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Micro-Christendoms: Cultural Renewal on a Human Scale

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La Salle University
School of Arts and Sciences

Graduate Program in Theology and Ministry

Dissertation

Micro-Christendoms: Cultural Renewal on a Human Scale

By

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Micro-Christendoms: Cultural Renewal on a Human Scale

By

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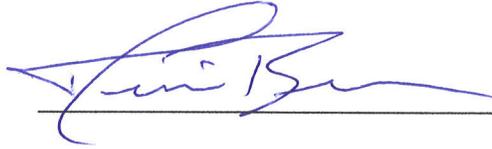
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ABSTRACT

When Christians think of “transforming the culture,” they often picture voter guides, national politicking, and bringing “Kingdom values” to Hollywood and Wall Street. Frustrated by two generations of this sort of fruitless culture warring, many have siloed and privatized their faith.

This dissertation will outline a vision of cultural engagement that’s neither triumphalist nor defeatist. Cultural transformation, I will argue, is indeed laudable and accomplishable if done on a human scale, i.e., on blocks and in neighborhoods rather than at the national level.

Building such “Micro-Christendoms” is not at all new to the Christian faith. Indeed, the dissertation will explore the role “place” had in Ancient Israel. God’s people have always been called to attend to the locality in which they are placed. Then, the dissertation will turn its eyes to the great tradition of Christian public engagement. Particularly, the notion of “subsidiarity” in Catholic Social Teaching and “Sphere Sovereignty” in Neo-Calvinism will be held up as helpful tools in the effort to transform local cultures.

Then, the project will consider the ways in which neighborhoods actually change. While offering a critique of the so called “broken window theory,” the research will show that, in fact, the strength of local neighborhoods has an outsized influence on the mental, physical, and spiritual health of the citizens. Thinking slightly larger, the research will then consider cities, and how city planning strengthens or diminishes localities. And

finally, the project will highlight the unique role the church has to play in the renewal of localities, with specific attention given to the catholic nature of the church. In every part of the dissertation, I have kept the end goal of La Salle's doctoral program in mind: real life ministry. The tone of this project, then, is popular, accessible, and practical.

Chapter 1

CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT ON A HUMAN SCALE

Build houses in a culture of homelessness. Plant gardens in polluted and contested soil. Get married in a culture of sexual consumerism. Make commitments in a world where we want to always keep our options open. Multiply in a world of debt. Have children at the end of history. Seek shalom in a violent world of geopolitical conflict and economic disparity. This is Jeremiah's word to the exiles. This is Jeremiah's subversive word to us. And in this vision we just might see, with Jeremiah, a future with hope.¹

By the end of this chapter, I will argue for a particular approach to cultural engagement, one that prioritizes micro-cultural engagement over macro-cultural engagement. The path to this conclusion will come by answering five questions, namely: (1) what is culture, (2) can we change culture, (3) should we change culture, (4) what should our posture toward macro-cultures look like, and finally (5) what artifacts will be of aid in the church's mission to transform micro-cultures.

What is Culture?

First, what is culture? In his classic *Christ and Culture*, H. Richard Niebuhr calls culture the “language, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, social organization, inherited artifacts, technical processes, and values.”² Former Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Abraham Kuyper, says of culture:

¹Brian J. Walsh, *Subversive Christianity, Second Edition: Imaging God in a Dangerous Time* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 47.

²H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1975), 35.

Creation was fashioned by God, fashioned with life that surges and scintillates in its bosom, fashioned with the powers that lie dormant in its womb. Yet, lying there, it displayed but half its beauty. Now, however, God crowns it with humanity, who awakens its life, arouses its powers, and with human hands brings to light the glory that once lay locked in its depths but had not yet shone on its countenance.³

Thus far, defining culture seems simple: it's that we make with creation. Yet, things get more complicated. Writing in the New York Times, Joshua Rothman sums up and develops Raymond Williams triangular way of getting at a workable definition. Says Rothman:

. . . there's culture as a process of individual enrichment, as when we say that someone is "cultured" (in 1605, Francis Bacon wrote about "the culture and manurance of minds"); culture as a group's "particular way of life," as when we talk about French culture, company culture, or multiculturalism; and culture as an activity, pursued by means of the museums, concerts, books, and movies that might be encouraged by a Ministry of Culture.⁴

While we will claim culture is more than this trio, it's certainly not less. This triangular discussion is a helpful place to begin precisely because of its haziness. These examples allude to two difficulties always lurking in the periphery when one is trying to define culture.

First, culture is both expressive and formative. To take the third example first, when one reads a book, one is reading the expression of the author. That is, the book is

³Abraham Kuyper, Nelson D. Kloosterman, and John Halsey Wood, *Rooted & Grounded: The Church as Organism and Institution* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian's Library Press, 2013), 112.

⁴Joshua Rothman, "The Meaning of 'Culture.'" *New Yorker*; Dec. 26, 2014. <https://www.newyorker.com/books/joshua-rothman/meaning-culture>

revelatory; it illuminates the inner life of at least one person. The same can be said of a movie, concert, etc. Each reflects something of one's self, giving voice to something previously un-embodied—a thought, a feeling, a belief, etc.

Culture is not only expressive, however, it's also formative. To be “cultured,” as Williams says, is to be formed by the expressions of others. That is, as one person is speaking another is listening. One is expressing as another is formed by that expression. Things get even more complex once one reckons with Williams second example of culture as a way of being in the world. It's not the case that there are two static groups in the world—the culture makers and culture receivers, the hearers and listeners.

Again, consider the act of reading a book. Once one reads the book—an expression of another, mind you—one is then moved, to or fro from the author's argument. The reader's inner life is now re-arranged. The reader cannot express himself now irrespective of the writer. Of course, the writer likewise is a reader—his expressions ultimately don't find their root in his own psyche, but in the heart of another, a writer he encountered as a reader himself.

To speak of a culture as a way of being at least tangentially connects the other two uses of the word culture. Each of us is born with a particular outlook, a particular way of being in the world. As we express ourselves, as we build and do culture, we do so as those impressed by others.

Ultimately, then, it's not that culture can be either expressive or formative, but rather it is both expressive and formative at the very same time, in ways often unspoken and perhaps unconscious to all parties involved.

These complexities lead Williams, for one, to question the wisdom of piling so much weight on any one term—perhaps culture is ready to break under its load:

Does it even make sense to have a single word, “culture,” with such divergent uses? Maybe not. . . . It's possible to imagine a more rational system, in which one word describes the activities of artistic and intellectual life, another our group identity, and a third our implicit norms and ways of living. Those terms, whatever they might be, would be narrower and simpler.⁵

To this point, we have refrained from offering a definition of culture. Perhaps, as Williams intimates, the word is too broad and varied for a single, cohesive definition. But perhaps not. Reformed theologian Henry Van Til offered a famous and influential definition of culture which this chapter will adopt going forward. “Culture,” says Van Til, is “lived religion.”⁶ Elsewhere he calls culture “religion externalized.”⁷

One immediately sees the appeal of such a definition. “Religion” does more than its fair share of heavy lifting. By seeing culture as an expression of religion, uses which once seemed quite disparate come together nicely. Yes, we're cultured, just as we're catechized. Yes, we produce culture, just as we evangelize. Yes, we share a culture, just

⁵Ibid.

⁶Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1959), 12.

⁷ Ibid.

as we share a faith with like-minded devotees. Religion shows how culture can be expressive and formative, individual and collective, something one does and something one is.

While it's clear that religion can finance a lavish use of the word culture, ought it to do so? Is there an organic connection between religion and culture, or is religion bailing out an otherwise alien term? Catholic historian Christopher Dawson sees a legitimate connection. After pointing out the obvious etymological tie (i.e., culture can't even be spelled without *cult*), Dawson shows that religion and culture are related by more than convenience or syntax:

A social culture is an organized way of life which is based on a common tradition and conditioned by a common environment. It is clear that a common way of life involves a common view of life, common standards of behavior and common standards of value, and consequently a culture is a spiritual community. Therefore from the beginning the social way of life which is culture has been deliberately ordered and directed in accordance with the higher laws of life which are religion.⁸

This chapter proceeds from the assumption that culture is indeed religion externalized. If accepting such a definition does nothing else, it surely queues us into the consequence of the question, "Can we change culture?"

⁸Christopher Dawson. *Religion and Culture: Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of Edinburgh in the Year 1947* (London, UK: Sheed & Ward, 1948), 35.

Can We Change Culture?

We will answer the question “Can we change culture?” before answering, “Should we change culture?” for good reason. If culture’s sway is disconnected from mankind’s pushing, then the latter question is inconsequential at best. However, if culture fluxes with mankind’s efforts, the later question is worth considering in some depth.

While Andy Crouch does not argue that culture is unmalleable, he does bridle any ambition to change culture. Indeed, Crouch moves away—though not totally—from *engagement* language altogether. Culture is made, produced, assembled. If believers want to affect the world for the better, they better get busy making things. The world is changed through items being created. The example given by Andy Crouch in his book on culture making is that of the highway system⁹. When President Eisenhower signed The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, the world was forever changed. However, how was it changed? It was not, principally, changed by an idea, but by an object.

Crouch is not arguing that ideas are inconsequential—far from it! Rather, he argues for a dynamic syncretism between ideas and objects vis-à-vis culture. In the case of the highway system, one can trace any number of ideas that were birthed from that object. How people engage with food was fundamentally changed as a result of the highway, for instance. While Eisenhower couldn’t have foreseen McDonald’s when he signed the bill; it was nevertheless downstream from the object he helped create.

⁹ Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2008), 41.

The point about unforeseen consequences is significant. In Crouch's reckoning, each cultural good gives something and takes something away (it "moves the horizons of possibility"¹⁰). Just as the highway made it possible to live in suburbs, several miles away from one's work, it also took away the possibility of traveling by some other means—by horse, say.

While I appreciated Crouch's emphasis that objects and ideas have a dynamic relationship, it seems to me one can overemphasize the role of the object. For instance, in the discussion on the highway bill, Crouch doesn't address what ideas made such an act possible. Or at least, what national mood made such an idea possible. One could just as easily use the highway illustration as an example of the opposite of his point: showing that the highway system was downstream from the national "can-do spirit."

Crouch's approach might seem to contradict Van Til's, but it does not. We shouldn't be surprised that the externality of religion would be physical. In the Christian tradition, at least, as mundane things as farms, money, and animals are all under the purview of one's faith. How one treats one's donkey speaks to the condition of one's soul. Thus, Crouch's point is well taken: Culture is concrete, tangible, external. This being so, any theory of cultural engagement must reckon appropriately with the actual matter of culture—the *objects*, in a word.

Again, it's not that Crouch is saying one should avoid culture; he's saying culture is too large and unpredictable to be tamed by our stargazing. What one means for good

¹⁰Ibid, 41.

may end up causing harm and vice versa. Thus, we make culture faithfully while leaving any results from our labor up to God.

It's at this point I want to develop Crouch's thesis while also slightly critiquing it. On the one hand, Crouch wants us to see the vastness of culture. The commodiousness of culture's width should humble our ambitions, if not extinguish any hope of transforming such an unwieldy beast. Yet, Crouch shows that culture is also near, manageable, local. Yes, the highway system is culture, but so too is a single shingle on a roof. I want to agree with Crouch: leave the larger, macro-culture up to God. We probably won't change the culture in that sense by anything we do in our daily lives.

However, I'm left persuaded that we shouldn't strategize and anticipate ways to transform micro-culture—neighborhoods or schools, say. One can imagine how a single person's culture-making could indeed transform the culture of a person's workplace. Suppose a woman in retail decides she's tired of her job. Suppose this woman develops a way to fold clothes that—while it may save time—does not look as tidy. While the development of this new folding technique won't likely result in national or even regional political transformation, one could easily foresee it effecting her coworkers. Indeed, one could imagine the result of this one act of culture-making transforming a once high-end clothing store into something else altogether.

Conversely, one could imagine a different employee in the same store developing a way to fold clothes that keeps them from wrinkling, saves time, and looks neat. One could imagine a converse result from the first illustration. The point is that

while Crouch is correct is surely correct in his assessment of words like “engage” and “transform” with respect to macro-cultures, he acknowledges that culture is as imminent as it is transcendent. Why must we give up transformational language with respect to micro-cultures? We need not. Indeed, we must not.

Should We Change Culture?

As we’ve seen, the question of whether or not culture can be changed can’t be answered as easily as one might expect. However, having given a qualified answer to the affirmative, we now must ask if we should change culture. To answer this, we will depend on the classic responses codified in H. Reinhold Niebuhr’s *Christ and Culture*. According to Niebuhr, Christians have essentially taken five varying positions to the question of Christ’s relation to culture.

First, says Niebuhr, there is the *Christ against culture* position¹¹. In this scheme, the antithesis between God and the world is accented, while common grace and the goodness of creation is muted. Immediately one thinks of the Amish or the Mennonite communities, those who see allegiance to Christ and affinity for one’s culture as mutually exclusive. Positively, this position keeps non-Christians values and tastes from eroding the moral and spiritual life of the church. Negatively, on the other hand, this position silos

¹¹Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Christ and Culture*. (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 2001), 45-76.

off the church from the world in such a way that she no longer finds herself among the sick that Christ came to save.

Second, Niebuhr outlines the *Christ of culture* position¹². These believers see an ultimate identity between Christ and the world. Themes accented here would be the incarnation—Christ’s alignment with the world, common grace, and the goodness of the world, while the sinfulness of mankind in Adam is muted. Adherents to this position believe that Christ fulfills the ultimate longing of man. Thus, it’s not that mankind needs to repent and turn to Christ, it’s that Christ can give a fresh perspective on those sentiments the world already holds dear.

Third, Niebuhr says some see *Christ above culture*¹³. Those arguing for this position understand Christ’s work as exclusively spiritual. The institutions, activities, and artifacts that make up culture go unchanged by the message of the Gospel. It’s not that Christ is angry at culture, or affirmative for that matter. It’s that Christ’s work is about something wholly different. Any change in society that results from one’s conversion is incidental.

Fourth, Niebuhr identifies a model of *Christ in paradox with culture*¹⁴. Seen this way, there is an inherent tension between God’s Kingdom and those kingdoms in which

¹² Ibid, 83-108.

¹³ Ibid, 116-141.

¹⁴ Ibid, 149-185.

we find ourselves today. One will accept some aspects of our current culture and reject others, but it's key to see these two spheres—the world and God's kingdom—in tension. Luther's "two kingdoms" theology can be seen as an effort to preserve the tension of this age and the eschaton.

Lastly, Niebuhr lays out the case for *Christ transforming culture*¹⁵. This view—exemplified, claims Niebuhr, in Calvin's Geneva—sees the Kingdom of Christ as a leavening agent in the world. Christ is setting the entire planet right, and the Church plays an active, direct role in this alignment. In this view, there is a distinct identity between Christ and the Church—the Church finding her mission as essentially identical to Christ's.

Having lightly sketched out these positions, it's time to answer the question at hand: "Should Christians change culture?" While the answer given here will be "yes," it's important to understand why our view of culture requires us to answer thusly. If, as Crouch claims, objects as well as ideas have consequences, then any and all who engage objects or ideas will be engaging and changing culture. Again, that is not to say the consequences of one's production is easy to anticipate, but it is to say that everyone is involved in cultural transformation of one kind or another.

What we find in Scripture is that God calls his people to care about ends, not only means. That is, the people of God are to work toward the establishment of his Kingdom

¹⁵ Ibid, 190-218.

of earth. Those with money in a community are responsible for those without, as if those without are Christ himself. Peace, justice, mercy—these are all things we’re not only called to pray for, we’re called to embody here and now. Of course, this requires planning, intentional culture making. The early American theologian Jonathan Edwards notes:

The spirit of charity, or Christian love . . . disposes a person to be public-spirited. A man of a right spirit is not a man of narrow and private views, but is greatly interested and concerned for the good of the community to which he belongs, and particularly of the city or village in which he resides

And a man of truly Christian spirit will be earnest for the good of his country, and of the place of his residence, and will be disposed to lay himself out for its improvement.¹⁶

Edwards’ quote is helpful because it assists us to see cultural transformation as something more than—indeed, different than—cultural conquest. Yes, the Church is called to transform culture, but this transformation is always an act of helping, of service.

To capture this emphasis, Pope Francis famously referred to the Church as a field hospital. Developing the illustration, political theologian William Cavanaugh shows that such an ecclesiology highlights two often-neglected realities of the church—namely, her mobility and telos.¹⁷

¹⁶Jonathan Edwards and Tryon Edwards, *Charity and its Fruits: Christian Love as Manifested in the Heart and Life* (London, UK: Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), 243.

¹⁷Cavanaugh, William T. *Field Hospital: The Church's Engagement with a Wounded World*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2016).

First, the church is mobile. When one thinks of a field hospital, one should not think of a high-rise building with a large staff, gift shop, and cafeteria. To the contrary, a field hospital is mobile. At the peak of Christendom, the church could afford—for better or worse—to bid the world to come and see her inner life. One could hardly live in the West without having occasion to go into a cathedral or talk with a priest or celebrate holy days. Today, however, the church lacks the cultural capital to bring in the world to our courts. What is needed, says Cavanaugh, is a creative mobility. This mobility, to be clear, is far from novel.

Mobility is part and parcel of the church's DNA. That the people in the church are temples of the living God is evocative of this fact. We—God's people—are never stagnant. We're on the move constantly. Thus, Jesus' words "make disciples" as you go carries with them a mobility mandate. It's not simply that the organizational church is a temple; the point is that the church as organism—comprised of all her members—are myriad tabernacles, traveling receptacles of God's presence.

The key biblical word to understand this *outward* task for Cavanaugh is *election*. God elects a people not arbitrarily, but intentionally. That is, election alludes to a plan. One elects a mayoral candidate because her campaign promises to do something for the city that aligns with one's overall philosophy of the polis. Naturally, we do not expect the mayor to do everything we want, but we do expect her to do her particular part. Similarly, God has a mission for the world. We are elected to participate, even in a small way, in that overarching mission. We are elected not to stay in, but to go out.

Practically, this has several implications for the church. To begin, if the church is a field hospital, we need to think about creative ways to move toward the city, not simply wait for the city to move toward us. An example could be youth sports. If we viewed the church as less than a field hospital—as a fortress—then we’ll organize volleyball, basketball, and football games at the church for our kids. Sure, we may invite others in the neighborhood to join for evangelistic purposes, but the ownership belongs to the Christians and it is geographically located on church premises, literally or not.

The field hospital metaphor encourages us to reimagine this paradigm. If we viewed ourselves as a field hospital, we would not put posters up around town inviting non-believers to our sporting league. Still less would we restrict our league to church-members only. Instead, accounting for our mobility, we would go out and join other city leagues. We would bring the tabernacle of Christ to the polis, or to the football field in this case. Once mobile, we then intuit, with the Spirit’s guidance, exactly how to bear witness in the changing context.

Second, the field hospital metaphor helps us understand the church’s telos. If “field” draws our attention to the church’s mobility, surely “hospital” illuminates for us the church’s goal, namely, healing. Again, Cavanaugh’s chosen image to contrast with field hospital is fortress. To our ear, a fortress recalls images of battles and conquest. The church’s posture with a “fortress” mentality is defensive or offensive vis-à-vis outsiders. The non-believer is one to defeat.

Contrast this with the image of hospital. This paradigm tells us something about the insiders and the outsider. If those inside are attending a hospital, it places our role in perspective. The churchgoers are broken, needy, hurt, etc. The messengers are not the ones with all the power. Actually, the insiders are in a treatment place. They are receiving help. They are sick, in other words.

