeffer). A cross-examination of these intriguing aspects of their thoughts illuminates the intersection of politics and religion. As James Bernauer notes, "their mutual embrace of worldliness is the key commitment that engenders their visions of activism" (2007, 78). Because these visions are innovative, scholarly concerns arise regarding how Arendt's free politics could inform the religious practices Bonhoeffer considers and how Bonhoeffer's Christological account of living for others could share Arendt's anxiety about anti-political elements that foster violence and threaten the public world.

In their worldly "visions of activism," action is crucial. Thus, as Ruth Zerner speculates, Arendt's ideas of free action occurring without restraints "resonate with Bonhoeffer's analysis of free responsibility and civic courage" (1999, 202). Yet, the nature and scope of action are controversial. When attending to Arendt's thoughts, Bonhoeffer scholars tend to treat her accounts of action as fundamentally rooted in natality and view her free politics as aiming at

radical beginnings. For instance, grounded in Arendt and Bonhoeffer's shared commitment to worldliness, Petra Brown argues that Arendt views natality as action's core quality and "attempts to re-establish a common world through her concept of natality" (2016, 30). Brown thinks this Arendt suggests radical openness, using it to criticize some conservative aspects of Bonhoeffer's thoughts attributable to his own cultural contexts. Andrew DeCort's approach differs from Brown's in that he considers Arendt's "natal agent" for action as a case of "an overoptimistic estimation of human agency" (2018, 19, xxvii). He contrasts this rendition of Arendt with Bonhoeffer's ethics of new beginning that suggest "the self's God-given liberation from its self-enclosure to begin again" with love and service for others. However, there is a consensus: the action Arendt has in mind is unmoored, and action-driven politics pursues radical beginnings.

The main purpose of the second analytical task (critical engagement with the Arendt–Bonhoeffer intersection) is to show that formulating an ethic for worldly religious engagements that is not dictatorial and anti-deliberative is possible and that it can actually help enhance Arendt's vision of free politics for non-domination. From this clarification, a refined argument emerges about points of encounter between these thinkers: Arendt's judgment on religion and politics can benefit from theological nuances articulated in Bonhoeffer's Christian worldliness, whereas Bonhoeffer's Christological ethics should be informed by Arendt's acute awareness of modern politics and society in their implementation. In advancing this point, though, the article also questions the recent take on Arendt's thoughts by Bonhoeffer scholars. Portraying her thinking as some variation on the Nietzschean view of humanity creates interpretive challenges. As Charles Mathewes cautions, Arendt's thinking contains aspects that "a simplistic voluntarist reading" cannot capture (2000, 399). Indeed, Arendt and Bonhoeffer respectively developed political sensitivities that incorporate both continuity and change, as Arendt appealed to agonistic

and institutional features of free politics, and Bonhoeffer discerned conceptual differences among the orders of creation and preservation and divine mandates (Markell 2011, 34–37; Villa 2008a, 408; Elshtain 2001, 347; and Mauldin 2019, 582–588). In this respect, neither theocratic legalism nor vulgar voluntarism can provide a full understanding of forgiveness, although these thinkers' specific ways of engaging with the world and establishing reality differ (Arendt 1998, 50; Bonhoeffer 2005, 58). Thus, any discussion of the Arendt–Bonhoeffer nexus must acknowledge such complexities found in their thoughts.

1. Secular Forgiveness

Forgiveness's merit lies in miraculously breaking a chain of violent reactions and initiating dialogues among parties in conflict afflicted by past harms. Arendt recognizes these functions of forgiveness, although her theoretical engagement with forgiveness has a broader context than the mere restraint of violence. As Karen Pagani notes, Arendt broaches the topic of forgiveness as she elevates action's meaning and dignity (2016, 144). Action that generates meanings by enacting stories in an intersubjective manner occupies a central place in Arendt's thinking as a redeeming force for other human activities, such as labor and work (Arendt 1998, 184, 190). But, because action resists a calculative and instrumental paradigm, it is unpredictable and irreversible. Unlike other activities that cannot find remedies within themselves, however, "the remedy [for action] . . . does not arise out of another and possibly higher faculty, but is one of the potentialities of action itself" (1998, 236–237). For Arendt, one aspect of this remedy is forgiving. By undoing the deeds of the past, forgiving mitigates action's irreversibility (1998, 237). Arendt adds that forgiveness closely relates to plurality—the crucial condition for action—because no one can forgive oneself without others' mutual release from what was done. In the

undoing, forgiving also has the same revelatory feature as doing or action. It challenges the current victim-perpetrator identities, as one "acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked [the reaction]," and the other participates in the proposed new relationship beyond the identity determined by the past action (1998, 241).

Yet, incorporating forgiveness into action has a consequence: its Christian or religious features are reformulated in secular terms because Arendt's action theory maintains a secularist objection to religion-based domination. In addition to the "associational" aspect of action that enacts stories in an intersubjective manner, Arendt's thinking describes action's "disclosive" feature: human beings reveal their uniqueness through performing great words and deeds in public (1998, 177). Arendt's accentuation of action's revelatory quality leads her to repudiate the politics of sovereignty where one imposes predetermined ends or wills onto others and to argue for a political life that occurs in a shared public space with a plurality of unique individuals with their own initiatives (1998, 179). This aspect of Arendt's thinking renders setting up reductive utilitarian, moral, or divine criteria for politics problematic, for doing so taints action's revelatory quality while diminishing the richness of diverse perspectives in the "in-between" world of individuals' appearances. Opposing the traditional thinking that resorts to a higher power for grounding politics, such as a divine authority who demands absolute submission, Arendt contends that a remedy for politics can be found within politics itself: the authentic politics of action (2005, 57).

This view of action-driven politics explains why Arendt constructs forgiveness in secular humanistic terms and incorporates it into her action theory. Thus, although considering Jesus of Nazareth the first discoverer of forgiveness's role in human affairs, Arendt emphasizes his teachings that are "not primarily related to the Christian religious message" (1998, 239). Jesus's

accounts of forgiveness, Arendt argues, suggest that human beings—not just God—have the power to forgive, reversing the conventional theological analogy that, as God forgives human sinners, human beings ought to forgive each other. For Arendt, such biblical passages as Matthew 18:35 actually point to Jesus's radically humanistic formulation that what humans do—whether they forgive their brothers or sisters from their hearts—determines God's forgiving of them. As such, the human power to forgive seems to overshadow and obviate God's forgiveness.

Meanwhile, formulating forgiveness as a solely human affair limits the area to which it applies. To this end, Arendt articulates a standard for judging the applicability of forgiveness: whether the actors in question knew their acts' harmful ramifications. In her view, forgiveness is possible only for the harm of trespassing, "an everyday occurrence" in human action (1998, 240). For Arendt, trespassing naturally happens in action-driven politics, as action "force[s] open all limitations and cut across all boundaries" (1998, 190). Although boundless action helps us establish new relationships, it can result in unintended harm. A cycle of vengeance that "incloses both doer and sufferer in the relentless automatism of the action process" can operate in this context, and forgiveness is a powerful method of avoiding it (1998, 241). However, Arendt thinks the forgiveness needed is not religious. Referring to the Greek usage in Luke 17:3-4, she notes that Jesus's statement describes releasing (*aphienai*) as the proper form of forgiveness for trespassing (*hamartanein*), while observing that the Luke passage only asks the wrongdoer to change his or her mind (*metanoein*). In other words, no theology of atonement demanding human repentance or penance appears. By specifying the degree of past wrong against which a process of forgiveness may begin (trespassing), the type of reaction in forgiveness (releasing), and the qualified condition that can merit forgiveness (changing one's mind), Arendt calls for non-religious forgiveness that fits with her theory of action.

Yet, the most obvious example of Arendt's secular inclination in forgiveness is her rejection of the Christian thought that "only love can forgive because only love is fully receptive to *who* somebody is, to the point of being always willing to forgive him whatever he may have done" (1998, 242–243). Arendt thinks love shares the revelatory feature of action, as it similarly attends to "the disclosure of *who*" (1998, 242). When one performs love, *what* the loved person is or does, such as the person's qualities, shortcomings, achievements, failings, and transgressions, does not matter. However, Arendt dismisses love's role in forgiveness because love is completely ungrounded in "the reality of the world" that only the continuous presence of peers acting together and sharing their diverse experiences can guarantee (1998, 50). Appearing as a form of passion that fosters one's emphatic blending with others, love can even destroy the ground for reality—the public world, or the "in-between" that relates and separates people (1998, 52; 2006a, 72–78).

For Arendt, the Christian argument also entails "the problem of an absolute" (2006a, 149). In her view, as Eric Gregory observes, the Christian narrative about God's love of humanity and the incarnation only functions as "a distraction from attending to the other in his or her alterity" (2008, 223). Rather than directing attention to individuals' uniqueness, Christian neighborly love highlights God's greatness in extending grace to sinful humans (Arendt 1996, 106). If all objects of love serve as mere reminders of human sin and the need for God's grace, individual uniqueness and its appearance in the public world—crucial to Arendt's free politics—cannot be real concerns for Christian love. Arendt believes that, without a common world and the public experience we gain by sharing diverse perspectives on it, "we are each driven back on our own subjective experience, in which only our feelings, wants, and desires have [false] reality"

(Canovan 1998, xiii). Thus, for Arendt, Christian forgiveness guided by love should be "outside our consideration" (1998, 243).

2. Revisiting Secularity in Arendtian Forgiveness

Arendt's conceptualization of forgiveness as a human power and her critical assessment of Christian-love-guided forgiveness bears on how to conceive of God, and the next section addresses this topic. This section analyzes Arendt's claim that forgiveness only applies to trespassing. This analysis helps us identify ambiguity in Arendt's thoughts regarding religious forgiveness and see the need to investigate a modest form of religiosity that can relieve concerns about religion-based domination.

Recall Arendt's observation that trespassing occurs daily and unknowingly. Other types of harm differ, and Arendt thus describes them in terms such as crime, offense, and radical evil, though her designations are not always clear. Arendt claims that forgiveness is inapplicable to "the extremity of crime and willed evil" because they are intentional (1998, 239). She makes the contrast that, whereas the individuals of action-driven politics frequently transgress limits and harm others unintentionally, the perpetrators of extreme crime know what they do and act intentionally. Arendt refers to extreme crime here presumably because she is aware that not all crimes are intentional and that unintentional crime becomes more and more difficult to claim when the scale of violence increases. On the next page, though, Arendt only mentions crime, describing it as a harm that stands outside the human ability to handle but belongs to the divine dimension of the Last Judgment. Arendt later returns to more extreme harms than "regular" crime: first, "offenses." She discovers in Luke 17:1 the original Greek word *skandala*, denoting something destructive of the whole human life (1998, 240n80; cf. Stählin 1995). Second,

"radical evil" destroys "the realm of human affairs and the potentialities of human power" (1998, 241; 1973, 459). From a strict view of action and pure politics, action is the most human activity, and crime, extreme crime, and radical evil are all "non-humanistic." Arendt's word choices then are understandable. But putting all acts of harm except trespassing in the same category obscures the fact that some crime is not the radical evil that Arendt thinks only God's retribution can handle.