Those outside the church, likewise, are those in need of help. The goal of the church comes beautifully in focus. The church is conduit of blessing a healing, not destruction. The church lays down her bombs and picks up the only balm that can cure the world's ailment: the grace of Christ. Peter Leithart illustrates the point well:

We don't welcome the naked so they can be naked in our presence; we don't show hospitality to the hungry so they can watch us eat. We welcome the naked and hungry to change their circumstances. We make room for them so we can clothe and feed them. So too with moral hunger and personal shame. We don't welcome addicts so they can continue in their addiction. We make room for them, and take up residence in their lives, in order to be agents of ethical transformation. We don't receive the prostitute to help her get more tricks. We open our lives to the prostitute so we can deliver her from her slavery—to the pimp, perhaps to drugs, to poverty, to a destructive life. Hospitality is not universal approval. It is universal welcome for the sake of renewal. We make room not to tolerate but to transform.¹⁸

Leithart is giving us glimpse into what Cavanaugh's thesis took for granted: the glue that binds transformation and service is love. We must not only ask the question of ourselves, "Do we 'welcome' and 'serve?'" We must go a step further and ask, "Are those whom we are welcoming and serving being transformed?" If the answer is "Yes" to

¹⁸Peter J. Leithart, *Traces of the Trinity: Signs of God in Creation and Human Experience* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2015), 88.

the first question and “No” to the second, it may be that our efforts—however noble they may appear—are motivated by something other than love, which is always transformative.

The Christian Posture Toward Macro-Cultures

The thrust of my argument is that Christians are called to transform micro-cultures. That is, they should spend the bulk of their energy seeking to conform their immediate environment into little Christendoms. Before getting there, we must say what role Christians should have in the wider culture. Miroslav Volf’s *Public Faith* is of help here.¹⁹ Volf’s goal is not to lay out a “plan” for a Christian takeover of society; rather, he hopes to develop a set of principles that will honor various religious traditions, reckon with the reality of globalism, and promote human flourishing. Volf overwhelmingly succeeds in his goal and leaves the reader with a desire to see a Christian community that drops its sword of triumphalism and picks up a cross of love.

The book begins with a prognosis of the current cultural climate all people live in. Volf says the biggest cultural change in the past two hundred years is globalization. There was a time when people of various religious traditions could simply “avoid” one another by living in separate space. This didn’t mean peace and harmony covered the earth. Indeed, various people were constantly seeking to expand their space by

¹⁹Miroslav Volf, *Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2014).

converting, usually by force, all who dwelled in their desired land. Yet, even with such religious wars occasionally rising, the day-to-day life of humanity has historically been lived around others with similar worldviews. Today, however, such luxuries have evaporated. The “fences” that used to separate cultures, Volf argues, have gone from being “lowered,” to “disappearing” in our globalized world. The whole world, from Brazil to Canada, from India to Mexico, all of humanity is living under “one roof.” Having described the problem of globalization, Volf then articulates the two solutions being offered: Religious Totalitarianism and Secular Exclusivism.

Religious Totalitarianism is the notion that the rest of humanity must convert to one religion. This is expressed in the extreme Islamic terrorist who wages war against the “pagan West,” as well as by the Christian Fundamentalist who refuses to do business with his Buddhist neighbor. Totalitarians view multiple religions as a problem to be fixed. Of course, there is a degree to which this is understandable; after all, each religion makes a claim of exclusive truth. However, the Totalitarian view makes two mistakes. First, they view the conversion of the world as “their job,” thereby excusing any of the actions necessary to convert civilization as “for the ultimate good.” Second, the Totalitarians understand conversion to be accomplishable through physical means. In other words, if a person will not be convinced by religious arguments, they can be convinced through bloodshed.

Secular Exclusivism, on the other hand, despises talk of “conversion” and “religious activism.” By contrast, they want a world in which religion does not intersect

with the public square. Their utopia involves Science and History ruling the public thinking, as opposed to Philosophy or Theology. The Secular Exclusivist is not against religion; they are simply against religion in any way bearing on public policy or discussion. The Roman Catholic, for example, is free to attend Mass daily; they simply cannot appeal to Aquinas or St. Paul when discussing welfare.

These two visions for the globalized world are in actual fact, says Volf, two sides of the same damaged coin. The Totalitarian hopes to conquer the world with his view of “the good life,” while the Secular Exclusivist hopes to do the same. Granted, their vision of the “perfect culture” is quite different; yet, both camps agree that all of humanity will ultimately be best served once they are uniformly converted. Neither allows for areas of grey, and neither appreciates the strengths offered to the global culture when various religious traditions simultaneously flourish.

If both proposed strategies are problematic, what is the correct way to engage the globalized world (i.e., the macro-culture)? Volf says the answer lies in a healthy and robust pluralism. A Christian appreciation of pluralism has its roots in the biblical text and church history. Taking his cue from the English Baptist movement in the seventeenth century, Volf says each religious tradition should not be forbidden from bringing religious arguments to the public square. On the contrary, the Buddhist, Eastern Orthodox, Muslim, and Hindu should all be able to freely engage culture through the lens of their respective worldview(s). It is only through such a pluralistic approach that the “world without fences” can exist in peace.

This peace comes through three principles. First, Christians must fear God more than humans. Volf tells a story in which he was in Bosnia with a politician. As they were eating, the politician looked out of the window at a number of mosques under construction. Upon seeing the mosques, the man said, “We have lost the fear of God!” When Volf questioned the man on the point, he explained that the mosques were not being built out of religious fervor, but out of a territorial sense of ownership. The Muslims, afraid of being invaded by Christians, build mosques to claim territory. Volf then recalls the large crosses he saw a few miles away in Croatia; they too were constructed out of political motivations, not religious. Volf asks the reader if they wear their necklace or build their monuments out of the fear of God, or the fear of man? Is our biggest motivator being “taken over by the heathens,” or pleasing God?

Second, Christians are to seek “the common good.” The Christian must be concerned not only for the propagation of the gospel, or the well-being of fellow Christians, but should also be concerned for the good of the whole city. We are not, after all, “against” people of other religious traditions, but “for” all of humanity. We must seek the good of our neighbor and, in so doing, offer a witness to the gospel we hold so dearly.

Lastly, Christians must tolerate other religions. When one seeks to tolerate varying religions, one is not merely “going with the flow,” but living out of a conviction that says, “We are all religious beings.” As Christians, we should be the first to fight for people’s religious rights as we understand the “two cities” concept better than most. People should not be discouraged from thinking theologically about political issues; on

the contrary, people should be encouraged to make the most informed decision possible using all the means at their disposal.

Volf overwhelmingly succeeded in offering a pluralistic theory of cultural engagement from a Christian perspective. The “good life” each person is seeking is different; but it mustn’t be excluded from the public conversation. Volf’s contribution is valuable for its sane and learned view of “culture shaping” as well as for its sober assessment of religious traditions. Volf shows that God does not rule with two hands (i.e., two kingdoms), and neither should the Christian think with two heads. We are rational and spiritual, political and religious; the separation of the physical from the spiritual is not an “evolutionary advancement” but a harm and detriment to culture at large. The world will be served best when people are appreciative of various religious traditions (thus avoiding Religious Totalitarianism) and operating out of an un-compartmentalized worldview (thus avoiding Secular Exclusivism).

Tools for Transforming Micro-Cultures

While it may seem counter-intuitive, humility drives us to consider micro-cultural engagement only after having first considered macro-cultural engagement. While we did give an affirmative answer to the question “Can culture be changed?,” we did so only with the following clarification: while one can change a macro-culture, it’s only possible to strategize and predict—at least to some degree—cultural transformation on a micro-level. Thus, the posture we have toward the macro-culture needs to be quite different from the disposition taken toward the micro-culture.

There is biblical warrant for assuming such a posture toward culture. 1 Timothy 5:8 says, “Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” While Christians are expected to give the church and the poor, the point Paul makes is that one is more responsible to those most near him. The further out one goes, the less responsibility one must assume.

Culturally, this could be teased out with the implication that believers are to care for their immediate neighbors, then street, then neighborhood, etc. It’s not that Christians shouldn’t care for the “ends of the world;” it’s rather that Christians should begin at home (Jerusalem) then work their way out to the world (Judea, Samaria, . . .). Ethicist John Jefferson Davis says it well:

. . . if we want to see [Christ’s] “lordship” over all of culture, we shouldn’t begin in Washington; we should begin in our own churches and with ourselves. Rather than focusing on public opposition to same-sex marriage, we should work on making our own marriages more lasting and loving. His commission was not just to make “converts” or to seek “decisions for Christ,” after all, but to make disciples willing to live—and to die—for him.²⁰

In many ways, past arguments around “Christ and culture” have been counter-productive on this front. By focusing on Washington, D. C. and national politics, we’ve contributed to that which causes the problem to begin with. Political scientist Mark T. Mitchell shows how this works practically:

²⁰John Jefferson Davis, “Slow Discipleship and the End of Christendom” at *The Gospel Coalition*, Jan 28, 2016 <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/slow-discipleship-and-the-end-of-christendom/>

The destruction of local communities leaves a cultural vacuum that is filled with a homogeneous culture that is as bland as it is broad. This homogenization leads to boredom, apathy, and a diminished sense of care or responsibility. If we hope to create a context within which human lives can be lived with dignity and joy, then we must turn our attention to preserving local culture, local customs, local beauty, local economies, and families. This, obviously, cannot be accomplished by political action at the national level; it will be realized only when individuals commit to raising healthy families in a particular place and commit to the long-term work of making a place.²¹

What is needed, then, is a cultural engagement that is on something like a human scale. To be sure, Christians must care about macro-cultures; but the chief engine of transformation has to be local, personal, and doable. Culture transformation can easily become de-personalized; it can cost us little to nothing. But if we come to the place where we see our primary obligation as engaging at the micro-cultural level, we move away from the nebulosity of issues, positions, etc., and move toward a more humane posture toward culture, one rooted in real life, with real people. Carmen Fowler LaBerge is pointed:

What if, instead of “issues,” we saw people? Most of Jesus’ earthly ministry happened “as he was going” or “along the way.” Cultural engagement is too big to get our arms around. But a conversation with an individual who sees the world differently than we see it, we can get our arms around that. We engage the culture by engaging in conversation with individuals. . . . And if appropriate, invite [those individuals] for a meal at your home. There’s a reason ambassadors move into the culture and set up a place to which people can come and learn the customs of another kingdom and be exposed to foreign ideas. Christ has a way of making Himself known in the breaking of bread.²²

²¹Mark T. Mitchell, *The Politics of Gratitude: Scale, Place & Community in a Global Age* (Washington D. C.: Potomac Books, 2012), 143.

²²Carmen LaBerge, *Speak the Truth: How to Bring God Back in Every Conversation* (Washington, D. C.: Regnery Publishing, 2017), 95.

The point here is not to deemphasize political theology, but to emphasize the political significance of seemingly mundane acts. In hosting a barbeque, one is politicking, one is adding to the cultural life of his or her city. In what follows, then, I want to suggest three artifacts the church can recover in the interest of micro-cultural engagement.

First, the church bell. No artifact better illustrates the church's political theology than the bell tower. While it may seem an oddity, an antiquarian object from another time, there are at least two reasons why the bell tower is uniquely able to call the church back to a cultural engagement on the human scale.

Church bells are indiscriminate—they regularly call the whole city in to kiss the Son. That is, it does not simply restrict itself to the members of the church, but it beckons all in a particular neighbor to join in the fellowship. Of course, the bells not only go off for church service, they also remind her members to pray the hours.

A bell can be a tool to shape the life of a community—to remind all those with ears to hear that there is a way to organize life apart from the rush of the urgent. It calls members to remember the spiritual dimension of everyday life, and it tempts those outside the body of Christ to imagine a world haunted by the spiritual. Yet, church bells aren't shrill or silly, they're beautiful and reverent. The quality of life of those in the city is enriched by the proclamation.

Second, we can think of the example of the “beating of the bounds,” which is a historic practice originating in Great Britain. The church would gather together and walk

the parameters of her parish. At important markers, like the boundaries of one's land, the young people would be gently tapped ("beaten") with a stick. It was a tactile way to teach the kids the lay of the land. But more importantly, it re-enforced the cultural memory of a society. The children were living maps, connected to their place, guardians of their place.

As the practice evolved, it became less about passing down geography and more a missional practice. The congregation I serve, for instance, does the beating of the bounds each year. As we do, we take the opportunity to pray for our block and educate members on the history of the place and its needs. We remind everyone as to who lives where, pray for the health of the local business, and appreciate the beauty and brokenness of the parish God has entrusted to us.

In conclusion, this first chapter has argued (1) that culture is religion externalized, (2) thus the church can't evade the transformation of culture, (3) but the church should leave macro-cultural transformation—which is often unpredictable—to God while she focuses on micro-cultural engagement.

Chapter 2

Christendom Today? A Defense

In what follows, I want to make three arguments. First, I want to argue that Christians are called to exert political power. Second, I want to argue that Christians ought to exert political power because the other option is to live in secularism, which is a non-starter for believers. Third, I want to argue that the building of Christendom is inherent to Christians' calling in Scripture.

Christians and Political Power

My social media feed is never as divided as it is during an election season. The most obvious divide is that between right and left, blue and red. However, that's far from the only rift, and perhaps not even the deepest one. The real parting of ways is between those who believe Christians have a political role to play and those who do not. Said differently, it's between those who view power positively and those who view it negatively.

I understand the position of those skeptical of the pursuit of political power. C. S. Lewis is correct when he insists that “[m]ankind is so fallen that no man can be trusted

with unchecked power over his fellows. Aristotle said that some people were only fit to be slaves. . . . I reject slavery because I see no men fit to be masters.”²³

But even putting aside “unchecked power,” *all* political power can be fool’s gold, appearing to be more than it is. Indeed, if there’s any lesson evangelicals should have learned over the past fifty years of political engagement, it’s that politics isn’t a silver bullet. Too often we’ve spent our days trying to pick the bad fruits off the political tree instead of addressing the rotten cultural and spiritual roots that produced that fruit.

Regarding the past fifty years, it should be noted that power—particularly political power and especially presidential political power—tends to have a corrosive effect. Many were taken off guard by the recently discovered recording of a blatantly racist comment made by Ronald Reagan to Richard Nixon in a 1971 conversation. I didn’t find myself shocked.

As it so happened, the week the recording became available was the same week I finished Grant Wacker’s definitive biography of Billy Graham, *America’s Pastor*. Graham, you might recall, was recorded with Nixon discussing the role Jewish people played in the media, clearly gesturing in an anti-Semitic direction he knew Nixon would appreciate. Graham was later grieved that he made those comments. Indeed, by the end of his life, Graham wished he had “steered clear of politics” all together.

²³ Lewis, C. S., and Walter Hooper. *Present Concerns: Journalistic Essays*. (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1986), 17.

If proximity to such power could make no less of figures than Reagan and Graham behave with such uncharacteristic shamefulness, what hope is there for the rest of us? After all, the allure of power can enable the worst in us by reducing our self-restraint and encouraging our desire to play to our audience. Perhaps we should all heed Graham's advice and avoid the muck of politics altogether? With respect to America's Pastor, I want to make an argument to the contrary. Power is a good thing when viewed and used properly. Crouch's work on culture has already been mentioned in a previous chapter, his work on power is helpful here. In *Playing God*, Crouch shows that human flourishing is contingent upon power:

Remove power and you cut off life, the possibility of creating something new and better in this rich and recalcitrant world. Life is power. Power is life. And flourishing power leads to flourishing life. Of course, like life itself, power is nothing—worse than nothing—without love.

But love without power is less than it was meant to be. Love without the capacity to make something of the world, without the ability to respond to and make room for the beloved's flourishing, is frustrated love.²⁴

This seems like an obvious point, but it's worth consideration. Love, worked out in hospitality, requires the ability to change circumstances. Without resources, without power, one wouldn't be able to clothe the naked, feed the hungry, or shelter the homeless. Now, extrapolate this principle from hospitality to politics: how will the slaves be made free or the vulnerable be protected if not by those in power? Indeed, it's only those with power who have the luxury to think they should avoid it.

²⁴Andy Crouch, *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 25.

Understood this way, power isn't negative; it's positive. It's a vehicle through which justice can be enacted. It's a way for us to steward God's good earth, which is our calling, as James Skillen reminds us:

The powerful import of acknowledging God's ordinances is precisely that we must work at obeying them; in other words, we must shape history in accord with those ordinances and not merely ride through history proclaiming that they exist. The only option besides obedience is disobedience. Justice must be done by us, not merely spoken as a word from our lips.

Stewardship is God's demand upon our farms and shops and corporations, not simply a word to be used for rhyming our Sunday hymns. Nurturing love calls our homes and schools to account; it is not just a term to help us organize our thought at prayer time.²⁵

Skillen's call here is evocative. He reshapes the power conversation around faithfulness. Christians get in trouble when they view power as an end in itself. Viewed this way, Christians can justify nearly anything if it's under the guise of taking power away from the "bad guys" and giving it to the "good guys."

Practically, we resort to name-calling when it comes to describing those who hold positions contrary to our own, or we may instinctively defend character flaws of those on our side while diminishing the attributes of our opponents. As Jonah Goldberg has pointed out, when we view politics as a team-sport we view our role as citizens solely as

²⁵Skillen, James W. and Rockne McCarthy. *Political Order and The Plural Structure of Society*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 47.

helping our side and hurting the other, rather than being the democratic referees our founders assumed we'd be.²⁶

Once the power conversation is recentered around faithfulness, we see that we in fact do not have to obsess about the scoreboard. We will be judged one day by our faithfulness, not the results we achieved. To do a bad thing for a good reason is still bad. If God desires a certain end for his people—the election of a certain candidate, the passing of a particular bill—He won't require us lying, cheating, or otherwise sinning to achieve that end. Our power is not of this world, after all. Once we've adopted the means of the world—even if it's to achieve a Kingdom end—we've placed our faith in something or someone other than the true King, who holds all things in his hands.

I'm always heartened when I'm reminded of the story of Thomas Hardcastle, the English Puritan who found himself persecuted because of his faith. Writing from prison in 1675, Hardcastle says, "It has been our great error that we have not trusted in the power of God. We have reasoned about the worst that men can do, but have not believed the best that God can do. . . . Religion is still for standing and going forward. There is no armor for the back."²⁷

²⁶Goldberg, Jonah. *Suicide of the West: How the Rebirth of Tribalism, Populism, Nationalism, and Identity Politics is Destroying American Democracy* (New York, NY: Crown Forum, 2018), 108.

²⁷Durso, Keith E. *No Armor for the Back: Baptist Prison Writings, 1600s - 1700s* (Macon, GA: Mercer Univ. Press, 2007), 4.

This, it seems to me, is the proper Christian approach to power. We recognize that true power, the only power that will last in the final hour, belongs to God. As his vice-regents, we're entrusted with power here and now, called to be stewards, using that power for the flourishing of all creation. We "go forward" as Hardcastle admonishes. Yet, we do so in a manner worthy of the King we represent, trusting that his sovereignty isn't dependent upon our shrewdness. In short, we do indeed engage the political process with gusto, but in a way quite different from everyone else. We engage politics as citizens of a polis not of this world.

Between Secularism and Christendom

Aidan Nichols draws on history, philosophy, literature, and contemporary sociology to construct an argument in favor of a revigorated Christian witness in the West in his seminal book, *Christendom Awake*. The book serves as a clarion call to (1) the church, which has privatized and neutered the faith and (2) the wider world, which has become thoroughly secularized.