Compared with Jacques Derrida's infinite conception of forgiveness, Arendt's is qualified and sophisticated. Derrida's (2001, 31) totalizing claim that authentic forgiveness is never "at the service of a finality, be it noble or spiritual," relates to a concern about the misuse of forgiveness, such as in abusing amnesty (Verdeja 2004, 41). Yet, as Pol Vandevelde recognizes, characterizing forgiveness as indiscriminately dismissive of any conditionality overlooks the "non-strategic" use of forgiveness for restoring a public relationship (2013, 271). Arendt considers radical evil neither forgivable nor punishable, as it is an unfathomable harm beyond human intellect (1998, 241).[3] This qualification suggests that forgiving, if still unpredictable, happens in a broad context where some desire to remain in humanity and rebuild a common space exists. Undeniably, however, Arendt's conception of harm—with its ambiguity between trespassing and radical evil—is confusing and needs further clarification. Her discussion of different harms in *The Human Condition* is brief, but she provides lengthy accounts of violence there and elsewhere. Given that violence and harm are closely related, seeing how Arendt views the nature of violence is essential for elaborating her understanding of the different levels of harm as they relate to forgiveness.

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[3] Arendt 1963 revisited the radical evil thesis and introduced the idea of banal evil as a way of bringing the perpetuators' deeds within the horizons of human judgment and law. Yet, she rarely mentioned "forgiveness" in the text and never regarding Eichmann.

The human activity of work is crucial to understanding Arendt's idea of violence. For Arendt, work has a clear end point: the production of an artifact. This feature of work is evident when we observe *homo faber* (man as craftsman). In Arendt's view, the means-and-ends reasoning drives the *homo faber*, who has a model or a blueprint for the product he or she intends to make. Thus "the element of violation and violence is present in all fabrication, and *homo faber . . .* has always been a destroyer of nature" (1998, 139). Arendt warns that when the mentality of work is dominant in politics, violence is difficult to resist (2006b, 139). However, Arendt also recognizes a certain value in work's instrumentality for politics: whether clear means and ends can be identified serves as a crucial criterion to differentiate tyranny and totalitarianism or conventional violence and radical evil (1973, 475; 1994, 339, 353; 2006b, 99). As Dana Villa notes, for Arendt, totalitarianism is not characterized by the "limited" aim of an individual tyrant's or regime's survival (1999, 189). Whereas "using humans as means to an end . . . leaves their essence as humans untouched and impinges only on their human dignity," the radical evil the totalitarian Nazi manifested renders humans superfluous by stripping them of their spontaneity and individuality and making them into interchangeable bundles of reactions (Arendt and Jaspers 1992, 166).

Arendt's observation that instrumental violence differs from both agonistic action and totalitarian evil provides clarity that seems to be missing when she groups all acts of harm but trespassing together in her accounts of forgiveness. A range of crime is conceivable between the "human" harm of trespassing that calls for secular forgiveness and the "non-human" harm of radical evil that demands God's retribution (Arendt 1998, 240). Here, we can construct two pairs: crime close to trespassing and extreme crime approximate to radical evil. Rather than

containing forgiveness within the ideal of action-driven politics, this formulation helps us explore its potential for harm that goes beyond pure politics.

In action-driven politics, mutual trust in the public space of appearances is strong enough to trigger forgiveness that helps the actors recover from trespassing or what they have done unknowingly without intention. As Arendt envisions it, God's intervention is unneeded at this stage. By contrast, against the radical evil of totalitarian terror that even means-and-ends reasoning cannot explain, neither forgiveness nor punishment is appropriate. Mutual trust has completely evaporated, and one can only expect God's retribution for those truly radical offenses against humanity. We can consider non-extreme crimes those that have not entailed mass scale and severity. Reciprocal respect has not yet died in this condition, and forgiveness, if difficult, may happen with a willingness to transition from enmity to political friendship so that the victim and the perpetrator can start viewing each other as peers who contribute to forming "sameness in utter diversity" (Arendt 1998, 57). As a modicum of trust and respect that can kindle movement toward forgiveness still exists at this stage, a strong call for God's forgiveness, not to mention God's retribution, is unnecessary. Finally, from the Arendtian perspective proposed here, extreme crime must be distinguished from transgressing because it would be nearly impossible to justify an act of harm on the basis of total ignorance when it results in mass atrocities and killings. It also differs from radical evil insofar as it is adopted to reach a clearly identifiable end, such as an individual tyrant's or regime's survival. Mutual trust in the extant public space and reciprocal respect among individuals are alarmingly low at this stage.

Cases in transitional politics mostly involve extreme crime, which is neither transgression (and non-extreme crime) nor radical evil. A crucial question for our purposes, then, is what Arendt's thoughts on forgiveness say about extreme crime. Regarding the status of forgiveness in

transitional politics, two Arendtian approaches are identifiable. One is to dismiss forgiveness and resort to resentment. The general consensus here is that forgiveness is advocated and practiced too easily, whereas resentment draws attention to the victim's dignity and right to protest against the perpetrator's wrong and injustice (Brudholm 2009, 129-132; Fassin 2013; and Hunt 2015, 288). However, resentment, though justifiable, is not a virtue but an emotion that lacks the medium to affect the public world, and its psychological benefit for victims is contested (Philpott 2012, 263; Rorty 2013, 263). Arendt herself limits the impossibility of forgiveness to radical evil. Given the distinction between extreme crime and radical evil, the argument that Arendt promotes resentment regarding extreme crime is disputable. Another approach is to turn to the extraordinary potential of agonistic politics that resists institutional closure. Notably, Andrew Schaap views reconciliation as manifested in "a striving for a sense of commonness that might be disclosed" when individuals offer their different perspectives on public matters (2005, 7). He emphasizes the open-ended aspect of Arendt's action-driven politics that helps individuals envision different political relations than what exist in the current institution. Forgiveness happens as actors realize that their public world is fragile and needs mutual care while seeing each other as entities beyond those defined by the past act of harm (Schaap 2006, 628). Schaap's sensible argument captures some of the core principles of Arendtian forgiveness. The problem is that we are discussing mass atrocities, which render mutual trust and respect almost nonexistent. Forgiveness is likely when all conflicting parties discover the political potential of action for a new beginning. But, if reciprocal respect—not to mention a willingness to act together—is missing, how does a striving for a sense of commonness occur in the first place, and what can really trigger an act of forgiving? If retrieving an answer from Arendt's observation on radical

evil when dealing with a lesser harm is misleading, looking for a solution from her statements about trespassing when addressing more brutal harm is equally problematic.

The discussion raises a deeper issue: how to apply Arendt's ideal of authentic politics for practical cases that hardly fit with it (Gündoğdu 2015, 60–67; MacGowan 1997, 292–293; and Markell 2011, 19, 35). Forgiveness is part of Arendt's action-centered politics. Trespassing happens, as boundless action makes unintended harms, and forgiving helps to undo past deeds. Yet, this picture of pure politics seems quite isolated from cases where individuals have completely lost confidence in each other and resist any move toward dialogue and negotiation. Pure politics has its own meaning. Arendt herself demonstrates a pure form of political experience to help us see what we, the modern, have lost and revisit basic assumptions in our understanding of politics. However, we need to know how to transition from non-pure political circumstances to the proper political status. Failing to address this issue makes Arendt's thinking utopian, which is far from her intention (Owens 2007, 31). In transitional politics, attending to authentic politics while ignoring actual (mostly non-pure) cases may be viewed as doing nothing until the situation becomes ideal. This disengagement renders the approach strangely close to the realist argument that, until conflict parties perceive the need to consider de-escalation and dialogue for a new institutional arrangement, we can do nothing but wait for a "ripe moment" (Zartman 1989).

Arendt's thoughts gain traction not merely in entertaining pure politics for its own sake but in urging us to investigate the actual contexts of politics in which action and forgiveness appear to varying degrees. Importantly, as we have seen, specifying different types of harm clarifies that the distinction between trespassing for human forgiveness and radical evil for divine retribution is overly simplistic. Such a dichotomy fails to reflect the possibility of forgiveness for extreme

crimes, where God may figure as a facilitator who reminds conflict parties of their creaturely humanness and restores some sense of mutual trust and respect. Evidently, the divine image suggested here differs from the God considered completely irrelevant and held at bay from pure politics or the God described as the final judge who executes just retribution after life on earth. We will engage with this theological issue of how to conceive of God in the next section. Yet, what is plain now is that regarding extreme crime, invoking the solely human politics of action and forgiveness is problematic. This aspect of Arendt's thoughts motivates us to render them more open to exploring God's role in helping humans imaginatively view extreme crime as trespassing and begin forgiveness with the qualified hope that the wrongdoer may ultimately become a decent political actor displaying mutual respect and forming public trust.

3. Revisiting Religiosity via Bonhoeffer's Theology

Finding in Arendt's thinking a situation that can benefit from a religious form of forgiveness does not mean that Arendt endorses religious involvement in politics. Her concern about the depoliticization effect of religion, evident in her objection to Christian forgiveness guided by neighborly love, also affects her critical observations on more assertive cases. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, for instance, Arendt notes that radical nationalism during the interwar period of Europe appropriated the idea of divine chosenness in the Jewish–Christian faith as ideological propaganda. This adoption, Arendt argues, "made nationality a permanent quality which no longer could be touched by history, no matter what happened to a given people," and accordingly, "divine origin changed the people into a uniform 'chosen' mass of arrogant robots" (1973, 234). Her judgment is that, whether people strive in public relations to actualize unconditional love dictated by an absolute God or whether they claim superiority over others by

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relying on a divine origin, they all increase depoliticization. The image of humans bound to the will of a totalizing God informs Arendt's anxiety about religion. In this scheme, divine agency seems so restraining of human agency for action that authentic politics, which for Arendt must be very humanistic and consist of continuous debate among diverse equals, is difficult to achieve.

This judgment is about the ideological use of religion, and places in Arendt's works assure this topic's difference from another—the nature and source of religion (Arendt 1994, 366; Baehr 2010, 101). However, Arendt is not aloof from theological sources, as her identifications of the antipolitical command-and-obedience thinking in the Hebrew tradition in *On Revolution* and of unworldly Christian charity in *Love and Saint Augustine* reveal. Thus, Arendt attends to religion's nature as well as its use. The aim of this section is to critically revisit Arendt's conceptions about religion and politics through theological voices that emphasize human agency and worldly engagement. It is not to argue that Arendt's anxiety about religion can be fully relieved. Arendt remains a critic on this score. Yet, her critique of religion in politics sounds more sensible when we qualify it by having her thoughts interact with theologies that call for a modest form of religious engagement in politics. This way, Arendt's thinking eschews the unpersuasive path of entertaining a total critique of religion and makes itself compatible with the aforementioned aspect of her thinking that invites further investigation of religious forgiveness.