Secularism is a harm to the church, but it's a harm to the people generally. One may understandably ask why the world should choose Christendom instead of secularism. Nichols shows that many of the values of secularism derive from a decidedly Christian line of reasoning. Therefore, secularism can't cash its own check. Everyone who assumes the general equity of the Christian ethic should be in favor of an awakened Christendom. Nichols sets secularism as his foe early in the book:

Conversing with God is not something we take in with the cultural air we breathe - as once it was for many in this country before the Western tradition took its secular turn, and, especially, perhaps - on the eve of the sixteenth-century Reform when a lay devotional culture saturated every aspect of life, both for the individual and for the group. Owing to the imaginative constraints created by secularization, a large chunk of a culturally transmitted human basis for prayer and contemplation is lost to us, at least for the foreseeable future.²⁸

In other words, the very assumption—the presuppositions—of the West are devoid of God. Our cultural imagination is naturalistic: assuming that which we can see, taste, touch, and smell constitute the totality of life. While one might expect Nichols to focus a book on Christendom with horizontal issues, things to do with concrete “culture,” he surprises the reader by centering the book on metaphysics. In other words, the Christendom project is as much a theological project as it is a sociological book. Indeed, Nichols devotes much of the book to arguing for a particular—Thomistic—philosophical and theological method. As he says:

In a secularized culture where agnosticism is intellectually de rigueur, those ultimate symbols, drawn from the vocabulary of the sacred, which alone can unify culture by synthesizing its most fundamental intuitions of order, goodness and beauty, are suppressed or marginalized, and the temptation thus arises for a theology which would take its cue from such a culture to conceive of its task in purely 'horizontal' - generally speaking, sociological - categories. Such a theology fails in its kerygmatic function of furnishing authentically evangelical sacred symbols of the ultimate, and at the same time fails culture by acquiescing in culture's suppression of what should be its own most fundamental question.²⁹

²⁸Aidan Nichols, *Christendom Awake: On Re-Energising the Church in Culture* (Edinburgh, UK: T & T Clark, 2000), 22.

²⁹*Ibid*, 55.

Thus, any concept of a “Christian culture” must begin with a “Christian confession,” which is to say a Trinitarian metaphysic. Nichols understands that any effort to have the flower (culture) apart from the root (faith), is bound to wither in the sun. One’s chances of success are better if one embraces the arduous task of proper catechesis and works up to cultural renewal than to start with the latter and try to get to the former.

Perhaps this is to beg the question, “How is such catechesis to happen?” In short, Scripture and liturgy are the means of catechesis. The academy is not the rightful place for the Holy Scriptures to be studied, he argues. In the academy, Scripture is probed, the reader stands over the text—asking the questions, bringing presupposition—rather than standing under the text, allowing his questions and motive to be questioned. Where does Scripture belong? In short, it belongs in the church.

Drawing heavily on the work of John Henry Newman, another Anglican turned Roman Catholic, Nichols sees a revivification of the liturgy as key not only to relocating the Scripture back to the church, but in renewing Christendom generally. In engaging in a rich, historic liturgy the imagination of the catechumen is re-enchanted. In the liturgy, the physical objects aren’t unimportant, but neither are they self-sufficient. They point beyond themselves to something deeper and more profound. As says Nichols, “The purpose of the liturgy is to make present the ultimate Mystery—not to explain it away.”³⁰

This liturgical formation will inevitably lead to a widening chasm between the believer and secularism. Once one is able to see that the bread and wine aren’t reducible

³⁰Ibid, 92.

to that which can be studied under a microscope, one is naturally inclined to avoid any argument that posits that the material world writ large is a cul-de-sac of meaning.

Throughout the book, Nichols deftly draws of the history of the West to show that liturgical sensitivity can be directly tied to the beautification of the city. Just as the Christian church allowed for fixed understanding of the true and the good, so too did it hold up beauty as a real, positive good, deserving of attention. Thus, the Western world is adorned with architecture, sculpture, and painting that testify to the import of the gospel. Nichols thus calls upon a “material culture” to carry beauty. That beauty is contingent upon a true metaphysic.

The most obvious obstacle toward a renewal of Christendom is not architecture or art, but politics. How can the State relate to Christendom in the current liberal order? Asked differently, is not an eye toward Christendom a thinly veiled plea to a totalitarian, theocratic monarchy? Nichols points to the inherent false dichotomy in asking such a question. There is a way to preserve the best of our liberal moment without exorcising God from the polis.

When Augustine of Canterbury baptized the King of England, Nichols points out, it wasn't just a regular catechumen being baptized. To the contrary, that act represented a nation coming under the domain of the church. Just as the King of Nineveh stepped off the throne at the words of Jonah, so too did the King of England subjugate his ruling to the will of God. Christendom, then, doesn't see the King *per se* as the ruler, but as an

instrument of rule, which is to say his magistrate is under the purview of God's will as revealed in Scripture and nature.

Drawing on the language of Oliver O'Donovan, Nichols sees all earthly authority as offer a "mediation of divine authority." Thus, in Christendom, the highest authority to appeal is emphatically not the king or president or prime minister. Rather, it's Scripture in the first instance, and reason subsequently.

Christendom, then, is more liberal than secularism in that it resources the individual with an appeal system to escape an unjust or tyrannical law or law maker. This isn't to say that abuse and malfeasance hasn't occurred in the name of Christendom. Whole people groups have been unjustly demonized, dehumanized, and thusly abused in the name of the Christian faith. It's simply to say that Christendom has an internal corrective measure that secularism lacks.

One might respond that pluralism is a corrective internal to secularism. Yet, following a line of reasoning from Alasdair Macintyre, Nichols rebuffs the idea that pluralism is as stable as many assume. Pluralism, he says, is a rhetorical posture taken by politicians, not a true governing system. Why is it that all religions are equal? What if one religion is hostile to another? Whose side should be taken? Pluralism doesn't have the intellectual tools to answer such questions.

Christendom, however, not only tolerates dissenting voices but it welcomes them. A plurality of voices and perspectives in Christendom are not only tolerated as a matter of politics, but welcomed as a matter of principle. It is the Christian worldview which

produces this respect and collegiality in the West. Secularism is aping Christendom when it speaks of pluralism.

Only when we offer this positive vision of society—rejecting some ideas, embracing others—can a truly flourishing society be birthed. Fascinatingly, Nichols shows that the history of Christian martyrdom points to such a positive vision of society. While we typically think of a martyr as having a deconstructive vocation—she is speaking truth to power—they are only able to say “no” to the empire because they have said “yes” to something more true, good, and beautiful. In other words, the martyr is prophetically calling the existing structures to better resemble the structures that ought to be, that will be.

While the current cultural moment has great patience with deconstructive voices—those people tearing down oppressive, harmful institutions—it behooves the church to remind her social witnesses that any deconstructive project, however valid, must have a constructive project in mind. Again, to say “no” one must have previously said “yes.” No one, it strikes me, was more of a master of this missional gesture than was Martin Luther King Jr. King combated injustice where he found it, but held up the eschatological ideal—the “dream” toward which he labored. Christendom is the realization of the dream of the church. It will never be realized fully on earth, but it is the labor of the elect to form a more just, structurally sound polis for all people.

The Biblical Call to Christendom

In the book *Christendom and the Nations*, a series of James B. Jordan's essays related to the Bible and politics are collected and published with a fresh introduction. Those familiar with Jordan's thought won't be surprised by some of the eccentricities present in the volume—such as his maximalist hermeneutic and dependence upon theonomic principles à la R. J. Rushdoony. Even in those places where disagreements remain, Jordan's thesis nevertheless requires careful attention. Jordan's thesis can be summed up as follows: while secularism desires one State and many religions, Christendom desires one religion and many States.

At the outset, many will be offended. The very worst sins of the Crusades immediately come to mind when a Christian speaks of world evangelization. It's here that Jordan's contrast is helpful. There is no doubt, the church has failed—in drastic, often bloody ways—and yet if the other option is a universal State, some perspective is introduced. Then, the sins of Christians are at least placed alongside the sins of dictators—like Hitler—who are seeking world domination.

Further, a Christian has the moral framework to understand their sins as such. One must ask, does the State *qua* the State have such a ground for understanding past mistakes as such? The answer, clearly, is a negative one. The State understands power and might. Christians, on the other hand, are breaking their internal code when using such means to subdue the world into submission to Christ. The only weapons at the Christian's disposal are spiritual in nature.

Of course, thus far we've only said why it's acceptable to have one faith, not why we might not want one State. Key to Jordan's point is his exegesis of the Old Testament. While for others in the Ancient Near East the foreigner and stranger are largely viewed as a barbarian, the Hebrew God instructs his people to care for the sojourner. In other words, the Judeo-Christian tradition has no category for the barbarian in need of conquering. Instead, the stranger is human, made in God's image, with the capacity for conversion.

To be sure, there is a danger in conflating the Old and New Testaments. The faith certainly remained ethnic in the Old Covenant in that a convert would have to be circumcised, etc. Still, it is worth noting that Prophets knew something of the missiological sweep of God's plan. The classic example is that of Jonah, who is sent to the Assyrian empire to convert the foreigners. That book ends with God expressing his compassion on the Ninevites and, indeed, their cattle: the heart of God is for all people; therefore, the foreigner is one to be converted, not conquered.

Yet, this imperative towards persuasion won't take the sting out of a defense of Christendom, not even for Christians. Jordan points to the modern individualism even within Christianity which poses an obstacle towards a revived Christendom. We're told to disciple individuals, not institutions. To rebut this idea, Jordan points to the Great Commission, which calls believers to disciple the nations. His argument is that this call is emphatically not just people of every tribe, but peoples, which is to say the tribes themselves.

He also points out that even the most individualistic Christian understands the need to disciple *some* institutions, so the disagreement is simply over *which* institutions. Take, for example, the family. Of course, the Anabaptists wouldn't want one to baptize a baby, but they of course would hold that the baby be raised in the fear and admonition of the Lord—i.e., disciplined. Take, as another example, the church. The letters in Revelation point to the reality that some churches *qua* churches are more or less disciplined.

Viewed this way, the question of institutional discipleship is settled, it seems to me; the only question remaining is which institutions are believers called to disciple. Once one accepts the calling of some institutional discipleship, it's difficult to read the Lord's command to disciple the nations as anything other a call to disciple the nations *per se*.

The question remains, however, how are nations to be disciplined? Jordan is clear on this point: the Church. Jordan insists that the goal of secularism—a one world order, in his telling—is best realized in Christendom. The church truly is the embassy of the Kingdom, therefore international in scope. While there are many nations and states, there is only one church.

Many will question this assertion. After all, isn't the church since the Reformation splintered and divided? Jordan concedes this point, but points to an invisible unity, deriving from the church's one head, Jesus. Thus, even when the church isn't acting like it, it is unified. This doesn't excuse the divisiveness of the church. To the contrary, the Catholicity of the church is akin to the relationship of justification and sanctification in

the believer. Sanctification is the process of becoming what we already are by virtue of justification: holy before the Lord.

Believers ought to strive toward Catholicity precisely because in realizing that goal, the church will become more of what it is: unified. How can the church show such unity? Respect and recognition, answers Jordan. That is, the church must recognize the jurisdiction of one another. So long as a church is Trinitarian and administered the sacraments, it behooves all churches to recognize other churches as such.

Jordan points to the flawed churches in Revelation: are they not still considered churches, despite their sin? Yes. To respect other churches is the natural consequence of recognizing them. Therefore, if a member is disciplined in a Lutheran court and seeks to join a Baptist church, it's incumbent upon the new church to respect the disciplining of the previous church.

Once the church is thusly unified, discipling the nations becomes a common mission. Jordan calls the church the "nursery of the Kingdom." The idea is that the church contains at a micro level that which is necessary for the well-being of the nations on a macro level. Said differently, it's at the church that the "manners of the Kingdom" are learned: respecting of all people, patience, justice, grace, etc. The law of the land will be more equitable and fairer once the citizenry is formed by the law of the Lord.

Important to Jordan's case here is Jesus' parable of the mustard seed. There, we find that the "tree" of the church will provide shade and nourishment to the birds of the air. Those birds, says Jordan drawing on a Patristic reading of Ezekiel 17, represent the

nations of the earth. The nations will be strengthened, fed, and provided for by the church. Of course, a tree starts off as a seed: small, insignificant, but grows into its being. The church, likewise, may seem to small and insignificant an institution to provide such a resource to the nations. Yet, Jordan would have us think eschatologically, trusting in the promise of the Lord.

One principle evoked by Jordan that's of help here is that of the "right of sanctuary." The notion is that the State is required to allow the church to worship unmolested. The State, by no means, ought to be under the church, per se, but it should recognize and respect the church's authority, as the church does the same with regards to that authority held by the State. This is for the good of everyone—believers and non-believers—in that it creates safety in accountability.

Jordan quotes historian Brian Tierney as saying, "The very existence of two power structures competing for men's allegiance instead of only one compelling allegiance greatly enhanced the possibility for human freedom."³¹

While the book had many insights from which to draw, it was not without fault. The main fault I want to highlight is that of political bias. While Jordan is seeking to retrieve something pre-Modern, and his grounding is firmly in the Old and New Testament, it's striking that his conclusions wind up resembling something very similar to the platform of the Modern Libertarian Party. For example, he claims at one point that

³¹Jordan, James B. *Christendom and the nations* (Monroe, LA: Theopolis Books, 2019), 43.

the Bible requires each nation to leave other nations alone. He then goes onto articulate a strictly isolationist foreign policy. It seems to me one could just as easily point to passages in the Old Testament in which the Hebrews did engage other powers and draw a different conclusion.

Another example is that of borders. Jordan reaches a very libertarian understanding of borders—that they ought to remain widely open. While one can argue this point, Jordan is insistent that it's the “biblical position.” His Biblicism allows little room for wisdom and discernment. Everything is either “biblical” or “pagan.” Thus, Jordan baptizes his libertarianism—isolating it from criticism.

Chapter 3: Myth of Placement

Key to my argument thus far is that our place in the world matters greatly in the ways we think about cultural renewal. We can't transform "culture" as much as we can transform "cultures." It's my argument in this chapter that placement, as a biblical category, will help us think carefully about our locality and our mission in that location. Thus, in this chapter, I'll answer the following three questions.

First, in what ways does Scripture see displacement as a consequence of sin? Obviously, this section will begin with Adam and Eve displaced from Eden, but will quickly move to the Israelites displaced from the Promised Land. Of particular importance will be the role of displacement as a motif in Scripture, particularly in the Old Testament.

Second, in the midst of displacement, how does God offer his people placement? Here, I'd like to highlight the complementary motif of redemption as placement. From the beginning, God has not left his people without the hope of home. Drawing on the significance of the Tabernacle and the Temple, I would like to emphasize the embodiment—the relocating nature—of salvation.

Lastly, this side of the cross, how should Christians balance the "already" of God's renewing His creation with the "not yet," of our current sojourning? To be sure, the wandering motif of Scripture needs to inform our emphasis on placement. I'd like to conclude the chapter with a practical application of the Biblical motifs of place and displacement to today's church.

Displacement As Sin

Before getting to the role of displacement, it will be helpful to step back and define place. According to Craig Bartholomew, place is a “creational structure.”³² It’s something that exists “between body and landscape.”³³ Place can never be “individualistic” precisely because it exists in the objective world and can only be experienced by an individual subject. “Though place and space can be distinguished,” says Bartholomew, “they can’t be separated.”³⁴

Modernity tends to emphasize the general, the abstract, the ethereal over the tangible, the located, the placed. Said differently, we privilege space over place. Space is abstract. It’s a concept. It has the potentiality of placement, but has yet to be so cultured.

For Plato, space preexists creation. It is “invisible and characterless.”³⁵ Place, on the other hand, is tangible and full of character. Indeed, following Plato, Western philosophy has shifted its focus from place to space, from the particular to the general.

This can be seen most clearly in Neo-Platonism. Neo-Platonism’s main insight was that the less material a place was, the more power it possessed. This was representative of the direction of Western philosophy more generally. If the Hebrew text

³²Craig G. Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 2.

³³Ibid, 2.

³⁴Ibid, 3.

³⁵Ibid, 168.

was concerned with wisdom acquired through particularity, through situated experience, Western philosophy in the tradition of Plato was concerned with wisdom acquired through abstraction, through the ethereal. Platonism influenced early Christians;

Bartholomew argues:

Origen affirms the resurrection of the body and the soul, but his eschatology leads not to a new heavens and a new earth but ultimately to incorporeal existence in God. Origen has much to say about different places, and particularly the places that are up rather than down here. . . . Thus Origen denigrates the human body, and animals exist only in order to be agents of purgation in the education of humans.³⁶

Yet, this influence was by no means comprehensive. Maximus the Confessor can be seen as an alternative to Origen. If Origen followed Plato in devaluing the body, Maximus went the other direction in elevating the physical. His theological reasoning was simple: If the second person of the Trinity took on flesh, flesh itself is now redeemed. As Thomas Howard so lovely put it:

The incarnation took all that properly belongs to our humanity and delivered it back to us, redeemed. All of our inclinations and appetites and capacities and yearnings are purified and gathered up and glorified by Christ. He did not come to thin out human life; He came to set it free. All the dancing and feasting and processing and singing and building and sculpting and baking and merrymaking that belong to us, and that were stolen away into the service of false gods, are returned to us in the gospel.³⁷

Thus, the Christian tradition can't be seen as syncretizing Plato and Paul. Instead, it should be seen as in conversation with Greek thought, sometimes bringing Aristotle to

³⁶Ibid, 199.

³⁷Thomas Howard, and Christopher Codol, *Evangelical is Not Enough: Worship of God in Liturgy and Sacrament* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1989), 36-37.

Jesus and other time bringing Jesus to Aristotle, as G.K Chesterton quipped. Because our very idea of place has been shaped in ways often imperceptible to our eyes, it's important that we take the time to turn our attention to Scripture—seeking to have not only our answers shaped by God's word, but also our questions.

In the monograph *Enduring Exile*, Martien A. Halvorson-Taylor helps us think through the role of place in Scripture by applying Metaphor Studies to post-Exilic literature generally, and Jeremiah 30-31, Isaiah 40-55, and Zechariah 1-8 particularly. Key to understanding her thesis is the interplay between “tenor” and “vehicle” in what she calls the “interactionist approach” to Metaphor Studies.³⁸

In a given metaphor, a tenor and a vehicle are employed. A tenor is that which is being described while the vehicle is the descriptor. For example, were one to say they “slept like a rock,” the period of sleep would be the tenor while the rock would function as the vehicle. When one pictures a rock, one thinks of steadiness, immovability, and firmness.

As a vehicle, then, “rock” will drive the hearer to understand the speaker's sleep as essentially sound. While this principle may seem obvious, the interplay between tenor and vehicle is nimble and mutually informing, such that one must be sensitive to which part of a metaphor is performing which role at a given time.

³⁸Martien A. Halvorson-Taylor, *Enduring Exile: The Metamorphization of Exile in the Hebrew Bible* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2011), 34.

The upshot of Halvorson-Taylor's thesis is simple yet profound and beaming with potential application: that literature written before 500 B.C. that metaphorically employs exilic language should be read in a particular way, namely, with "exile" as the tenor of the metaphor. Conversely, exilic language metaphorically employed post-Exile—typified by Third Isaiah—should be interpreted with "exile" as the vehicle of the metaphor.

In Pre-Exile literature, exile is a covenantal punishment. In this context, exile is an end in itself—it is the punishment. The Garden of Eden comes to mind: Adam and Even rebel against God's explicit instructions; death is the foretold consequence.