Bonhoeffer's theology offers a good case of comparison.[4] Like Arendt, Bonhoeffer embraces worldliness (2010, 486). Yet, contra Arendt's valorization of an inherent conflict between divine and human agency, Bonhoeffer's thinking points to Christ as a divine entity who dwells in the human world and history. Arendt is not ignorant of Christ. The overall method she adopts, as

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[4] My focus here is Arendt's and Dietrich Bonhoeffer's views of human and divine agencies, although this theme broadly relates to another important topic: whether and how these thinkers conceptualize the political. For works in this direction, see Dana Villa 2008b, 338–353 and Stephen Plant 2019.

noted earlier, is to view Jesus as a human person of Nazareth, but in her early work on Christian love, she uses the theological language of Christ. Even here, though, Arendt mainly portrays Christ as a figure who serves to concretize the Creator's grace for humanity and to form the community of the redeemed against the world (1996, 108-109).[5] Her account of Christ elevates the authoritarian image of God, who reminds humans of their sinner status and of God's sole authority to grant grace and mercy to them (1996, 105). Arendt's Christ underrates the aspect of God's sacrifice for humanity and reconciliation with the world through the incarnation that binds together love of God and neighbors (Breidenthal 1998, 499; Gregory 2008, 240). Hence, the alternating choice of God or humanity prevents the capture of theological nuances with which Christ positions himself as a reconciler, and the believers pursue loving God and the world simultaneously. Broaching the topic of how to conceive of God with attention to Bonhoeffer's theology is not to deny the integrity of Arendt's thoughts. Nor does it intend to impose Christian authority on her thinking. The accuracy of her appropriation of biblical passages and theological ideas aside, though, investigating a different form of religiosity that fosters human agency for forgiveness than what Arendt assumes is relevant, since her accounts of forgiveness are incomplete, and secularism alone is inadequate when her thinking is applied to transitional politics.

Studies of how to conceive of God relate to the issue of the theological justification of human actions. Some of Arendt's statements, such as "the toying movements of a god holding the strings of puppets," simplify this topic of concern by suggesting that religious practitioners are mere enactors of God's orders (2005, 57). But human actions that rely on divine criteria must

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[5] Cf. Bonhoeffer 2005, 67. The "humanized" Christ, for Bonhoeffer, does not view humans as slaves to sin and death. Bonhoeffer 2010, 406 notes, "Christ is Christ only in the midst of the world," not against the world. For him, God is simultaneously recognized in life and death and in action and sin.

face the complex questions of whether finite humanity can access infinite divinity and on what grounds human beings can claim that their actions conform to God's will. Bonhoeffer resists both approaches that view God as a decisionistic subject completely free from humanity and conceive of God as an object that humanity can absorb (1996, 81–109). Proposing a person-concept of God as a middle way between subjective and objectified deity, as Michael DeJonge (2012, 70) aptly puts it, Bonhoeffer argues that "God not only reveals God's self in discrete acts, but is somehow available, present, and 'haveable' (*habbar*)" in the incarnation. For Bonhoeffer, neither the being-theology of objectified God nor the act-theology of decisionistic God is adequate, as both underrate the "reality" that is only revealed in witnessing a unified life of Christ, who reconciles divinity and humanity. Defining reality in terms of such a reconciled nature of Christ, Bonhoeffer claims that "the most fundamental reality is the reality of the God who became human" (2005, 223). The human action guided by Christ-reality affirms the "indissoluble unity" of faith and works that resists the complete reduction of either side of human and divine agencies (Bonhoeffer 2000, 64). The ethic attending to the reality of the reconciliation of God and the world in Christ objects to "cheap grace" that renders human "action . . . in vain" by emphasizing that "those who affirm [God's love] have already had their sins forgiven" (2000, 44). It also seeks to avoid the hubris found in a type of legalism that claims humans can be fully righteous by observing a set of rules they have established.

Bonhoeffer's critique of the two theologies helps us revisit Arendt's view of Christianity. With her emphasis on participatory politics driven by agonistic action, Arendt raises an understandable concern about the depoliticization effect of Christianity through its otherworldly orientation. Yet, Bonhoeffer's articulation suggests that voices in Christianity that foster worldliness are not impossible and are even central to its message. In contrast to theologies that

take the fundamental difference between divinity and humanity as a starting point of inquiry into revelation and prioritize the "authentic" believer's alienation from the "imperfect" world, the ethic Bonhoeffer formulates highlights Christ's incarnation as a reconciled figure and its this-worldly implications (McBride 2014, 87–118). Religious claims in the world can take an aggressive form; some of them, as Arendt's concern about religious nationalism shows, even threaten to destroy the public world. For Bonhoeffer, however, "the action of the Christian [that] springs from the unity of God and world brought about in Jesus Christ" is not a manifestation of arrogance or intent to dominate others in public (2005, 238). Assuming so violates the nature of God that Christianity depicts: whereas God exists as a limit in the middle of human existence,[6] the same God "consents to be pushed out of the world and onto the cross" (Bonhoeffer 2010, 479). "The God of the Bible," Bonhoeffer argues, "gains ground and power in the world by being powerless" (2010, 480). Bonhoeffer's emphasis on God's powerlessness and suffering creates a twofold expectation: that God's entrance into the world in the person of Christ, who suffers for humanity, serves to warn believers against actions degenerating into domination and that the suffering God helps believers form a space of solidarity beyond domination. They each share in the sufferings of Christ through participating in others' sufferings.