However, their death isn't immediate, at least not in the literal sense. Instead, they are exiled from the Garden immediately—this is their consequence, and the consequence is reminiscent of death in that they're separated from the Temple-Garden, i.e., immediate access to the presence of YHWH.

Eventually, however, exile "became a metaphor for political disenfranchisement, social inequality, and alienation from God," which Halvorson-Taylor argues lead to an "extension of exile's meaning."³⁹ This shift is subtle but substantive: exile used to be like death, but now death is like exile.

In her article *Exiles and the Dreams of Return*, Tamara Eskenazi similarly examines how the nature of the exile was a formative event—one which threads throughout the Hebrew Bible—and how it helped shape the dreams of Israel, especially

³⁹Ibid, 8.

in the prophetic work of Jeremiah.⁴⁰ She begins this study with a historical overview, followed by an examination of the nature of exile followed by the dreams of Jeremiah and Israel's hopes to return to their land. For Eskenazi, Jeremiah's—and Israel's—dreams of return were both a return to the land and a return to God, both being interconnected returns.

This evolution is well chronicled by Halverson-Taylor, and ends in exile metaphorically evoking more than just death, but also “sterility, bodily and emotional pain, and servitude.”⁴¹ Taylor-Halverson points out the continued relevance of exile through the Torah. Zechariah particularly keeps the exile metaphor at play by applying the “condition” of exile to the post-exilic community. This signals the aforementioned metaphorical shift.

Thus, the plight of mankind is one of dislocation. Since the Protestant Reformation, the church has been comfortable describing mankind's situation post-fall in strictly legal terms. To be sure, this language isn't without merit. That St. Paul uses courtroom metaphors is not in question.

Yet, litigation is far from the only metaphor implored by the Biblical writers. No, the human condition cannot be understood apart from the categories of guilt and grace, but neither can it be understood apart from the categories of displacement and placement.

⁴⁰Tamara C. Eskenazi, 1990. “Exiles and the Dreams of Return.” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 17 (3): 192-200.

⁴¹Martien A. Halvorson-Taylor, *Enduring Exile: The Metamorphization of Exile in the Hebrew Bible* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2011), 203.

If it's true that this is the fallen condition of all mankind, then it shouldn't surprise us to see placement as a redemptive motif in scripture.

Placement as Redemption

As the modern eye reads Genesis 1, its tendency is to rush the cosmic implications of the story. No doubt, there are cosmic implications. However, "Genesis 1 is a place story, with all that that involves, and not just an earth story."⁴² That is, the story is situated in a particular place and time. It concerns all places but is about one particular place.

Sin, we see, is the quintessential displacer. It's not only Adam and Eve that must wander, "The theme of journeying holds the rest of the Pentateuch together."⁴³ Seen through this lens, the Biblical story post Genesis 3 isn't just about atonement, it's about placement. It's not just about guilt, it's about dislocation. To be sure, the Exodus makes this point clear. Yes, Israel is sinful thus deserving of dislocation, but God is merciful and eager to pursue them. To illustrate this claim, Bartholomew points to the literary structure of Exodus: "Exodus contains two parts: Egypt, the land of pharaoh, is the setting for the first half (1:1-15:21), and Sinai, the realm of Yahweh, dominates part two (15:22-40:38)."⁴⁴

⁴²Ibid, 6.

⁴³Ibid, 47.

⁴⁴Ibid, 54.

God is bringing his people back under his law. Adam and Even wanted autonomy and ended up wandering, insofar as Israel respects the theocracy, they can have placement. “Just as Israel is the center of the nations in Genesis 10, so Yahweh, living in the tabernacle, is the center of Israel’s life.”⁴⁵

T. Desmond Alexander helpfully shows that the tabernacle and the temple were pregnant with meaning:

The Jerusalem temple is decorated with arboreal features. The tabernacle menorah (or lampstand) resembles in shape a tree, possibly representing the 'tree of life' (Gen. 2:9; 3:22; cf. Ex. 25:31–35). The mention of gold and onyx in Genesis 2:11–12 may be linked to the fact that gold, in particular, was used extensively to decorate Israelite sanctuaries and priestly garments (e.g., Ex. 25:7, 11, 17, 31). Although the gold and onyx lie outside the garden of Eden, mention of their location indicates that there is a known source for these materials. The Lord God walks in the garden of Eden as he later does in the tabernacle (Gen. 3:8; cf. Lev. 26:12; Deut. 23:14; 2 Sam. 7:6–7). The concept of a river flowing out of Eden (Gen. 2:10) finds a parallel in Ezekiel 47:1–12, where a river flows from a future, idealized Jerusalem temple, bringing life to the Dead Sea. The garden of Eden occupies an elevated location, a feature that recalls how other sanctuaries associate God’s presence with an elevated location. . . . The Israelite tabernacle, and later the Jerusalem temple, was considered to be a microcosm or model of the earth. In this capacity it provided a visual illustration, anticipating God’s glorious presence filling the whole world. This expectation comes to fulfillment in New Jerusalem. As Revelation 21 reveals, New Jerusalem has no temple building, 'for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb' (Rev. 21:22). Viewed from the perspective of God’s presence filling the whole earth, the garden of Eden represents the first stage toward the creation of New Jerusalem.⁴⁶

⁴⁵Ibid, 70.

⁴⁶T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2009), 13.

Indeed, the tabernacle is representative of a new Garden of Eden. It's there that mankind can be fully human again. The liturgy surrounding worship in God's presence was meant to shape the worshiper into a true human. Says Bartholomew, "Ritual played a crucial role in all areas of the Israelites' lives as a means to continually call them back to who they really were."⁴⁷ God's reign is comprehensive, yes, but it is situated:

Significantly, the psalmists are not reluctant to identify Jerusalem as the "city of our God" (Ps. 48:1). Here we see the potential for urban life to be the very place where Yahweh is enthroned. . . . His rule extends literally over Israel, but Zion is simultaneously an evocative symbol of his reign over his whole creation, over all the nations. To argue that urban life, politics, and nationhood are somehow alien to the Old Testament is a violation of the comprehensive vision of the Psalter.⁴⁸

This brings us to the New Testament. When we think in the categories of law and gospel, we see Jesus as taking on our sin and giving us his righteousness, but if we look at the drama through the lens of displacement and placement, we see that more is going on. As a matter of fact, if guilt were the only problem that was in need of rectification, Jesus' actual storied life makes very little sense. If Jesus only needed to take our guilt, it seems that he would only have had to die, not live.

Yet, Jesus' life—which begins displaced in Bethlehem, climaxes with the Son of Man having no place to lay his head, and ends alone, embodying the death as exile metaphor—reveals that he was identifying with the epochal story of wandering, the

⁴⁷Craig G. Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 70.

⁴⁸*Ibid*, 81.

dislocated journey of humanity. In the life of Jesus, we see the life of Israel played out in miniature.

Bartholomew points to the Gospel that would appear to give the least attention to place, Mathew. As is commonly noted, Matthew's preference for the "Kingdom of Heaven" language can often be used to curtail a more embodied, earthly, placed view of the kingdom. Bartholomew doesn't rush past this observation.

It is true, Matthew is no doubt critiquing a view of the kingdom that is entirely "here and now" centered. Jesus is busy conquering more important enemies than the Romans. Yet, Bartholomew says that, taken with the rest of the Biblical witness, Matthew can be understood as saying that Jesus' redemption is more than temporal, but not less.

Helpfully, Bartholomew discusses the various ways kingdom has been interpreted. Some talk of *reign* while others of *realm*. If one is to think of Jesus' kingdom as a realm, the tendency is to become dualistic. In other words, Jesus is redeeming one place (Heaven) while the other place (earth) is passing away. If one thinks of Jesus' kingdom as a reign, however, one can see the space which Jesus is claiming as coextensive with the place being claimed by Satan, the same place we live today. Says Bartholomew,

In its Jewish context kingdom never refers to a new kind of kingdom in another realm of existence...If one takes the canonical shape of Scripture seriously, leading from creation through fall and redemption to new creation, as well as the

embeddedness of Jesus in first century Judaism, the realm of the king's reign in the kingdom of God is obvious: it is the entire creation.⁴⁹

The New Testament language of kingdom, then, should be understood as carrying two components: *placement* and *presence*. If the results of sin are embodied, so is redemption. Just as Israel understands that they can be in a state of exile without geographic displacement, so too must modern Christians come to see their redemption as relocation, even as they sojourn.

Israel's very freedom can be snatched away by their own passions and sins. They can be away from the presence of YHWH even as they live near the Temple. They can lose their identity and culture even as they remain among family. Moses interpreted Adam and Eve's banishment as spiritual death; the Prophets interpreted Israel's spiritual death as banishment.

If the condition of exile is the result of separating oneself from YHWH, then what might a community formed by the presence of YHWH look like? Asked differently, what is shalom? What is Kingdom-life? If exilic culture is fearful, then placed culture would be joyful. If exilic culture is enslaved, placed culture would be free. If exilic culture is disordered, placed culture would be ordered. If exilic culture is contentious, placed culture would be harmonious.

⁴⁹Ibid, 101.

While this may seem obvious, it is nevertheless a helpful exercise not only in understanding protology and eschatology, but in understanding the sort of peace that Christians should be pursuing now.

In addition to Kingdom carrying with it a connotation of *placement*, it likewise carries the idea of *presence*. Halvorson-Taylor makes clear that return from exile “includes more than just the return of Judeans to their homeland.”⁵⁰ Indeed, a return to home means a return to YHWH, a return to Temple-access. Further, as is made clear, the return home brings with it an accompanying hope for a future Davidic ruler who will secure the placement of Israel once and for all.

Thus, just as exile is seen as a consequence of sin, so too is placement seen as the fruit of reconciled relationship with YHWH. Home isn’t an end in itself, said differently. If exile typifies a ruptured relationship, home represents a healed relationship. This makes sense out of “exile condition.” Insofar as the Israelites have a ruptured relationship with YHWH, they are in exile regardless of their location. Indeed, making “home” and security an end in itself is what leads to Israel losing those very things.

In the effort to return to an embodied, tangible faith, we must not lose sight of the end of the faith: communion with God. Following the work of N. T. Wright and others⁵¹, there is a growing consensus that the gnostic tenor in much contemporary (post Second

⁵⁰Martien A. Halvorson-Taylor, *Enduring Exile: The Metamorphization of Exile in the Hebrew Bible* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2011), 57.

⁵¹ N. T. Wright. *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2008).

Great Awakening) evangelicalism needs to be shed for a more robust, biblical view of human flourishing. To be sure, the criticism is well deserved. Indeed, evangelicals interested in a more holistic soteriology are being tutored outside of their tradition—often by Liberation Theologians of various stripes—precisely because of their own tradition is so anemic on this point. Fleming Rutledge is of help here:

When the church focuses on social justice to the exclusion of a more comprehensive understanding of classical Christian doctrine, liturgy, and practice, we lose theology, we lose the Trinity, we lose liturgical breadth, we lose discipline, we lose Christology—and that means we lose the living Jesus Christ who alone, by his Spirit, builds the Church and moves masses of people to protest injustice.⁵²

There can be an over correction in this regard. Yes, just as a fractured relationship with God leads to a dysfunctional society, so too will a renewed relationship with God lead to a more amicable society. Yet, just as Israel was never able to have the gifts of God on their own terms, so too must we not try to obtain the gifts of God in our own strength. God is present with his people now only through a relationship with the fulfillment of the Temple, Jesus.

Any effort to reconstruct a garden-Eden without the temple-Eden is doomed to fail. Yes, soteriology is more than vertical, but it's not less than vertical. If we only focus on the horizontal, sociological dimensions of salvation, we risk becoming like the Israelites who were happy with the abundance of the land without resting in the presence of God in the land.

⁵²<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2018/02/10/interview-fleming-rutledge/>

Place Today

In trying to apply the role of placement to the modern church, the category of inaugurated eschatology will be of help. Often, this reality is summed up in *already* and *not yet* language. Jesus has already given us eternal life spiritually, but has not yet given us eternal life physically, as an example. As we've seen, Jesus came preaching about his Kingdom. That Kingdom brings relocation, placement. Yet, Christ's Kingdom is both already here and yet to come.

An illustration might be of help. In 1 Peter 3:21 we see that the church in some way corresponds to Noah's ark—it's a vehicle for redemption. In the ark, Noah's family was saved in that they were protected from drowning.

Yet, they were not fully saved until the boat landed. Indeed, they were adrift, wandering even as they were stationary and grounded. They were placed in that they had a floor to stand on, but that floor was still to reach the mountain top upon which they could finally rest. Their salvation had an already component and a not yet component.

Likewise, the church is located, placed, given a home on an earth that is yet to be fully redeemed. Insofar as the church is meek, the earth is her inheritance. This in-between living is complex and difficult to navigate. Yet, this has always been the calling of God's people.

Abraham was given a place, a promised land. He believed and it was counted to him as righteousness. Yet, all he and his family knew was wandering. As Genesis 15:13

reminds us: “Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years.”

The church should resonate with the words of the author of Psalm 137:

By the rivers of Babylon – we sat down there and we wept when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our harps. For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, ‘Sing us one of the songs of Zion!’ How could we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?

Bartholomew ends his book with an extensive discussion on what Christians who are concerned with a recovery of place should do today. One of the more helpful parts of his books was his suggestion that we try to comprehend the nature of a place, and then build accordingly.

Take the city as an example, “As a social entity, a city is composed of manifold complex interrelationships.”⁵³ Seen thusly, a city is a shared place, one that should be nurtured as such. Bartholomew helpfully quotes Nicholas Wolterstorff who gets at the problem:

Wide expressways are sent crashing like destructive tornadoes through our cities. . . . Thus our commitment to the car as our principal means of transportation reinforces our tendency to think of the city not as an integrated public environment for our life together, but as a collection of individual buildings.⁵⁴

⁵³Craig G. Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 263.

⁵⁴*Ibid*, 264.

What is needed, then, is a more humane view of place. “High art is venerated in cities but is locked away in museums,”⁵⁵ Bartholomew laments. Christians must reject the modern, Platonic preference for space and return to the Judeo-Christian emphasis on placement. In holding to such a truth, they can be instruments of beauty and goodness in an otherwise cold, dislocated world.

If God’s kingdom is already among us, then we should be taking those aspects of creation that don’t yet reflect that reality and transform them into what they will one day be, by God’s grace and our participation.

The Christian story allows us to look at the world with two eyes. With one eye, we see that which is, with the other we see that which could be. With one eye, we see the pain and brokenness of a place, but the with other we see with faith that which could be—what a place might look like when transformed by those with a Kingdom view.

Conclusion

The Bible has much to say about land—the possessing of it, the stewarding of it, the loss of it. A Christian anthropology is one that recognizes the inherent placement of the person, the locality of creation. The bad news of sin is that, before Christ’s return, we are all alienated and displaced to one degree or another. The good news, however, is that Christ has come to be the new Joseph—leading us to a new placement.

⁵⁵Ibid, 264.

Thus, Christians work toward an embodied, placed existence, one nimble to the beauties and complexities of locality. Christians must not accept the displaced condition of the world but seek to live a life situated in the particularities of their given place.

Chapter 4

Subsidiarity And Social Justice

Having considered the ways in which Scripture can aid the church in her project of cultural renewal on a human scale, it's worth giving attention to the ways in which the great tradition of Christian thought can likewise be of help. Specifically, we will consider how the church has considered Subsidiarity. Subsidiarity is the idea in Catholic Social Teaching that problem solving should be done at the most local level possible. What is its history? How does it relate to Social Justice? How can it be abused? Those are the questions this chapter seeks to answer.

Subsidiarity: An Early History

When one considers the origins of subsidiarity, one naturally thinks of Pope Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), or Pope Leo XIII's earlier *Rerum Novarum* (1891). But Thomas Behr asks us to look even further back to the writings of Luigi Taparelli, SJ, 1793-1862. "Taparelli was the first Catholic theorist to explore the relationships between natural right and subjective rights," Behr says. "Identifying the origin of the latter in the moral compunction resulting from the former, as applied in concrete social reality."⁵⁶

⁵⁶Thomas Behr, *Social Justice and Subsidiarity: Luigi Taparelli and the Origins of Modern Catholic Social Thought* (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 187.

Though an almost forgotten figure, Behr paints a picture of Taparelli that powerfully captures the sway his Neo-Thomistic thought had on later, more well-known, figures. Key to understanding Taparelli is his revolutionary context. Against the backdrop of the French Revolution of 1789, Luigi Taparelli balked at the Modern political theory coming from the pen of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

For Rousseau, an individual is born free, but finds himself or herself in chains. An individual can be whatever he or she wishes to be, in other words. That which holds someone back is mere cultural constraints. As soon as one is able to wrestle himself or herself free from such constraints, he or she can truly know freedom. Again, the backdrop of the French Revolution is key to understanding Taparelli's critique. Taparelli sees a modern world that has distain for the heritage that built it up. It was seeking to build a society on this novel view of man, a view Taparelli saw as suspect. Contrary to Rousseau, Taparelli says man is not born free; he's born bound to his nature.⁵⁷

More to it, men and women are born in relation to their fellows, thus doubly bound to himself and to the proverbial other. Anthropology, in his reckoning, wasn't something to be invented, it was something to be discovered. This fixed anthropology was a direct result of Taparelli's devotion to Thomas Aquinas.

In Thomas' thought, Taparelli found an anthropology sturdy enough to withstand the weight of a humane sociology. That is, Thomas' concept of natural law naturally

⁵⁷ Ibid, 33.

birthed a politic that was both coherent and constructive. If man is born in a web of allegiances, he's thus bound to give the other his due. A weaker person can't be trampled upon simply because he can be. No, each man has certain natural rights which are directly derivative from his nature. Each is owed, each is indebted, thus each is bound to his self and his neighbor. Says Behr:

No person has a right to define the universe and the meaning of life as he wishes: there is a finite range or rational possibilities, from the strictly materialist to the strictly spiritualist, and one can dare to say that the effects of any given set of metaphysical/anthropological/ethical beliefs are subject to pragmatic empirical evaluation.⁵⁸

One can see the ways in which such theological reasoning ran afoul the revolutionary spirit in France. Modernity was being birthed, and the old chains of church, family, and nature were giving way to a new order. Taparelli saw modern political thought as legitimizing Leviathan. By taking away nature, it took away rights, which took away the individual's power to fight the intruding state.

To say that Taparelli is revolting against the revolution is only half true. To understand his appreciation for Modernity, it's necessary to connect Taparelli again with Thomas. Behr makes the case that Thomas's scholasticism was integral to Taparelli's "baptism of Modernity." In the Scholastic movement, theology went from being a study done in the church, to a study done in the academy. Thomas, obviously, represents the

⁵⁸Thomas Behr, *Social Justice and Subsidiarity* (Washington, D.C., Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 97.

best of what scholasticism had to offer. The Modern age of Taparelli was also moving toward the academy.

In seeing the church and culture as restraints, the French Revolution saw the power of mankind to discover and remake the world. The optimism surrounding anthropology was boundless. The academy represented the means toward a higher end. The academy harnessed the energy of mankind, as opposed to the church which held it back. While there can be no doubt that Taparelli rejected the thoroughly materialistic underpinnings of this scholastic revival, he refused to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Yes, Taparelli rejected Modernity's logic, but he accepted many of its conclusions. He wasn't reflexive. He patiently weighed the fruit of this new age and kept that which was pleasant. And so, he begins writing what would become his magnum opus, *Saggio teoretico* from 1840 to 1843. There can be no doubt that this work helped shape Catholic Social Teaching going forward. An excerpt from the Catholic Catechism, for example, shows Taparelli's fingerprints: "The way God acts in governing the world, which bears witness to such great regard for human freedom, should inspire the wisdom of those who govern human communities. They should behave as ministers of divine providence."⁵⁹

⁵⁹*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (N.P.: United States Catholic Conference, 1994), 460.

In these collected essays, Taparelli arguably coins the term “social justice.” In his mind, social justice is natural outflow of recognizing that man is made in God’s image. It’s the idea that we owe one another respect even as we preserve “personal and associational liberty.” That is, man’s freedom and man’s dignity have to be balanced. One can’t be so free as to withhold the due respect another deserves.

But neither can one be bound to give to another that which is beyond their due, thus becoming enslaved. Rights, said differently, aren’t just about freedom or responsibility, but the freedom that responsibility brings. Again, it’s hard to overstate how much this idea continues to shape Catholic Social Teaching. For example, Pope Francis’ words stand on the shoulder of this sort of sociology:

Today no one in our world feels responsible; we have lost a sense of responsibility for our brothers and sisters. We have fallen into the hypocrisy of the priest and the Levite whom Jesus described in the parable of the Good Samaritan: we see our brother half dead on the side of the road, and perhaps we say to ourselves: ‘poor soul...!’, and then go on our way. It’s not our responsibility, and with that we feel reassured, assuaged. The culture of comfort, which makes us think only of ourselves, makes us insensitive to the cries of other people, makes us live in soap bubbles which, however lovely, are insubstantial; they offer a fleeting and empty illusion which results in indifference to others; indeed, it even leads to the globalization of indifference. In this globalized world, we have fallen into globalized indifference. We have become used to the suffering of others: it doesn’t affect me; it doesn’t concern me; it’s none of my business!⁶⁰

It’s here the notion of subsidiarity comes back into play. How is one to live out this “indebtedness” that social justice applies? It has to be at the human level. Because this

⁶⁰Pope Francis “Homily of Holy Father Francis,” July 8, 2013, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130708_omelia-lampedusa.html

indebtedness is personal, it must be near the person. The common good is something achieved in lived reality between one person and another. Thus, what Burke would call “little platoons,” i.e., voluntary associations, will naturally be the connective tissue between social justice and the individual person. Practically, this principle can be seen in how Christians care for the poor, for example.

It is ideally the family and the church that are the primary instruments of wealth-redistribution. This isn't to say that the State can't redistribute wealth, but it is to say that the first means of doing so isn't the State. Indeed, the first means isn't even the church. Surely there's a difference between how we share our money with our immediate family and how we share our money with our church community. Our kids will likely require much more than a tenth of our income, after all.

There are myriad different spheres of life—schools, cities, clubs, churches, families—each with their own system of governance, their own sovereign, their own code. Indeed, I don't think it would be an equivocation to say each sphere has its own *justice*, if by that we mean that a just way to behave in one sphere might be unjust in another. For example, we should have compassion on anyone living in poverty, but our responsibility for the impoverished person correlates to how closely the person is related to us, a point Paul makes in 1 Tim 5:8: “If anyone doesn't take care of his own relatives, especially his immediate family, he has denied the Christian faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

A man might be justified in passing a homeless person on the street without stopping, but if the same person were to pass by his mother begging on the street without stopping, they'd no doubt be unjust in doing so. One action can be just in one context or sphere but unjust in another. The sphere, not only the action, matters. A pastor ought not imprison a criminal in his or her vestry—that's the role of the State. A mayor ought not baptize the police chief—that's the role of the church.

Likewise, while the description of believers living a life of shared resources in Acts is no doubt prescriptive today, but it must be prescribed in the first instance within the appropriate sphere, namely the church. None of this is to say that Scripture has nothing to say regarding the State. To the contrary, kings and all civil rulers are beckoned therein to rule justly and govern under the ultimate Lordship of Christ. A well-ordered society is one in which each sphere is in tune with God's revelation, both special (i.e., Scripture) and general (i.e., Natural Law).

A just society requires more than just one sphere functioning appropriately, it requires all of them working in harmony with one another and the divine order of reality. One can be born into a healthy family that worships in an unhealthy church, just as one can go to a healthy school in an unhealthy city. Speaking of social justice, then, allows us to speak about the society on a macro level—evaluating more than just the State or the church or the family or the prison system or the school—but analyzing the economy of institutions as a whole, with God's special and general revelation as the grid.

One can see, then, how social justice and subsidiarity relate. And by taking us back to this early source, Behr re-grounds our understanding of subsidiarity. It's not just about problem solving. It's about living a good life. It's not just about we can do—i.e., negative freedom—it's about what we should do—i.e., positive freedom.

What Subsidiarity Isn't

In his 2001 essay "Subsidiarity as a Principle of Governance," Robert K. Vischer tries to untangle subsidiarity from conservative politics. Vischer points to the influence of Marvin Olasky on George W. Bush's first campaign for president. "Compassionate Conservatism," he says, co-opted subsidiarity. "Rarely, if ever," says Vischer, "is subsidiarity looked to as warranting a greater role for the federal government in the combating a given social problem."⁶¹

Vischer points to the first serious policy speech offered by then Governor Bush. In that speech, Bush argued for charities and churches to take a more substantive role in fighting poverty, drug addiction, and other societal ills. Although he doesn't use the word "subsidiarity," it's clear that he's using the principle to lessen the role of the State and elevate the role of civil society. The problem with such a view, according to Vischer, is that it neglects the ways in which subsidiarity can have the reverse effect. Indeed, there are myriad ways in which subsidiarity could, in fact, take power away from private, local

⁶¹Robert K. Vischer, "Subsidiarity as a Principle of Governance," *Indiana Law Review* 35, no. 1 (2001): 105-06.

organizations and place it in the hands of the State. Fred Crosson is quoted as insisting somewhat counter intuitively:

Subsidiarity is not a knee-jerk shunning of government authority and embrace of any non- government entity, nor does it stand for the blanket devolution of government functions from the federal to the state level. Rather, subsidiarity is a principled tendency toward solving problems at the local level and empowering individuals, families and voluntary associations to act more efficaciously in their own lives. In this regard, the focus is on fostering the vitality of mediating structures in society.⁶²

Environmental law, for example, is an area in which the common good simply can't be achieved best by a series of local, decentralized laws. Or take campaign finance reform. The federal government should have a vested interest in acting—on behalf of the least powerful—to curtail big money in Washington. And yet, the status quo dominates not in spite of subsidiarity, but in the name of subsidiarity.

Subsidiarity, in short, is a means of solving problems, but it doesn't offer partisan solutions. In other words, one could use the logic of subsidiarity to come to a faulty policy conclusion. The republican party's use of subsidiarity, then, doesn't give a Catholic stamp of approval to each policy offered.

This wedding of Catholic Social Teaching with Republicanism harms the former, says Vicsher. To decouple the two, one needs to understand the history of subsidiarity as an idea. To do that, one had to understand that for Pope Pius XI, it wasn't just a rejection of Marxist collectivism, it was a rejection of Lockean atomism.

⁶²Ibid, 116.

For Locke, society is a collection of individuals. Vicsher sums up the view as: “society is understood as a collection of individuals who have come together to promote and protect their private rights and interests.”⁶³ Contra such an individualistic understanding of society, the Catholic Church insisted that the common good was not only discernable, but something to which the collective should strive. Pope Pius XI that it draws on ancient truths to solve a modern problem.

It goes without saying that the most important resource available to the Church, aside from Scripture itself, is Thomas Aquinas. For Thomas, ownership of property helps not only the individual, but the collective: “...people work more diligently and treat economic goods more carefully, when these goods, as well as the means of production, belong to themselves and are their personal property.”⁶⁴

In other words, individuals will care for things that have a stake in. Subsidiarity is an inference of this principle. The larger the stake one has in a problem, the better they’ll be able to negotiate a fair and equitable solution.

This puts the burden of proof on the “far off” entity when it comes to intervention. Again, it’s not that the state shouldn’t intervene, but it does mean that there needs to be a good reason for that state to intervene in leu of a more local actor. John Paul II, perhaps more than any of his predecessors remained suspicious of the state. One would be forgiven for thinking the following words were spoken by President Bush, not the Pope:

⁶³Ibid, 114.

⁶⁴Ibid, 111.

By intervening directly and depriving society of its responsibility, the Social Assistance State leads to a loss of human energies and an inordinate increase of public agencies, which are dominated more by bureaucratic ways of thinking than by concern for serving their clients, and which are accompanied by an enormous increase in spending.⁶⁵

Yet, Vischer is insistent that such suspicion can have negligent consequences.

One can have a robust, even large, state while still be deploying the subsidiarity principle.

It's here that Vischer point to the European Union as a positive test case for the ways in which subsidiarity can be used without reaching the same "small government"

conclusions drawn by American conservatives. The EU uses subsidiarity to solidify lines of authority and responsibility. This is very different than saying "smaller is always better."

Indeed, the economic safety net is higher and more robust in the EU. This, says

Vischer, is not a violation of subsidiarity:

Recognizing the economic equality aspect of subsidiarity does not necessarily require the redistribution of wealth, but it suggests that at least some effort must be undertaken to prevent individuals from losing access to economic resources due to anticompetitive corporate action.⁶⁶

This position stands in direct contrast to one of the most high-profile defenders of subsidiarity, Michael Novak. Novak is critical of the "directing principle" in Catholic

⁶⁵Pope John Paul II "Centesimus Annus: Encyclical Letter to His Venerable Brother Bishops in the Episcopate the Priests and Deacons, Families of Men and Women, Religious, all the Christian Faithful, and to All Men and Women of Good Will on the Anniversary of Rerum Novarum," May 1, 1991; http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus.html

⁶⁶Robert K. Vischer, "Subsidiarity as a Principle of Governance," *Indiana Law Review* 35, no. 1 (2001): 105-06.

Social Teaching. For him, the invisible hand of the free market will naturally guide society better than any intervention ever could.⁶⁷ After reading Vicsher's essay, especially in light of more recent debates over Catholic integralism, it's hard not to feel Novak's bet didn't quite pay off. In the end, it strikes me that Vicsher's thesis is correct:

As a model of governance, subsidiarity offers no shelter to those who seek the unbridled expansion of centralized government, nor to those who disregard the need for a vital government role in making an empowered and connected citizenry a reality. Stripped of its partisan baggage, subsidiarity offers a model that-rooted in a social justice tradition that stresses both individual liberty and communitarian values-rejects the alienations of both the market and centralized government, embracing instead individuals and the mediating structures to which they belong.⁶⁸

Conclusion

Subsidiarity is a powerful tool to help in the aid of social justice. It can be coopted by partisan politics, as the last twenty years of American history shows, but it nevertheless remains a vital tool in any effort to build a healthy community. If the church is to renew the cultures in which she finds herself, it will behoove her to utilize the category of Subsidiarity. In so doing, she can avoid the extremes of Statism and individualism and embrace, instead, the covenantal nature people made in the image of the triune God.

⁶⁷ Novak, Michael. *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1991).

⁶⁸ Robert K. Vischer, "Subsidiarity as a Principle of Governance," *Indiana Law Review* 35, no. 1 (2001). 142.

Chapter 5

Micro-Christendoms: Christian Politicking on a Human Scale

I began this dissertation arguing that that “culture war” is a misguided paradigm for cultural engagement for two reasons. First, I said that “culture” wasn’t the correct object of our attention. Rather, I said, we should engage “cultures.” That is, we can’t engage in a monolith—culture—only particular, embodied institutions, societies, and peoples. Second, I said the “war” metaphor was likewise ill advised. War implies that the other is an enemy to be conquered, rather than a person to be convinced, helped, or loved.

I fervently argued, however, that it would be a mistake for us to cease to seek to transform culture, a temptation for those of us who feel burned by the culture wars. To the contrary, it seems to me that it is indeed incumbent upon Christ’s disciples to transform cultures, as Matthew 28:19-20 makes clear: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Eric Jacobsen helps charts a helpful path forward that avoids common pitfalls:

What we [Christians] don’t have is access to cultural power. This is a bitter pill to swallow for some, but once swallowed can have some delightful effects... It allows us the freedom to be a counter-cultural movement whose members relate to one another more like revolutionaries working in the fringes than figureheads jostling for a place of honor at the front of the parade. It frees us from the exhaustive task of building an unwieldy bureaucratic machine for the sole purpose

of institutional survival. And above all, it allows us to live riskily – to die to self; and be agents of a King whose power is not of this world.⁶⁹

In this chapter, I want to follow Jacobsen’s lead. I want to further apply the principle of cultural engagement on a human scale by showing what a Christian politic might look like on a human scale, which is just a long way of saying I want to talk about neighborliness. I want to understand the Christian’s role in the neighborhood within Jacobsen’s “agents of the King” framework. I want to do this by addressing three questions. First, why do neighborhoods matter to the country? Second, why do neighborhoods matter to the individual? And third, how might churches engage the neighborhood? This will culminate in a vision of Micro-Christendoms. That is, an effort to build a local society for the common good. A neighborhood that reflects the shalom of Christ. Micro-Christendoms will be localities where Churches pray the Kingdom comes on their block as it is in Heaven.

Neighborhood and Country

First, why do neighborhoods matter to the country? That’s a question Marc Dunkelman seeks to answer in his book, *The Vanishing Neighbor* which can be a helpful conversation partner for our purposes. To understand what’s wrong with America—typified in Washington, D. C.—says Dunkelman, one must answer a basic question:

⁶⁹Eric O. Jacobsen, “Jesus Shaped Identity at the Denominational Level” April 30, 2015, ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, <https://eco-pres.org/jesus-shaped-identity-at-the-denominational-level/>

namely, what made Washington, D. C. “work” in the first place?⁷⁰ To answer this question, Dunkelman turns his attention to the Revolutionary War. While the motivators of the Revolutionaries were no doubt complex and mixed, they were at least in part motivated by the growing gap between American and European culture.

Alexis de Tocqueville guides the discussion going forward: the hallmark of Democracy in America was the architecture of her social life. Instead of being a “top down” Monarchy, the burgeoning Republic was “bottom up.” The genius of the American experiment, as far as deTocqueville was concerned, was the idea of “townships.” Dunkelman calls this phenomenon a different name. Instead of “townships” Dunkelman refers to “middle rings” of social life.⁷¹

A middle ring is distinguished from inner and outer rings. An inner ring of social engagement exists between one’s immediate family—husband, wife, kids, parents, etc. An outer ring, on the other hand, refers to those relationships with people whom one does not live near— the Federal Government, a political party, fellow members of an affinity group, etc.

A middle ring exists within voluntary institutions like the Lions Club, churches, homeowner associations, and the like. These robust middle rings were what caused the cleavage between the Colonials and the Brits and, to answer the original question, were

⁷⁰Marc J. Dunkelman, *The Vanishing Neighbor: The Transformation of American Community* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014), 13.

⁷¹Ibid, 13.

what made Washington, D. C. work. The sort of cooperation—indeed, compromise—required of representatives in a Republic depends upon a constituency who live among and understand citizens operating out of plausibility structures different from their own. Our “inner ring” tends to agree with our presuppositions and we of course self-select our “outer rings,” so such knowledge can only be acquired from those relationships in the middle ring of society. The problem, of course, is that the one ring that can give us such exposure is currently emaciated, thus we exist in louder and louder echo chambers. Says Dunkelman:

A networked society doesn't bring people with different experiences into contact with one another. Natural rhythms once put Americans from different stations in touch at the store, on the street, in the newspaper, even at church. Until fairly recently, the cross section of people who lived near one another passed the same billboards, watched the same television shows, and listened to the same radio stations. And so, whatever divided them – issues of race or ethnicity, political creed or religious affiliation – they were more familiar, if only perfunctorily, with the way other people approached the world.⁷²

As goes the middle ring—de Tocqueville's townships or Richard John Neuhaus' intermediate institutions—so goes politics at large. Politics per se, however, is only one way in which the erosion of middle rings affects the populace at large. Dunkelman offers two more examples: medicine and entrepreneurship. Like Washington, D. C., hospitals were built assuming robust middle rings of extended families, churches, and clubs. The medical industry was designed to diagnose and treat *illnesses* but was not designed to

⁷²Marc J. Dunkelman, *The Vanishing Neighbor: The Transformation of American Community* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014), 102.

provide long-term care for *people*. Once one was treated, they were released to a social structure that then nursed said person back to well-being.

Hospitals can no longer assume a patient has such a support system. Dunkelman chronicles the growing pains of medical facilities as they try to catch up with the new social architecture.

Another example is that of entrepreneurship. The center of innovation today is Silicon Valley. Dunkelman compares that with the hub of enterprise of the last century, Detroit. He points out that every revolution in technology assumes other revolutions, or at least other developments. Gutenberg, for example, was dependent upon typesetting, ink, paper, etc. The automobile was developed in a community of diverse experience and expertise. In Detroit bright-lights from the boating industry, engineering, and former horse-carriage manufacturers were able to pull their collective knowledge to produce something truly revolutionary—an affordable automobile.

Today's Detroit, Silicon Valley, represents the new state of the social architecture. To be sure, real geniuses are collaborating today at Apple, but geniuses of a similar ilk. Rather than pulling on a diverse knowledge base, Silicon Valley pulls the wisdom of a limited set of backgrounds. It's not that no revolutions are taking place there, of course, but Dunkelman argues that the innovations are stunted by the homogeneity.

The data behind this sorting of people groups is strong. Obviously, the outer ring is expanding as social media connects individuals with like-minded people across the globe. People are spending more and more time in virtual worlds connecting with a

community they'll likely never meet in person. Dunkelman is clear that this "community" is precisely that—a community. It's simply a different kind of community than the ones civilizations have known in the past.

Perhaps most surprising in the book is the claims made about the inner ring. Much is made out of the collapse of the nuclear family—and perhaps rightly so—but the data shows parents are actually spending more time with their kids now than twenty years ago, not less. Young adults are more likely to keep in daily contact with their parents today than a generation ago and are far more likely to move back in with their parent after having moved out.

Obviously, if the inner and outer rings are dominating the limited amount of social capital each individual has to spend, the middle ring grows more and more impoverished. The upshot of the problem is this: people spend plenty of time with their immediate family and with larger affinity groups, but little time with their neighbors. The obvious question is, what can be done about this problem? Dunkelman sees a few solutions on the horizon.

First, social networking can be used counter-intuitively. Just as apps can connect people across the world, so too can they be used to connect people across the street.

While simply introducing oneself may seem simpler, the redefinition of "neighborliness" has made such a move less intelligible, as Dunkelman describes:

During the mid-2000s, two psychiatrists on the faculty of the Harvard Business School, Jacqueline Olds and Richard Schwartz, noted that the definition of 'neighborliness' had evolved dramatically over the course of several decades. In the early postwar period, being neighborly meant reaching out to the people

who lived next door – taking a homemade cake to the family moving into the house across the street, offering to watch the kids in a pinch, saying hello at an annual block party, or inviting acquaintances to join a Wednesday night bowling league. Over the years, however, the term came to denote almost exactly the opposite. Today, being ‘neighborly’ means leaving those around you in peace... The sense of warmth once suggested by the term ... has been replaced by a kind of detachment.⁷³

Second, Dunkelman suggests we build institutions that strengthen middle rings.

One suggestion offered was restructuring already existing organizations—like Americorp—to team people up based on geographical proximity. Obviously, such service organizations could go a long way in creating experiences that not only serve a larger purpose, but connect people on a local scale. Interestingly, the Armed Forces used to team soldiers up based on geography and only stopped after the Civil War (at which time small towns would lose a large percentage of their male population in a given battle).