Arendt scholars, as well as those in the Marxist tradition, may find this argument insufficient. Perhaps the Christian analogy can invoke charity among believers and cultivate an environment for acting for and on behalf of the underprivileged. But numerous cases of "humanitarian" intervention—notably those driven by international liberalism—show that charity organizations impose a certain hierarchy in relationships with their target populations (Richmond 2007, 463–

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[6] Bonhoeffer treats limits not as restrictions but as enabling realities. As Charles Mathewes 2000, 399 observes, Bonhoeffer understands that "God limits us most fundamentally in the middle of our lives; limits are not an extrinsic imposition but an intrinsic determinant."

472; cf. Lynch and Schwarz 2016). Acting for poor neighbors in these examples serves to ensure one's superiority. Yet Bonhoeffer would reassure us that action guided by Christ-reality attends to concrete situations and resists projecting onto them an idealistic, abstract principle good for all times and places (2005, 370–371; 2000, 59).[7] Thus, no human individuals and groups should be ranked low or high according to some universally valid codes of conduct that sideline action's "appropriateness" in specific contexts (2005, 272). Opposing idealism by emphasizing real contexts, however, does not conform to the status quo, as *Realpolitik* dictates (2005, 239–241). Bonhoeffer notes that "every order . . . can be broken . . . when it is locked within itself, hardened, and when it no longer permits the proclamation of the revelation" (2012, 364). The operative principle here is that God is both legitimizing and a critical source for human lives, and, for Bonhoeffer, humans must respect this principle when seeking to justify acts of resistance and extant institutions (DeCort 2018, 162–171). Thus, even for a dire situation that demands extraordinary measures, Bonhoeffer emphasizes bearing "guilt" to confirm that the ultimate justifiability of responsible human action belongs to God and highlights the difference between this form of action and ideological action "[that] is already justified by its own principle" (2005, 283, 225; see also Puffer 2019, 177).

To recall Arendt's argument, however, authentic politics appears only when citizens continuously engage in public talk, debate, and deliberation. This view of politics raises the question of whether mutual deliberation is possible in the Christian action Bonhoeffer portrays. Put broadly, does faith itself demand some kind of inculcation and obstruct deliberative politics? Indeed, for Bonhoeffer, Christian action is not possible without assuming faith, which prevents

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[7] This objection also includes treating Christ as a form of ideology. As Joseph McGarry 2014, 118–119 notes, Bonhoeffer thinks that even for such admirable practices as neighborly love and forgiveness, Christians cannot claim that they are acting as Christ but can only say they are trying to be like Christ.

divine revelation from becoming an object of human justification. In Bonhoeffer's view, "revelation is known in the intentionality of faith, and this intentionality is not accessible to [human] reflection" (DeJonge 2012, 79–80). Does assuming faith then leave any space for deliberation among human individuals? Moreover, Bonhoeffer's statements about the divinely mandated spheres of life complicate the matter. The world's relation to Christ, Bonhoeffer argues, becomes concrete in God's mandates in the world (2005, 68). For Bonhoeffer, the mandate is "the authorization and legitimization to declare a particular divine commandment, the conferring of divine authority on an earthly institution" (2005, 389). How does the divine mandate, in Bonhoeffer's sense, differ from the command-and-obedience law that Arendt associates with the Hebrew tradition of Decalogue and warns of its depoliticization effect (Arendt 2006a, 181–182)?

Here, Bonhoeffer would reaffirm that his Christ-reality-guided ethic opposes abstract Christology that begets cheap grace, "an idea about Christ, a doctrinal system, a general religious recognition of grace or forgiveness of sins [that] does not require discipleship" (2000, 59). Discipleship calls for continuous deliberation among believers in a sacramental space regarding what it means to be like Christ and live for others in concrete situations (Jones 1995, 30; Thiemann 2002, 109; and Harvey 2015, 19–57). Religious engagement of this kind resists "standing . . . as a spectator, critic, or judge" who focuses on naming what is Christian or non-Christian at an abstract level (Bonhoeffer 2005, 370). What drives this demand, for Bonhoeffer, is the inaccessible aspect of faith, which creates moments of self-check and mutual deliberation among believers by resisting religious overconfidence. Bonhoeffer's thinking suggests that the intention of faith does not dissolve the need for human actions; it only sets the basic groundwork

for directing attention to the indissoluble unity of divinity and humanity in Christ and of faith and deeds in Christian life.

Bonhoeffer's statements of divine mandates have generated some intriguing debate among his interpreters. Some argue that these accounts tend to counteract the radical vision found in his Christ-reality-guided ethic (Guth 2013, 133; Brown 2016, 27). Others discover a Hegelian heritage in them, claiming that for Bonhoeffer, ethical life gains concrete substance only through the institutions authorized by divine mandates (Robinson 2018, 166–169; Mauldin 2019, 583). Resolving the issue of whether divine mandates are obstacles or supplements to Bonhoeffer's distinctive ethic goes beyond the scope of this essay. The question for us is whether his divine mandates effect Christian depoliticization Arendt portrays. Suffice it to say here that Bonhoeffer opposes any conventional form of theocratic politics, whether one considers his Christian ethic within or beyond the church. We must note that his conception of divine commandment is not "negative," as Arendt's suggests. Bonhoeffer contends that God's commandment concerns the "positive" content of human sociality and human freedom to affirm that positive content (2005, 386). The image of God as a source of domination is far from this understanding. For Bonhoeffer, the will of God is neither a static idea nor a conceptual device to justify what exists. Rather, it is "a reality that wills to become real ever anew in what exists and against what exists" (2005, 74).