Lastly, Dunkelman argues we need to do a better job of training people in grit and character. He references the now classic “marshmallow test.” A child’s ability to refuse a marshmallow for a larger prize later to come is a shockingly accurate predictor of future success. Dunkelman sees delayed gratification as a crucial element in creating the sort of people who could rightly belong to a middle ring. His reasons are perhaps obvious: when we meet people in the middle ring, they don’t hold our same affinity (like those in our outer ring) or our blood (as in our inner ring). We need to be able to have the grit to stay with people long enough to find the common, shared humanity is someone different than ourselves. We need better character.

⁷³Ibid, 71.

Thus, the answer to the question “Why do neighborhoods matter to the country?” finds a parallel question; namely, “Why do neighbors matter to the neighborhood?” If the thesis of this chapter is correct, that culture is best transformed on a micro level, then that principle can be pushed even further down from the neighborhood to the individual neighbor. Good citizens make for a good society. But how is our citizenry formed? Counterintuitively, they’re formed by neighborhoods.

Neighborhood and the Individual

This brings us to our second question: Why do neighborhoods matter to the individual? The rumors of community’s death have been greatly exaggerated. That’s the hypothesis of Harvard University Sociologist Robert Sampson. It’s not hard to see the origin of the rumors. Globalization and technology are long thought to have flattened the world to such a degree that geographic proximity is virtually irrelevant: one can work for a non-profit in Malawi from a Starbucks in Milwaukee, after all. If Dunkelman’s work argues that the institutions that make a strong community—institutions between one’s immediate family and one’s larger affinity groups—are in ill health, then Sampson argues that there’s a feedback loop of unhealthiness that at least must be recognized if we’re to offer a proper antidote.

In his book *The Great American City* Sampson shows that the common narrative of communal decline tells only part of the story. Using data collected from The Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN), Sampson paints a fuller picture. The data shows that when one’s immediate community is weakened; it’s not the

case that community dies. No, community based on geography still exists; it just exists with more dysfunction.

The book depends not only on new data, but a genuinely novel metric to acquire and analyze the data. Instead of evaluating individuals within a given community, the typical way sociological research is preformed, Sampson uses what he calls “ecometrics,” i.e., metrics for the study of ecology. Using ecometrics, Sampson observes neighborhoods as living species, not simply “stand-ins for individual-level traits.”

Of course, the one and the many can’t be separated, but by looking first to the neighborhood Sampson is able to shed new light on individuals as well. Using Chicago as his lab, Sampson evaluates the nature of neighborhoods: how they work, how they form their residents, and how they change. It turns out; urban people have been organizing themselves into neighborhoods since antiquity. Says Sampson:

The archaeologist Michael Smith has argued that the spatial division of cities into neighborhoods is one of the few universals of urban life, going back even to ancient cities. Neighborhood, in other words, is a near universal theme of human history, and the salience of neighborhood differences has persisted across long time scales and historical eras despite the transformation of specific boundaries, political regimes, and the layout of cities. The consistency of differentiation from ancient cities to contemporary Chicago suggests the general and enduring process of neighborhood effects.⁷⁴

As valuable as studying neighborhoods of yesteryear is, studying neighborhoods of today is of even greater urgency. The name of a main street in Chicago, Division Street, is illustrative of the disparity between neighborhoods. According to Sampson, to

⁷⁴Robert J. Sampson, *Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 362.

understand the city you have to understand the various neighborhoods that make it up, and their vast inequality. And it's more than just the amount of wealth that makes up a neighborhood. The key to understanding a neighborhood's health is found in what Sampson calls "collective efficacy." Essentially, this phenomenon refers to the trust among neighbors.

Collective efficacy can be measured in several different ways. Would neighbors take action if a neighborhood kid were seen skipping school? Would they stop a fight on the street? One interesting way to gauge collective efficacy is by "the dropped envelope test." Sampson and his associates dropped postmarked-mail in the streets of various neighborhoods. The letters returned ranged from 0% - 82%, depending on the neighborhood. The factor to predict whether or not a neighborhood would carry the lost piece of mail to a mailbox didn't depend upon race or economy, but upon collective efficacy, which is dramatically important for all sorts of reasons:

Collective efficacy is relatively stable over time and that it predicts variations in future crime rates, after adjusting for things such as concentrated poverty, racial composition, and traditional forms of neighbor networks (e.g., friendship/ kinship ties). Dense friendship ties may facilitate collective efficacy, but they are not sufficient. Perhaps more importantly, highly efficacious communities do better on a lot of other things, including birth weight, rates of teen pregnancy, and infant mortality, suggesting a link to overall health and well-being independent.⁷⁵

It was here that Sampson sought to qualify the famous "broken window theory," doing so by implementing *systematic social observation* (SSO). The broken window theory essentially states disorder compounds at an exponential rate. Once one window in

⁷⁵Ibid, 177-78.

an apartment complex goes unrepaired, the next to be broken will likely go unfixed and so on until the entire complex, indeed the entire neighborhood, is in shambles.

Using cameras in the back of an SUV, Sampson obtained footage of various neighborhoods and later analyzed that footage. He was looking for evidence of physical disorder (i.e., graffiti) and social disorder (i.e., public intoxication). Sampson is careful not to overstate his case. Yes, once something in a neighborhood goes unrepaired, it does seem to encourage further decay while discouraging responsible ownership. Disorder self-generates at a high speed.

Sampson's qualification has to do with our ability to perceive that which constitutes the proverbial broken window. It turns out, people are quick to identify all sorts of erroneous factors as "disorder." Immigration is one example. People are likely to label a neighborhood with a dense population of immigrants as chaotic or dangerous. Statistically, nothing could be further from the truth, however. A high percentage of immigrants is a key predictor for low percentage of crime in an area, in actual fact.

Sampson's point is emphatically not that a neighborhood's physical and social structure does not matter. To the contrary, it matters a great deal. The point is that signs of disorder are highly dependent upon one's culture. Graffiti may appear to be vandalism in New Haven while being seen as public art in New York. Sampson references a study in which a car was made to look abandoned in Harlem—it was stripped of tires, engine, etc. within a day—while a similar car left in Palo Alto took a whole week to be vandalized. Those communities perceived the car differently.

What are accurate signs of order or disorder? Sampson points to social networks. Areas with high collective efficacy also have highly connected leaders, what he calls “organizational density.” Sampson took samples from various community leaders: politicians, business people, real estate moguls, pastors, rabbis, etc. Neighborhoods high in altruism (places with people likely to return the lost letter, preform CPR on a stranger, etc.) also have leaders that know one another. The converse is also true. In neighborhoods with low collective efficacy, leaders don’t know one another, outside of a few cliques based largely on affinity.

Sampson proves his thesis handily: community based on geographic proximity matters greatly. One’s community will either be healthy or unhealthy, but it will exist, and it will dramatically bear upon one’s overall health, wellness, and wealth. It behooves those who care about individuals, then, to care about the neighborhood. The social and physical structures of a place aren’t just built by the character of her inhabitants; her inhabitants are also formed by the structures of the neighborhood. This reciprocity is complex but real and statistically verifiable, as Sampson shows.

In short, we each live in particular places, and despite the best efforts of social media, our inhabitation still bears starkly on our person. After answering our first question it would have been easy to surmise that the way to change the country is to change the neighborhood and the way to change the neighborhood is to change the individual.

Sampson helped us see that such a simplistic formula doesn't grapple appropriately with the formative dialectic at play between the neighbor and the neighborhood. Yes, the neighbor forms the neighborhood, but so too does the neighborhood form the neighbor. The church, then, should not only seek to make Christians of her neighbors but micro-Christendoms of her neighborhoods.

The Church and the Neighborhood

This brings us to our last question: How should the church engage the neighborhood? The church must approach cultural transformation on a human scale with a disposition of anticipatory gratitude. We transform that which we see as somehow malformed. It's difficult to view something that is malformed with a spirit of gratitude, but that's exactly what we must do if we're going to see deep, systemic change—just like a gardener must view a shoot with anticipatory gratitude, provoking and tending with care, so that it will blossom into a flower. It would be a grave error for the gardener to despise an immature flower. It would also be a grave error for the gardener to only have gratitude without anticipating more growth to come.

In his book *Suicide of the West: How the Rebirth of Tribalism, Populism, Nationalism, and Identity Politics is Destroying American Democracy*, Jonah Goldberg makes a case for gratitude as a political virtue. Yes, America is broken, but it could be more so—that's his starting point. The Republic we inhabit is the result of bravery and revolutionary ideas, to be sure, but it's also the result of an often-under-appreciated element; namely, *chance*. It's shocking, in Goldberg's account, that the West is as

healthy as it is. Not only is the freedom we enjoy a historical anomaly, it's unnatural: "Capitalism is unnatural. Democracy is unnatural. Human rights are unnatural. God didn't give us these things, or anything else. We stumbled into modernity accidentally, not by any divine plan."⁷⁶

If those of us who believe in providence dismiss his argument outright, we do so at our own peril. As Goldberg chronicles, for most of mankind's history, we've lived a tribal, violent existence. That we now view the proverbial "other" with as little skepticism as we do is a feat of monumental proportion. A feat accomplished by what, you ask? Goldberg answers: money. Money made it possible for a person of one tribe to have an exchange with a person of another tribe that was mutually beneficial. The "other" in a free market isn't just a competitor, he's a customer.

Because the peace we have with one another now is incomplete and imperfect, it's easy to view the current state of affairs with contempt. In the age of Trump, with identity politics being practiced by the Left and the Right, Goldberg sees the natural human propensity toward tribalism "coming back with a pitchfork." We're renovating the Republic with the sledgehammer of populism, knocking down institutions and norms at will, unmindful of which artifacts are structural and which are superficial, which are negotiable, and which are loadbearing. Thus, the structural integrity of the West has been compromised, perhaps irreparably, by those seeking to improve it. No, the current system

⁷⁶Jonah Goldberg, *Suicide of the West: How the Rebirth of Tribalism, Populism, Nationalism, and Identity Politics is Destroying American Democracy* (New York, NY: Crown Forum, 2018), 73.

isn't perfect; but it's better than an infinite number of alternatives that seemed inevitable a relatively short time ago.

There's a famous story in which Benjamin Franklin is asked what sort of government the delegates at the Constitutional Convention are attempting to create, to which he responds, "A republic, if you can keep it." Goldberg's proposal for keeping the Republic lies not in specific policy proposals—he offers relatively few in the book—but in a disposition: gratitude.

Illustratively, two accounts of Aesop's "golden goose" story are given in the book. In the first, the goose is killed out of rage because he wouldn't—or couldn't—lay more eggs for his owner. In the second, he's killed by the owner so as to remove whatever mechanism is inside him that creates the gold. On a surface reading, the first telling blames passion while the second blames reason. The real culprit, however, is ingratitude, which can as easily corrupt the head as the heart.

The goose-killers weren't grateful for the miracle of a golden egg laying goose—what an unlikely event! It's simply not natural for a goose to lay golden eggs, and it's simply not natural for man to live in the free, prosperous, peaceful society in which we find ourselves. No. We must not stagnate in the status quo, but neither must we take for granted the value of our free society. There has never been a better time to be alive—we've won the historical lottery and we should be grateful. The question remains: "To whom should we be grateful?"

Goldberg says on the first page that there is no God in his argument. He makes clear that he's not an atheist, but neither does his reasoning depend on the existence of a deity. In a sense, I appreciate what he's trying to do. He's making a limited case for Classical Liberalism and wants the opportunity to persuade people of that argument without being tangled up in thornier, metaphysical debates.

By and large, I think his description of our current situation will be compelling to those who don't believe in a higher power. The historical, sociological, and psychological data backs up Goldberg's argument that we're prone toward tribalism and violence. Yet, the prescriptive portion of the book, built as it is on the notion of gratitude, is unintelligible in a godless universe. It is good and right to be grateful for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, but to whom are we grateful? Who receives our thanks? Does not gratitude imply a personal, transcendent "Other?"

Without such a being, our gratitude for the events of the past that brought us to the present becomes neutered into something like nostalgia. In Scripture, God's covenant people are often called to look back, but they do so with their feet in the present and their eye toward the future. Looking to God's actions in the past will encourage and ennoble his people toward steadfastness and faithfulness in those things God is calling them to do in the moment and in the moments to come.

Nostalgia, on the other hand, is an indulgent retreat to yesteryear; it is leaving the real present for a glossy, sentimentalized version of a past that likely never was.

Nostalgia is an existential form of suicide. Gratitude leads to good works, bravery, and

life. If liberalism is the result of chance, nostalgia is the best we can hope for. If it's the result of divine providence, the gratitude for which Goldberg calls is not only possible, it's necessary.

Without belief in God, it seems to me we could have gratitude but not anticipatory gratitude. It would be easy to walk away from Goldberg's book suspicious of any talk of "progress." But Christians live under the rule of a city that is to come. In Scripture, we find the words of that city's King, and in those words, we find the recipe for human flourishing in the here and now. Thus, we can amend and tweak the structures of the West responsibly, as happened with women's suffrage and the abolition of slavery. We look back with thanks, but we also march forward with hope. In other words, we have anticipatory gratitude.

Of course, Goldberg is applying the political virtue of gratitude on a national scale, but it can and must be applied on a human scale also. To be sure, the church should see those areas of brokenness, injustice, and pain in a neighborhood, but so too must she gratefully acknowledge the flourishing already present—what Goldberg refers to as "the Miracle." Practically, this may look like seeking out those areas that social support is already present in a neighborhood before beginning a new program. Instead of a church starting a day care to support the working mothers in a neighborhood, the church could seek out the grandmothers in a neighborhood who are already doing that work and offer their support. In this way, the church would view those structures that are supporting the

neighborhood with a heart of thanks, rather than arrogantly transposing a new system irrespective of the ways God is already at work.

This sort of gratitude requires a nearness and presence that the church often, sadly, lacks. Too often we impose structures alien to the neighborhood because we're not knowledgeable enough of our neighborhood to be grateful, thus our efforts are necessarily misguided. John Perkins is helpful here:

Once outsiders misdiagnose the problem, their proposed solutions cannot help but miss the mark. They will almost always treat symptoms without touching the disease. An outsider can seldom know the needs of the community well enough to know how to best respond to them. Rarely if ever can an outsider effectively lead the community in finding creative solutions to its own problems. That kind of leadership, the kind of leadership that empowers people, comes from insiders.⁷⁷

Returning to the example of childcare in a neighborhood, a church seeking to provide that service shows gratitude by seeing those ways in which childcare is already being done, and it shows anticipation for God might do by seeking to buttress and expand the good already happening. In other words, the church may offer space in her facilities to the grandmothers who are watching the kids, or they may remit the monies they were going to use to start a childcare center to those grandmothers, making their care more effective.

Catholic Social Teaching refers to this principle as subsidiarity—namely, that problems should be handled at the most local level possible. The Neo-Calvinist doctrine of sphere sovereignty is apropos as well. However one defines the phenomena, it's

⁷⁷John Perkins, *With Justice for All* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1982), 60.

essential to recognize that nearness and presence is necessary for genuine ministry to occur. When Jesus sought to transform and save the world, he came into the world. More to the point, he didn't come into the world generally, but he came to a particular town, a particular family, at a particular town. This principle of incarnation must animate the church in her engagement with her particular dwelling.

Of course, the incarnation principle can be used to do exactly that which Goldberg says leads to the tribalism that is destroying the West. By accenting the particular, aren't we negating the other? Perhaps, but it need not be so. Mark T. Mitchell's essay within *Why Place Matters* points out:

What we might call "humane localism" appreciates the variety of local communities and resists the homogenizing impulse that is so strong in modern liberal democracies. It recognizes that the language of the global village represents an abstraction that will never satisfy human longings. Humane localism is characterized by a love for one's particular place, yet at the same time it is not animated by fear of the other, for by an act of imagination it sees through the inevitable differences and recognizes the common humanity we all share. It recognizes that we are all living souls with needs and longings that bind us together even as the particulars of our own places remind us of our distinctness. In short, humane localism is rooted in respect, not in homogeneity, in a recognition that liberty is sustainable only alongside respect for limits, and in the realization that human flourishing is best realized in the company of friends and neighbors sharing a common place in the world.⁷⁸

There is an analogy in theological parlance. One is not somehow less catholic by being more tied to their local church. On the contrary, the better the churchman the more

⁷⁸Mitchell, Mark T, "Making Places: The Cosmopolitan Temptation," in *Why Place Matters: Geography, Identity, and Civic Life in Modern America*, ed. Wilfred M. McClay (New York, NY: Encounter Books, 2014), 101.

catholic their faith. Their unity with believers across the globe is tied to their unity with believers in their given congregation. So it is with neighboring. We love our particular place, but our service on a human scale ultimately should foster an affection for the human race more broadly.

Micro-Christendoms, then, are embodied, outward facing Christian communities that exist for the sake of their place. Micro-Christendoms imagine what their localities will look like redeemed, and then seek to join God on his mission to do just that. Micro-Christendoms seek the welfare not of mankind generally, but of particular cultures and particular peoples and particular neighborhoods.

Conclusion

Culture war is not the needed paradigm for today's church, but neither is cultural retreat. What's needed is a Christian political witness on a human scale. A witness that sees the broader culture as made up of neighborhoods, one that sees neighborhoods as formative for citizens, and one that sees the church's vocation as caring service and embodied formation of the neighborhoods in a spirit of anticipatory gratitude. What's needed, in short, are Micro-Christendoms.

Chapter 6

Reading in New Localism

Thus far, we've looked primarily to Scripture and tradition as guides in the effort to renew local cultures. In this chapter, I will glean insights from what's sometimes referred to as "the new localism." This chapter will come in three parts. First, I will outline the tenants of the new localism, drawing upon *The New Localism* by Katz and Nowak. Second, using the work of Jane Jacobs, I will locate the city in the new localism. Lastly, I will attempt a pastoral appropriation of the new localism.

New Localism: An Introduction

In *The New Localism*, Katz and Nowak investigate how cities and metropolitan regions wield the economic, demographic, and social power inherent to them—affecting change while many state and local governments fail to do the same. The crux of *The New Localism* emerges from the idea that cities are rejecting the previously held misconception that they are beholden to state or federal governments. Now, Katz and Nowak observe, cities are entering into the public market as local, federal, and global players in their own right.

Katz and Nowak are not just commenting on this change in how cities operate in the world. Rather, they believe this change is vital to success for anyone, individual or country. In a world where state and federal governments are drowning in partisan gridlock, "problem solving has become localized." Cities are utilizing the resources

available to them to solve local problems without input from state or federal entities. This is new localism, a problem-solving philosophy that embraces diversity, is guided by pragmatism, and governs with an eye for long term growth.

While new localism is concerned with many of the same issues as populism, such as the central focus economic disparity, new localism's focus on diversity, pragmatic results, and long- term growth make it the opposite of populism. Despite the subtitle of the book, populism does not receive much attention in *The New Localism*. What little space is given to populism is often given in response to how populism and new localism address similar problems but from varying points of view.

The book is arranged with a framework laid out in the first chapter to help the reader understand the rise and impact of new localism. That framework has 5 key points: First, New Localism is not synonymous with local government as new localism is multisectoral. Second, the transfer of power from state and federal governments to more local levels is not an argument for doing away with state or federal governments, as they offer vital safety net services that new localism requires to thrive. Indeed, the ability for new localism to thrive relies on federalized governments providing only what they do well and leaving more localized problem solving to cities and municipalities.

Third, as a problem-solving measure, New Localism must be open to new ideas and a diversity of constituencies. "New Localism occurs at the intersection of local capacity and global change, where innovation is primary, and the status quo is no longer sufficient." Fourth, New Localism does not discriminate between district, county, city, or

metropolitan local levels. While this may be the case for New Localism as a whole, the New Localism is primarily centered on cities and urban areas. Fifth, New Localism is the direct result of partisan politics and the “consequent withdrawal of the federal and state governments as reliable partners.” As such, this is a very American-centered work, even though new localism is not a wholly American phenomenon.

New Localism, Katz and Nowak argue, sprang up in earnest in the second half of the 20th century when cities were in decline due to “racial discrimination, zoning laws, political fragmentation, changes in transportation, a decline in manufacturing, tax policy, consumers desiring larger homes, high crime rates, and the decline of urban public institutions.”⁷⁹ Federal urban policy during the beginning of this decline (the 60’s and 70’s)—focused largely on poverty and affordable housing, which did little to address the underlying issues that created the poverty and need for housing in cities.

While the federal government was offering up one size fits all solutions to city decline, local governments stepped in to revitalize their cities on their own. This revitalization relied on and was caused by a changing global economy, demographic demand, and new cultural preferences. In other words, cities became players in the global economy thanks to their research, medical, and academic institutions.

⁷⁹Bruce Katz. *New Localism: How Cities Can Thrive in the Age of Populism* (Washington, D.C., Brookings Institution Press, 2017), 23.

City living, and its smaller housing, became more attractive to smaller families, empty nesters, and single professionals. And tv shows like *Friends* and *Sex and the City* made city living look fun and hip. However, these changes were also partnered with new governing practices in cities, less reliance on federal government to solve a city's needs, and a greater reliance on local governments working with other institutions to make cities their own vibrant economy.

New Localism is also possible because of and in response to globalism. "Globalization not only creates a hyperconnected world, it opens up new means for expressing local identity and new possibilities for local development strategies."⁸⁰ Globalization both creates the problem new localism addresses and helps make new localism the solution to those problems.

This is due to the *structural effect* (cities and other subunits inside countries no longer need the larger national unit to negotiate for them on the world market,) the *spatial effect* (cities becoming more and more important as hubs in the global economy), and the *leveling effect* (economic advantages being spread out among more places due to technology, of globalization). Cities can rely on their nations to provide security and safety net policies for their citizens, which frees up cities to compete on a global level in the arenas they choose.

⁸⁰Ibid, 43.

Viewed in this way, new localism is the positive response to globalization, standing in contrast to populism with its grievance based, short term solutions. These structural, spatial, and leveling effects also allow cities to tinker with and adjust to the challenges globalization brings—such as loss of manufacturing jobs in places like Pittsburgh—in order to find solutions that might be applicable on a bigger scale. New localism, then, does not just operate as a local answer to globalization; it is the test room for national policy solutions to globalization.

To provide more concrete analysis of their claims about New Localism, Katz and Nowak turn to actual cities that are reaping the benefits of a New Localism mindset. Pittsburgh, Indianapolis, and Copenhagen are all experimenting with new forms of growth, governance, and public wealth. Pittsburgh has turned itself around from a victim of deindustrialization to a high-tech global hub by making its regional economy a global one and “prioritizing long-term investments in innovation assets, talent, and quality places.”⁸¹

Indianapolis shows the broad definition of governance that New Localism requires through a governance that reaches beyond just the mayor’s office and brings in local universities, philanthropies, businesses, and civic organizations into a co-governance structure. Copenhagen provides an example for how cities utilizing New Localism ideals can tap into local revenue to fund their endeavors. They are reclaiming

⁸¹Ibid, 59.

public assets within the city to create new public purpose revenue. These chapters function as proof of concept for Katz and Nowak in that they do not add much to their discussion of New Localism except to show that the ideas already discussed are not just ideas, but realities in cities across the world.

After the examples, Katz and Nowak turn to the issues that New Localism must address in order to continue to have the success it has achieved so far. New Localism must integrate economic growth and economic inclusion to have sustained success. In other words, for New Localism to work, people from all socioeconomic backgrounds must be able to reap the rewards, especially lower income residents of cities. Katz and Nowak believe innovation in public K-12 education should be the primary focus. New Localism will also need new sources of capital if it wishes to finance these long-term investments, especially as much of a city's current revenue is likely locked up in paying for pensions and legacy cost constraints. Coining the term "metro finance," Katz and Nowak discuss ways that public purpose capital can be used to finance the dreams of New Localism. This metro finance, like a lot of things in New Localism, is a multisectoral endeavor between philanthropies, civil society capital intermediaries, impact investors, public sector investment intermediaries, and major research universities.

Katz and Nowak then lay out the areas that they deem most need financial investments for the continued success of cities in a New Localist world. These include

investments in innovation districts, regional investment funds, infrastructure, public asset corporations, children, and local lenders of first resort.

Finally, Katz and Nowak bring it all back together with a call to action for problem solvers. Reminding readers that New Localism is about reimagining power as it seeks to tap multiple sources of local power that can give cities economic growth, inclusion, and renewal. New Localism seeks to buck the conventional wisdom that cities must be subservient to the state or federal government; indeed, New Localism is bucking this wisdom.

This is happening in numerous ways, as numerous as the different cities adopting New Localist practices to revitalize their future. For Katz and Nowak, this all comes back to a focus on problem solving and pragmatics. City leadership needs to be focused on solving problems creatively using untapped resources to address the problems arising from globalization rather than give into the grievance-based solutions of populism. In the end, there is little doubt that New Localism is indeed a new way forward for cities and regions in a globalized and globalizing world.

The City in The New Localism

Written in 1961, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* is a seminal book for those seeking to understand and nurture a thriving city-life: architects, sociologists, politicians, and city planners. Jane Jacobs writes with the zeal of a convert, having at one time found large city planning a plausible, even positive good for the economy of cities. This book is more than a *mea culpa*, however: it is a comprehensive and cohesive guide

to building cities on a human scale, from the bottom up rather than from the top down. As she said, “Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody.”⁸²

Her point is simple, but important: city planning must be done not from an ivory tower or a state capitol but it must originate in the cities themselves. The foe of the book is those city planners who impose a vision of city life upon particular neighborhoods. They are the people who build parks which go unused, then blame the inhabitants for not using the good they were provided—as if the people are too dull to understand how a swing and slide are to be used. They are the people who have complex, albeit logical, ideas of city organization: the large roads put in to connect the business district with the upper-class housing with the restaurants with the shopping area. Each space has its neat and tidy area.

Jacobs’ vision ran in the other direction. Rather than imposing the will of a logical, dispassionate stranger upon a city, Jacobs wanted to study the city as it actually existed—its intricate connection of districts and streets. She took a posture of humility when it came to the city, assuming the small businesses, neighbors, and schools understood the complexity of their economy better than a bureaucratic expert. The book shows a reverence for the sort of spontaneity that marks any flourishing society. This

⁸²Jane Jacobs *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York, NY: Modern Library, 2011), 73.

order is not the result of a plan given on high but appears organically amidst the intricate web of institutions as they interact with one another. As she puts it beautifully:

Under the seeming disorder of the old city, wherever the old city is working successfully, is a marvelous order for maintaining the safety of the streets and the freedom of the city. It is a complex order. Its essence is intricacy of sidewalk use, bringing with it a constant succession of eyes. This order is all composed of movement and change, and although it is life, not art, we may fancifully call it the art form of the city and liken it to the dance—not to a simple-minded precision dance with everyone kicking up at the same time, twirling in unison and bowing off en masse, but to an intricate ballet in which the individual dancers and ensembles all have distinctive parts which miraculously reinforce each other and compose an orderly whole.

The ballet of the good city sidewalk never repeats itself from place to place, and in any one place is always replete with new improvisations.⁸³

One helpful way to get at the difference between Jacobs' understanding the vision of her interlocutors is the difference between French and English gardeners. While the French gardener flattens out the terrain and makes the plants appear geometrical and logical, thus bending nature to his "plan," the English gardener embraces the chaos and wildness of nature. It's not that Jacobs saw no role for "top-down" interference. Like an English gardener, there is a role for pruning and trimming, but that sort of interference should be done with a light touch, sensitive and respectful to nature—i.e., the spontaneous order of the city.

So, what's an example of such interference? To answer that, one has to reckon with what makes a healthy city in Jacobs' mind. A healthy city is one of diversity. Homogeneity is the ultimate enemy of a thriving city. In a healthy city, you have a

⁸³ Ibid, 74.

diversity of economies, a diversity of ethnicities, a diversity of building types, a diversity of income levels, etc. Perhaps counterintuitively, this diversity is what provides social cohesion in Jacobs' telling. If the restaurant district is isolated from the residential district, people will have to get in cars and travel to that area. On the other hand, if the restaurant is down the block, people can walk with their neighbors to get the food.

There are countless examples of the ways in which such diversity provides unity. To return to the question of top-down interference, Jacobs sees income inequality as a hindrance to such diversity. If the "free hand" of the market sets each price in a neighborhood, Jacobs foresaw the sort of gentrification that has taken place in many places. Such neighborhoods might have a diversity of business and residential properties; but if only the very wealthiest of us can live there, it nevertheless results in homogeneity. Thus, things like rent control—which isn't birthed out of spontaneous order—will be required to fix prices and allow a diversity of income earners to dwell in the same place.

These exceptions to the spontaneous order notwithstanding, Jacobs' general idea is that cities "cannot be a work of art." By that she meant that cities aren't the result of one artist—an architect building a neighborhood simply to display his brilliance. Again, she takes a British rather than French view of city-gardening: the lighter the outsider's touch, the better. Thus, Jacobs sought to preserve the unique and odd in a neighborhood. She wasn't looking to form some perfect platonic ideal of a city. Rather, she wanted to be sensitive to the unique features in a neighborhood.

You do this, she said, by making short blocks. That is, allowing each street to have its own unique personality. The beauty of a “corner bakery” or “corner bar” is that it resides at an intersection: between one street and another. It’s a meeting place. Jacobs saw various districts comprised of numerous such “corner” places—each street brought into the larger context of a district, and each district making up a city. Again, this vision goes against the planner’s vision of a city riding roughshod over the district with forces compliance vis-à-vis the streets. If you do that, you lose all uniqueness, all variety, which is the lifeblood of a healthy city.

Once one short street is truly diversified, a sense of home can be achieved without limiting the residents to one sort of job or income level. If the entire block is made up of inexpensive housing, it will cause the residents to move away once they’ve attained higher paying jobs. In a diversified street, once one gets a higher earning job, they need not move away. They can move into a more expensive apartment or house without moving away from the street. This provides a true sense of home. It also allows residents to know the breadth of the human experience rather than isolating in one cluster or another. It also keeps the wealthy from forgetting their roots, their fellow man. Further, the upkeep of the city will become a shared project. The schools will have a variety of stakeholders, as will the markets and restaurants.

Jacobs points to the fact that such a web of networks is needed for humanity to thrive. We aren’t meant to live in isolation from one another. Big city planning with large highways imposed as the organizing principle of a city have just this sort of

disenfranchising effect. Impositional city planning dislocates residents and disenfranchises citizens.

My critique of Jacobs has to do with her idea of human flourishing. While I think she and I would share a great deal in common vis-à-vis our idea of thriving city, I felt she took quite a bit for granted as she articulated her vision. For example, consider her insistence upon economic diversity. It seems to me that if one went to a neighborhood in New York City which she lauded—low rise buildings, mixed use spaces, places in which various sorts of economic activity takes place—one simply doesn't see the economic diversity she would desire.

Of course, she would insist that that is a failure of the State—an instance in which imposition was needed. However, it strikes me that the reality of such places leaving out the poor point to the fact that it's not a given that their presence is a good thing. As a Christian, I understand the poor have something to contribute to the neighborhoods because they are made in God's image. However, if that isn't a given on one's formulation, it must be asked: why have the poor in a neighborhood? Indeed, as gentrification has taken over so many U.S. cities, that question has been answered negatively. In other words, while I agree with Jacobs' conclusion, I'm not sure it's as self-evident as she assumes.

A Pastoral Appropriation of the New Localism

In the remainder of this chapter, I will share some things I think are important for pastors and church leaders to glean from the New Localism. I want to emphasize three points: diversity, distinctiveness, and particularity.

First, let's consider diversity. Just as a healthy city, street, or district needs diversity, so too does the body of Christ. Too often, local churches have adopted a parochial uniformity. The church shares a similar ethnic, cultural, and income level member base. In other words, the church is something akin to a "club." Paul's point in comparing the church to a body is that it should have diversity—an eye alone does not make up a body.

Sadly, local churches have tried to congregate around gifting, sensibilities, etc. such that they're functionally all elbows, all noses, or all knees. Drawing on the new localism, churches need to be mindful of the value of having a diversified congregation. As mentioned earlier, Christians have good reason to believe this diversification is a net positive. If all believers are made in God's image, each person has something to offer the larger body. It is not, it should be noted, that the "lesser" need the "greater" in the congregation. It is, rather, that there is no distinction between the members: no Jew, no Gentile, male, or female. Each person has something to offer; each has a need to be met. Only through a true diversification can such a give-and-take be realized.

Second, distinctiveness has a part to play. One thing that struck me about Jacobs' work was the importance of distinctiveness in a city's life. The heavy hand of the planner

has the unintended—or in some cases, intended—consequence of flattening every curve, softening every edge. The city, when heavily manipulated, becomes generic—Uptown looks like Downtown, the West Side looks like the East Side.

A vibrant city can hold in balance the distinct flavors of their various constituencies and businesses. A master planner puts in a Chili's while an organic city includes hole-in-the-wall bars which couldn't—and shouldn't—be duplicated elsewhere. How does this apply to the church? It frees the church to be distinct, to be unique. On the one hand, Christians should be "all things to all people" in order to reach them, but the church ought not lose her "churchiness."

That is, the church has a specific, distinct role to play in a city. It not in and of itself "the city." It is a component of the city. To be a healthy contributor to the city, it has to have a self-understanding that is distinct from the restaurant, the theater, the civics club, etc. As an Anglican clergyman, this frees me to view my job not as a community organizer—though there's no doubt overlap between pastoral ministry and that vocation—but as a sacramentalist, a preacher. The church doesn't need to look exactly like a coffee shop. It can look unique and distinct from its city. In so doing, counter intuitively, it helps the city.

Lastly, one point that came up over and over again in the New Localism reading was the reality that cities can become victims of their own success. They are unique, quirky, and fun because of their particularity. Then, the affluent move in, displace those citizens who built the city, and kill the city with the weapon of homogeneity. The city

worked; and its own success killed it. The U. S. is replete with such examples, from New York to San Diego, from Portland to New Orleans.

Churches, too, can suffer the same fate. Churches can become so large they no longer resemble the particular place in which they reside. The church feels more like a Chili's than a dive bar. Churches must consciously fight against this "victim of their own success" reality. One way in which they can do this is by investing in real estate. This runs counter to much church planting advice, which suggests you stay mobile. That model makes sense if you're looking to grow numerically. After all, you don't want to buy a new building for every fifty people you add to the membership.

However, if a church is committed to representing a particular place, it can invest in facility that belongs to that place. Zoning laws make this especially challenging, but churches should do their best commit to a locale, a place, and remain. As they grow, they can plant churches in other localities. The ambition, however, is not numerical growth per se, but the flourishing of the city. There's no question the modern church has failed to seek the well-being of the city and the glorification of God above numerical growth. The New Localism offers a call of repentance to us.

To renew a place, one has to first understand one's culture. Cultural exegesis will be key in any effort to appropriate the insights of those writing on the new localism. If the church wants to have a mission encounter with such thought, she must understand her nature missionally. After all, what is the church? It's not a building, we know. It's not a set of programs or name. For as easy as it is to say what the church isn't, saying what the

church is can be quite difficult. That's the task taken up by Lesslie Newbigin in his piercingly punchy little book, *The Household of God*⁸⁴. How one answers the question, it turns out, is of great import not only on how one thinks of Sunday, but of the whole of life. Newbigin sees three possible ways of answering the question.

For some the church is defined wholly by the faithful proclamation of the gospel. In this framework, it is the *head* that is the locus of ecclesiology. Right belief—orthodoxy—is key to what makes up a church. To be sure, a church might well apostatize itself if it doesn't have right belief on key issues—the deity of Christ, for example—but is right belief alone enough to make up a church? What separates, say, a faithful Bible study from a church?

This brings us to the second suggestion of what makes up a church—its sacramental life. Obviously, there are groups of people who meet together and have very orthodox views, but that doesn't make their meeting a church. The sacraments are classic marks of a church. Yet, for as much as Newbigin agrees that the sacramental life is vital for a church, the question remains—is it sufficient? The sacraments, on their own, are not sufficient to make up a church. What else is needed?

The third thing— or Person, actually— people point to in marking a church is the Spirit. If evangelicals emphasize doctrine, and liturgical churches like Roman Catholicism emphasize the sacramental life of the church, there's no question

⁸⁴Lesslie Newbigin. *The Household of God* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1953).

Pentecostals and charismatics emphasize this last point. However, the presence of the Spirit is not an exclusively charismatic marker. To the contrary, according to Newbigin, anywhere a true church exists, the Spirit is there.

As a minister in the Anglican Mission in America, the sort of “three streams” approach taken here by Newbigin is familiar. Both the head (orthodoxy) the hands (our sacramental life) and the heart (the Spirit’s quickening) is crucial for a full-orbed ecclesiology. Often, people will join such a three-stream church comfortable only with one or two of the streams, but each stream working together is vital for a rich congregation.

Yet, Newbigin doesn’t stop at identifying and affirming these three emphases of “what makes a church.” Newbigin adds another marker that provides harmony and teleology to each stream: mission. It would be easy for each of the streams taken in isolation to become a club. Take, for example, the orthodox stream. Alone, it could be a club of right belief. The “in group” are those who believe rightly while the “out group” are those who believe wrongly. The sacramental stream, also, can work with a similar dynamic. Church can become overly fastidious with regards to its liturgy. The Spirit emphasis, likewise, can be a club of who can speak in tongues, prophesy, etc.

In emphasizing mission, Newbigin is saying that even if we get everything right, we can still not have the mark of the church if we exist only for the benefit of those in our church. The church is meant to exist for the benefit of those on the outside, not the

interior faithful. Mission is a way of orienting us toward the other, toward the neighborhood.

Key to understanding how we ought to exercise our mission is understanding the collapse of Christendom. While paganism ruled the past, the early Christians, by preaching the gospel, displaced the gods of old with one Lord: Jesus. This leads up to the time of Christendom. In Christendom, Christians gain immense political power. The culture becomes “Christianized.” In such a context, the church has a unique role to play not only in forming the morals of a civilization, but also its mores and taboos which become codified into law.

An article title in the British magazine *The Telegraph* is a helpful, practical way to understand a post-Christendom context: “80 per cent decline in religious funerals as mourners opt for golf courses and zoos over churches.”⁸⁵ At first this seems like just another odd quirk of our postmodern culture, but this is about more than just evolving mourning practices. Whether it’s progress or devolution, this “fad” says something about the flow of Western culture.

As the writer notes: “Eight-years-ago 67 per cent of people requested traditional religious services and just 12 per cent were non-religious. However, by 2018, just 13 per

⁸⁵Gabriella Swerling, “80 Per Cent Decline in Religious Funerals,” *The Telegraph*, 08/28/2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/08/28/80-per-cent-decline-religious-funerals-mourners-opt-golf-courses/>.

cent wanted a religious funeral.”⁸⁶ This rising phenomenon of non-traditional funerals speaks to the rapid decline of religious observance in the West.