4. The Political vs. the Theological

Bonhoeffer's thinking shows that formulating an ethic for religious practices that is not unworldly, dictatorial, and anti-deliberative is possible. His Christ-reality-guided ethic points to a distinctive form of religious forgiveness that appeals to the reconciled moments of faith and works. The ethic of forgiveness driven by Christ-reality appreciates God's presence in the lives

of humans and conceives of God not as a dictator but as an indicator of their common humanness as God's creatures. Such an awareness of equalness in God gives rise to a kind of "moral imagination" (Lederach 2005) that helps conflicting parties recognize each other as equally present for God's salvation and treat harm as worth forgiving. The "faith" side of this ethic, however, must be accompanied by "works." As Paul Fiddes points out, there is a tendency in the history of Christian doctrine to view divine forgiveness as "a legal pardon, or a 'remission' of sin" closely aligned with the Latin model of atonement (2016, 58). Bonhoeffer, as suggested earlier, finds this view of forgiveness deeply flawed, based on cheap grace. The ethic attuned to Christ-reality emphasizes human responsibility to embody the life of Christ living for others in the world. Its objection to cheap grace and call for worldly engagement mean that believers should not isolate themselves within personal piety or private feeling from the painful relational experience of forgiving and being forgiven (Jones 1995, 6; Fergus 2016, 16). Instead, they must keep asking what specific actions would embody Christ's life for the powerless and what concrete forms of forgiveness would help them reconcile broken relationships. By embracing the ambiguity and contingency of worldly matters, Bonhoeffer's ethic of forgiveness resists moral purism and makes room for people's experiences of anger and resentment (2005, 242, 370).[8]

This form of religious engagement with forgiveness is much more modest and qualified than what the conventional charge against public religion portrays. It helps one revisit Arendt's anxiety about religion's role in politics and forgiveness to reflect the demands of religion that arise when we apply her free politics to the challenging situation of extreme harm. Yet, even with Bonhoeffer's idea of Christian worldliness, Arendt's caution has its own significance. As a

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[8] Further inquiries in developing a Bonhoefferian idea of forgiveness may investigate the relationship between forgiveness and reconciliation in Bonhoeffer's thoughts, especially how his Christological reconciliation deals with calls for retribution. As Tuomas Forsberg 2001 notes, reconciliation is a broader concept than forgiveness, as it can happen through either retribution or forgiveness.

way of synthesizing the discussion, the following articulates how, while being informed by Bonhoeffer's Christian worldliness and Christ-reality-guided ethic of forgiveness, Arendt's thinking can also serve to reduce any degeneration of those ideals when religious believers implement them in modern contexts.

Readers who emphasize in Arendt's works the initiatory dimension of action and its close connection with natality characterize her faith in action as messianic and religious (Arendt 1998, 247; see for example Bernauer 1987, 11; Biss 2012). This rendition of Arendt's thoughts differs from the ongoing assertion that her thinking itself is not religious but has some dimension that can benefit from religious engagement. It is important to see that, viewing natality as the ontological basis for action, Arendt recognizes that initiatory and boundless action serves to create new relationships. With this feature of action implying "radical openness," Arendt's thinking looks congenial to what Bonhoeffer envisions through his accentuation of Christian humility and solidarity for the marginalized (Brown 2016, 32). Yet Arendt also has reservations about action. She ascertains that action, for its reliable appearance, needs some institutional limits (Canovan 1992, 133). Moreover, Arendt is much more pessimistic about genuine free politics' possibility in our time than the natality-based reading suggests. This pessimism is not only because we the modern have lost the "taste for public freedom" but also because the situation we face is precarious due to what she calls "the rise of the social," forces driven by capitalism and consumerist culture that devalue political action and free politics (Arendt 2006a, 271; 1998, 45; see also Owens 2012).

Arendt's diagnosis of modern society, if properly situated in examining Bonhoeffer's thoughts, proves instructive, as it offers a cautionary argument for implementing Bonhoeffer's refined Christian ethic. For Bonhoeffer, Christ's reconciliation of divinity and humanity plays

the central role, motivating believers to act for others in the world. In contrast to concrete ethics building on the reconciled Christ-reality, Bonhoeffer refers to a type of abstraction, notably one inspired by what he calls "pseudo-Lutheranism," that separates reality into two discrete parts (2005, 238). This approach, by shifting the focus to the mere relation of the parts, such as the secular and the sacred, moves the reconciled reality of Christ out of sight and breeds "insoluble conflict" at the theoretical level (2005, 154). Bonhoeffer sees such abstract ethics as a great obstacle to ethical decisions. He deplores that "living in an abstraction . . . means living detached from reality and vacillating endlessly" between two conflicting principles (2005, 262).

That God has reconciled with the world in the person of Christ is a confessional statement that triggers believers' actions. Yet, such a Christological reconciliation can also be taken as a rigid empirical fact of the current world we live in, which engenders more relief than motivation to act for change. What might be missing here, then, is theological dynamism, which is evident when we present Arendt's position on public religion not as a total critique but as a qualified caution that is properly informed by theologies like Bonhoeffer's that emphasize worldliness. This theological dynamism helps us diagnose the extent to which either bleak secularism or religious fanaticism, which Bonhoeffer calls "compromise" and "radicalism," prevails in politics (2005, 153–157); correct the condition by balancing the claims of secularity and religiosity; and remain alert to either danger. Here, I am not making the same charge that skeptics often make against so-called Christian triumphalism (Paipais 2018, 1031–1032). Using Bonhoeffer's theology, we can recognize that those critics tend to miss the hermeneutically complex nature of Christ. Christ's victory, if taken as confessional assurance, is not a confirmation of a sovereign God's conquest of the sinful human world. Rather, it is a call for believers to attend to God's becoming human in the person of Christ in the world and the unity of faith and works in

Christian life. As we have seen, this side of Bonhoeffer's thinking produces a distinctive ethic that resists moral purism and allows for worldly motives for human actions. The real concern is about the effects when believers see Christ's reconciliation of divinity and humanity as a static concept or an empirical fact of the world they face.[9] If this perception occurs, the person of Christ starts losing its dynamic character and taking an ideological form, and the tone of engagement with the world becomes relieving and celebratory. Accordingly, the form of faith that ensures the fulfilled reconciliation via Christ overrides what is supposed to be the actual content of faith: following the reconciling Christ, who assiduously works in concrete worldly matters through the never-ending drama of incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection.

The true relevance of Arendt's caution is found at this juncture. Arendt's broad point behind her dual emphasis on agonistic action and institutional stability and her concern about the increasing infiltration of the social into politics is that any foundational claim and public institutions based on it are vulnerable to ideological ossification without a public-spirited agonism (Lee 2021, 89–90; Markell 2011, 28; and Villa 2008b, 104). This judgment is a useful reminder for those who apply Bonhoeffer's insight to religion and politics. Arendt at times treats this case of degeneration too conclusively, failing to envision forms of religious engagement that differ from her narrow view of Christianity. Bleak secularism creates difficulty in fulfilling her free politics in challenging circumstances, such as transitional politics. By contrast, though, Bonhoeffer's theology needs to be complemented by Arendt's critical insight. Her thinking suggests that even a refined form of religious ethic that attends to the reconciled nature of Christ is not completely free from the trap of ideological institutional sclerosis. What can follow from

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[9] Similarly, Michael Mawson 2018, 72–73 points out that the claim of unifying Christ, if not accompanied by the theological dialectic of creation, sin, and reconciliation, can entertain a form of idealism.

this cautionary judgment is that to prevent such a problem, we need an ethic sensitive to the importance of balancing secularity and religiosity.

Bonhoeffer views vacillation between these two claims as ethically inadequate because it only leads to inaction or theoretical self-contentment. For him, Christ's reconciliation provides a firm ground that motivates believers' ethical decisions. However, although believers embrace God's incarnation and reconciliation with the world as an important confessional commitment, they also need to know empirically the current state of the world they live in. Recognizing which demands of secularity and religiosity prevail in a concrete situation in question and balancing any extreme manifestation from either claim is a crucial part of ethically responsible action. Contra Bonhoeffer's argument, the effort of balancing—properly guided—can serve to reduce cases of ideological ossification that are apparent in the current world by the increasing dominance of social forces of neoliberalism and capitalism in which Arendt's warning to modern society is grounded. As such, Arendt's judgment on religion and politics can benefit from theological nuances articulated in Bonhoeffer's Christian worldliness, while Bonhoeffer's Christological ethic of forgiveness needs Arendt's call for caution in its implementation.

5. Conclusion

Two issues have been the focus herein: whether any need for religion arises when we put Arendt's vision of free politics into practice and what form of religious engagement in politics could relieve Arendt's anxiety about religion-based domination. I have shown how the case of forgiveness complicates the secularist rendition of Arendt's thinking and invites further investigation of religious forgiveness. I have also pointed out via Bonhoeffer's theology that the reconciled nature of Christ can serve to rectify Arendt's one-sided view on divine and human

agencies and to reduce her concern about religion's detrimental role in politics. By making these points, I did not argue that the proposed form of Christianity is desirable for all settings of politics across different harms I identified. My analysis only dealt with the probable condition of transitional politics under which a religious form of forgiveness is not ignorable due to the high intensity of violence and the resulting absence of mutual trust among parties in conflict. Nor did I address forgiveness in inter-religious conflict, although there is no immediate reason to believe that a modest form of Christian practices would impede peace processes, for instance, between Christians and Muslims in a conflict zone. I leave the analysis of these important issues for other occasions.

What I have presented as theological dynamism through the reconstruction of Arendt's statements about religion and forgiveness agrees with Samuel Moyn's (2008, 91) sensible argument that Arendt saw religion as a powerful version of authority and recognized "the potential appeal of the transcendent." For Moyn, though, the potential Arendt discovered in religion was dangerously proximate to the Schmittian God as a sovereign dictator for human affairs. Although sympathetic to scholars like Moyn who emphasize Arendt's eventual rejection of a political theology of this kind, I highlight the need to investigate the complexity and nuance that a simple reduction of the religious to religion-based domination cannot capture. As my analysis has shown, Arendt's thinking is not tightly closed off to exploring positive benefits religious engagements would offer free politics or a transition into that vision. Indeed, considering Arendt's thinking alongside theological arguments *a la* Bonhoeffer that suggest a modest form of religious engagement in politics clarifies the uniqueness of her theological dynamism. This study's broad implication is that political theorists must be properly informed by theological specifics that are not necessarily monistic and dogmatic. After all, political theology

needs the discussion of theological specifics as much as ideological analysis of religious beliefs or sociological examination of the impact of civic religious virtues on politics (McCormick 2022, 102–103). By analyzing Arendt's thoughts via Bonhoeffer's thinking, which sustains the "theology" in political theology, the article has sought to make an Arendtian case for meeting such a demand for theological discourse, thereby moving the discussion further than the recent valorizations of civil religion or humanistic deity in Arendt's works (Dolan 2018, 5; Moyn 2008; and Vatter 2018).

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