Mind you, the fact that churches and other formal spiritual sites aren't being turned to in times of grief is hardly surprising to anyone who has been following religious trends over the past 30 years. So, it isn't striking where the funerals aren't being held, but where they are: shopping malls, McDonald's, golf courses, and zoos. Why the change?

One might expect the religious vacuum of culture to be filled by service organizations like the Lion's Club or the Boy Scouts, but it's not the structures of altruism that are attracting these funerary innovations. It's the institutions of consumerism and entertainment that are filling the space once held by the church.

I recently saw an image from a marketing conference that illustrated this perfectly. It showed a man on stage with the words on the screen behind him declaring, “Turn customers into fanatics, products into obsessions, employees into ambassadors, and brands into religions.” The non-traditional funerals are just one example of the ways in which marketers are succeeding in their efforts to become the new priests of Modernity.

Think of the central calling of the church: to proclaim the good news, the *euangelion*. Today, that role has been assumed by marketers. In an alternate universe where culture remained heavily influenced by the Christian faith, there would be a

⁸⁶ Ibid.

common moral horizon. Sure, some people in that culture wouldn't know Jesus, but they would still largely assume a Christian worldview. In that context, the message of Jesus really is heard as good news. The people feel guilty when they sin, and the notion of grace relieves their shame. This is not our world.

In Modernity, those things once assumed are now explicitly rejected. To sell a sweater, marketers are telling a different story, one in which their product is the savior. "You were created for attention and praise," they insist. "Your problem is that you're drab and unfashionable. This sweater, however, will save you." This product—be it a sweater, a car, or a phone—is more than an accessory, it's an identity, it's a redeemer. It doesn't belong to you so much as you belong to it. This is the *euangellion* of the marketers of Modernity.

Once a culture has moved from Christendom to Consumerism, the church can't assume her message of grace is understood, as such. So long as the people understand their main calling in life to be entertainment, enhancement, and expression, our message of sin will fall on deaf ears. So long as the people think their main problem is simply a lack of resources or education or comfort, Jesus' saving work on the cross will seem an irrelevant abstraction.

The church's calling, then, is to "re-narrativize" the West. We must reframe the very idea of teleology and vocation for people. We were created to live in the presence of God. The isolation we feel from others, indeed from our own selves, is the result of sin—that thing in all of us that causes us to ache and hate and hunger. It's only when this

groundwork is done that the good news of Jesus becomes understandable. Jesus takes the sins of the world upon himself, thus removing the barrier that prevented us from living in the presence of God.

Once a consumer becomes a Christian—the buyer becomes a believer—it’s not just that she rejects the thing being sold to her, it’s that she rejects the entire creation/fall narrative the marketers are telling and selling. Once re-narrativized by the church, it becomes clear that the product being sold by the world can never offer real wholeness or true redemption, because it can never take away our actual problem and it can never give us that which we were created for.

Few things provide more insight as to the true faith of a people than the way in which those people handle the dying and the dead. The decline of religious funerals says something about the decline of the church; the rise of nontraditional funeral venues like shopping malls and golf courses says something about the new religion of Modernity, Consumerism.

For the church today, our job is to help “sell” the story of the gospel of Christ to a world consumed by a dismal fairy tale. We are to remind the world that its false *euangellion* of Consumerism will never deliver on its promise, but only in the true story can they find what they seek. It’s to this storytelling that Christians have been called, and it is in this hope that the world may find the peace for which it is so desperately looking.

Newbigin, a missionary very keen to looking at cultural context, recognized that the West is in a fundamentally post-Christendom context. If the church views her role, as

she did for so long, as the stewards or guardians of culture, she won't recognize that the people aren't listening or looking to her. This isn't to say that the West is in the same place as Newbigin's mission field of India. To the contrary, the secular, post-Christendom West isn't pagan, but neither is it Christian.

With all this in mind, Newbigin is insistent that the church ought to view her role the way the early church viewed its role: as evangelizers and missionaries, not chaplains of an empire. The distinction is vital to be reckoned with if the church is to have any role whatsoever in a post-Christian context. In a world marked by biblical ethics, the church can view herself as a club to a large degree. There are various cultural forces which push people toward the church.

In Christendom, social capital is lost if one disaffiliates with the church. In Christendom, there's social capital lost if one violates a biblical norm—like staying faithful to a marriage—therefore, the people are incentivized greatly to remain “in.” Post-Christendom, however, offers no such social capital. Indeed, it offers the reverse: people lose social capital if they go to a church, just as they lose capital if they hold to many of the more controversial biblical ethics.

We are all missionaries, therefore. We can't depend upon the powers that be. Indeed, we find ourselves, often, in conflict with the powers that be, political and otherwise. The good news, of course, is that the church has found herself in such a place before. Paul lost capital when he became a Christian. The early disciples were summarily

executed by the powers that be for their faith. And yet, the church grew. The Spirit did his work. The sacraments were administered and the word faithfully proclaimed.

What's needed in post-Christendom, Newbigin argues, is a renewed focus on our mission. The club mentality could work in the past, but not anymore. When thinking about the sacraments, we have to ask "Why?" When thinking about the exercise of spiritual gifts, we have to ask, "For what purpose?" When studying the Scriptures, we have to ask, "To what end?"

These are missiological questions. Newbigin isn't saying that the three streams are unimportant or can be replaced by a sole emphasis on mission. To the contrary, mission is simply a way to give teleology and direction to the three streams. In conclusion, Newbigin powerfully answers the question "What is a church?" by drawing our attention to the question, "Why is there a church?"

Approaching the subject this way reorients the means by which we view mission, but it also reorients the way we view church, and specifically the way we view worship. It's here that the work of missiologist Ruth A. Myers becomes helpful. In her book, *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission: Gathering as God's People, Going Out in God's Name*⁸⁷, Meyers lays out a compelling and lucid case that worship and mission don't need to be integrated. At first blush, this thesis may seem odd for one who has been as involved in the missional conversation to posit. After all, everything, we're told, should

⁸⁷Ruth A. Myers. *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission: Gathering as God's People, Going Out in God's Name* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2014).

center around God’s mission in the world—why is it wrong to integrate mission with worship?

Myers answers this question by refuting the premise: namely, that worship and mission need to be integrated in the first place. The book powerfully contends that worship is, in the first place, a missiological act. Mission, says Meyers, is not an activity. It’s not an “add on” thing to be done, like a bake sale or Vacation Bible School. Rather, mission is an identity. It’s a marker of who we are.⁸⁸

Seen in this light, her counterintuitive thesis comes into its proper light: we don’t have a mission, we are a missiological people. To be missional, then, is to recognize the ontological alteration brought about by our election into Christ. We’re his, yes, but we’re also with him. We join Christ on his mission in all that we do. How do we join this mission more fully? Meyers draws on the work of two Roman Catholic theologians Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder to answer that question.

In their book, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, the authors offer two postures the church will need to adopt as they seek to live out their missional identity: prophetic and dialogical.⁸⁹

To say we need to be prophetic is to say that we need to proclaim the new eschatological reality brought about by the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder. *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (New York, NY: Orbis Books, 2004).

Jesus. In him, the Father is reconciling all things—he's bringing unity where there was once disharmony. Applied to the worship service, Meyers wants us to see that being missional and being faithful in Apostolic preaching aren't mutually exclusive. To the contrary, it is in the sacred pages of Scripture that we find our missional identity.

Therefore, we must not sacrifice proclamation at the altar of mission. Not because the former is more important than the latter, but because they are not in conflict from the start.

It should be noted that the theme of mission can and should inform our prophetic voice. That is, the overarching theme of mission offers a hermeneutic by which we can interpret the particularities of a given text such that even when we're preaching on a passage that doesn't seem immediately relevant to our mission in Christ, we interpret that particular in light of the general theme.

To say we need to be dialogically sensitive is to say we must faithfully proclaim the holy Scriptures in conversation. Again, Meyers is clear that dialog isn't in opposition to faithfulness. Indeed, to be insensitive or deaf to the voice of the proverbial other would itself be unfaithful to our mission.

In the incarnation, Jesus takes upon himself the other. His mission is a missiologically, outwardly focused one. How, then, could his people join him in that mission if we ourselves aren't willing to dialogue, engage, indeed live in the skin of our community? We can't, therefore, only use our mouths to live out the mission; we use our ears—dialogically—as we listen and engage our community. Practically, this looks like having interreligious conversations with the mosques, synagogues, and temples in our

neighborhoods. It means understanding what our words mean to those to whom we speak and altering as necessary. It means humbling ourselves to the wisdom of all God's children, even those with whom we disagree.

The worship service, then, is an exercise in both prophesying and dialoging. It's a place where we speak faithfully, but in a way that can be understood by our community—which is to say incarnationally. We will know we're faithful to this mission if our service looks different than the assembly in another town. Faithfulness will no doubt mean we have similarities to the church across the state, but it will also mean there are differences. Our service will take on the skin of our neighborhood.

Of course, the title of Meyers' book alludes to the fact that she not only believes that worship is integral to mission, but that mission is part and parcel of worship. Meyers rightly contends that those activities typically associated with mission—evangelism, peacekeeping, justice advocacy, disaster relief, etc. are, in fact, acts of worship.

To worship, says Meyers, is to attend to God. In a worship service, of course, this looks like centering our attention to his means of grace—his word and the sacraments. But worship isn't restricted to Sundays. To the contrary, God calls his people to attend to the entirety of his actions in the world. His people, then, are beckoned to look with imaginative eyes of faith at their community, asking such questions as: What is God doing? Where is he active? In what ways is God planting seeds of resurrection on my block? How can I join in his restorative activity?

The illustration Meyers uses is evocative. The eucharist is like the very tip of a spinning top. It offers the energy and pull of the whole top. The edges of the top are made to join in the energy. For her, this means activities like reconciliation, environmental concern, etc. This was helpful for me to see that her main point—that worship and mission are already, by their very nature, connected—has real world application. If we train our eyes to attend to Christ in things as ordinary as bread and wine each Sunday, we'll have an easier time recognizing him in study centers for at risk youths, addiction treatment centers, and community Bible studies. Worship is an act of mission even as mission is an act of worship. The whole Christ is calling the whole of his people to attend to the whole of his mission to make the whole of broken creation whole again.

Conclusion

Thinkers writing in the New Localism can aid the church in her goal to renew those localities in which she finds herself. In order for the church to understand her very nature, she must understand her mission. To understand her mission, she must understand the culture around her. Today, that means understanding that the West is post-Christian and closer to something more consumeristic. In such a context, both the worship of the church as well her other activities need a renewed focus on how to tell the old story of the gospel in new, missiologically sensitive ways.

Chapter 7

Micro-Catholicity

To renew culture at the local level, the church must be unified. How can the church's Catholicity be realized at a local level and why is it important? Those are the questions this chapter seeks to address. While much work has been done regarding the macro-Catholicity of the church (i.e., unification at the level of "denominations"), my "practical ministry" project at La Salle, and thus this chapter, will offer a more modest "micro" proposal.

That is, I want to make a gesture that's very practical in nature toward a local catholicity, and I'll go about it in four parts. First, I'll provide an argument as to why the church is valuable to our civic life. Then, using G. K. Berkouwer, I'll make an argument for why a unified church is important. Third, I'll insist that schism needs to stop at the denomination level before schism can stop globally. Lastly, I'll show how micro-Catholicity fits into the overall thesis of the dissertation.

The Civic Importance of the Church

As communities collapse and families disintegrate, we continue to look to politics to solve a problem that's fundamentally cultural. Today, Washington, D. C. is expected to do that which can only be accomplished at the religious level. Yet, as the church is weakened, scattered through schism, and marginalized, the State is filling a role it was never meant to fill. So, who is calling citizens to lives of virtue?

Of course, there's always the danger of viewing the past with rose-colored glasses. Even at the time, Jimmy Carter was mocked for encouraging us to wear sweaters in the face of an energy crisis. Likewise, Nancy Reagan was mocked for teaching kids to "Just Say No" as the scourge of drug addiction wreaked havoc on our communities. Speaking the language of virtue and personal responsibilities always opens one up to scorn.

Yet, those episodes remind us that there was a time in which major political figures advocated small—personal and local—solutions to big societal problems. To understand where we find ourselves today, an episode from 2017 will be of help. In the aftermath of the Republican's inability to pass a "skinny repeal" of Obamacare, Senator Chris Murphy infamously tweeted, "Last night proved, once again, that there is no anxiety or sadness or fear you feel right now that cannot be cured by political action."⁹⁰

That comment doesn't just typify the politics of the Left, it also embodies today's Right. Republicans cheered enthusiastically as they heard Former President Trump respond to the complex, myriad challenges facing the country with, "I alone can fix it!" And while, to be sure, the Right and the Left want different people in charge, they fundamentally agree that the solution to our crisis is political.

⁹⁰ Chris Murphy.[@ChristMurphyCT]. 2017/07/28. Last night proved, once again, that there is no anxiety or sadness or fear you feel right now that cannot be cured by political action [TWEET]. Twitter.
<https://twitter.com/christmurphyct/status/890924515999526912?lang=en>

In this vein, Neil Postman's prescient book *Amusing Ourselves to Death* only gets more important with each passing year. "What the advertiser needs to know is not what is right about the product," he said, "but what is wrong about the buyer."⁹¹ Substitute "advertiser" with "politician" and "buyer" with "voter" and you can see how politicians are able to capitalize on the profound isolation and loneliness of their constituencies. It must not be underestimated: modern political campaigns have become remarkably adept at identifying societal wounds.

But is the political product being sold to us actually working? Tim Carney, in his book *Alienated America*, is skeptical. In short, his thesis goes like this: as we look to government to fix our problems, we stop looking to our neighbors. This leads to our continued disenfranchisement from our local communities, which only causes our problems to compound.⁹² Said differently, our political solutions are making our cultural problems worse.

Of course, some problems really can be alleviated by legislation. Whether one agrees or disagrees with Bernie Sander's solutions to our healthcare crisis, it wasn't absurd that a Navy Vet named John looked to the Senator for relief from his mounting

⁹¹Postman, Neil. *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2007), 13.

⁹²Carney, Timothy P. 2020. *Alienated America: Why Some Places Thrive While Others Collapse* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2020)⁹³Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics* (London, UK: Penguin Publishing Group, 2020), 102.

\$130,000 medical bills. What did take people off guard was John’s response when asked how he planned to pay off the debt, the man was suicidal.

Sanders responded with what the man needed in the moment: empathy and kindness. It was humanizing. I say *humanizing* because we saw Sanders respond not as a representative of the State, but as a human—one person speaking to another. The sort of despair that’s defining our cultural moment isn’t irrelevant to politics, but neither is it identical with politics.

No one who watched the video of the man crying out for help is under the guise that he’s simply in need of debt-relief. Our problems are of a magnitude that only deep, interwoven relationships in the context of a Christian community can address them. Sanders was able to offer John a personal connection that day, but he’s only one man. He can’t comfort everyone.

In discussing politics in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle makes the following point that’s as profound as it is obvious: “To the extent that people share in community, there is friendship, since to this extent there is also what is just.”⁹³

We can’t expect justice where there is no friendship, and we can’t expect friendship where there is no community, and we can’t expect a thick horizontal community without a vertical connection to God. This is the point Carney makes in his book—namely, the church has been the central institution for organizing community in

⁹³Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics* (London, UK: Penguin Publishing Group, 2020), 102.

American life. So, as the church is hollowed out, so too is America's civic life emptied, thus the moral and cultural life of America vacuously looks to Washington, D. C. to do for it that which can only be accomplished by the church.

The church, then, must take her social calling seriously. The problems facing the West—problems made worse by individualism, consumerism, and tribalism—require a church sure of her mission. As society becomes fragmented, the church must be unified. What is needed is a truly Catholic church.

The Importance of a Unified Church

G. C. Berkouwer, a Reformed professor at the Free University of Amsterdam, was perhaps best known for his monumental, multi-volume work in systematic theology, *Studies in Dogmatics*. In his book *The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism*, Berkouwer chronicles the developments which proceeded from the Second Vatican Council, which he had opportunity to observe as a guest of the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity.⁹⁴

While Berkouwer's reformational *bona fides*, are often discussed, Berkouwer's transcending passion to heed our Lord's desire for unity (John 17:21) is less well known. Berkouwer's work reads as equal parts religious journalism and systematic theology as he traces the developments of a more progressive form of Catholicism (going back to Pope John XXIII) with all the reactions and possibilities which flow from such an open stance.

⁹⁴G.C. Berkouwer. *The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1965).

Berkouwer's openness is seen most dazzlingly in his discussion of Scripture and tradition and the continuing dialectic that exists between them. Frankly, as a Calvinist who's always had an uncomfortable relationship with the doctrine of "sola scriptura," it was refreshing to read Berkouwer himself work through this issue. Too often, Reformed Christians refuse to acknowledge the problem of "whose interpretation" when discussing the primacy of Scripture.

Berkouwer allowed for a certain nimble reciprocity between the church and the Bible. Yes, the church looks to the Bible, but none of us come to the Word of God in a vacuum, with objective eyes, as it were. We read with some sort of interpretation; the question is, "Whose?"

This is just one example of the many false dichotomies (church or tradition) which keep unification from being realized. While I didn't find myself ready to go to Rome, I am heartened and chastened by Berkouwer's open and sympathetic ear to the Roman Catholic Church. In speaking about justification with a Roman Catholic friend recently, he asked the question, "Can one be saved by a dead faith?" This cut me to the core because, like Berkouwer had been doing to me, it exposed the number of false dichotomies I was carrying with me.

Another area in which I found Berkouwer helpful was the way in which he prioritized the crisis of modernity in his assessment of Rome. Indeed, the likely apocryphal Winston Churchill quote, "Never let a good crisis go to waste," materialized in my mind as I read Berkouwer's assessment of the (then) current state of ecumenical

dialogue. While Berkouwer's sympathies manifest in the debates between the conservative and liberal wings of the Roman Catholic church (he fears the liberals are posturing in such a way as to concede, rather than confront, modernity), he nevertheless appreciates the daunting challenges ahead of the whole church.

Thus, in engaging characters like Rahner and Küng, Berkouwer makes the point that even when the church can't agree upon what we should do, we can agree on that which we shouldn't: namely, be a victim of the coming hurricane of modernity. Thus, while he differs with the way in which some in the progressive wing of the Catholic church have engaged culture, that they're engaging it in the first place is heartening to him.

Questions of science, gender, and technology will create a sort of Catholicism by necessity if we're to survive. It strikes me that this is precisely where the ecumenical movement should focus its efforts. Of course, one could say this has been the case. Areas of religious liberty, pro-life causes, and the like are but a couple of examples of problems which have caused a co-belligerency between Christians of various stripes. John Paul II spoke of ecumenicism as not just being an exchange of ideas, but an exchange of gifts.

Yet, despite many wonderful examples to the contrary, by and large the ecumenical movement has retained the tacit assumption that there are theological areas that need to be worked out, then there will be a trickle-down effect upon communities. Bishops work things out, then priests, then deacons.

It strikes me that if we refocused our Catholicity on problem solving, the order would be reversed. That is, unity would start at the deaconate level—addressing real problems a community face. This could be things like systemic homelessness, public obscenity, abortion providers, etc. Then, once the Methodists and the Catholics are serving, there could be a shared shepherding plan.

By that, I mean it would move up to the level of priest. Instead of churches competing for membership with one another, they'd view the people in their parishes as sheep of the same flock—the Chief Shepherd's. Then, of course, this Catholicity needs to be expressed at the highest, most institutional of levels. This is the level of Bishops. It's important, but I think in trying to start here, at the theological and ecclesial level, we've missed a real opportunity for the “problem-based” Catholicity of which Berkouwer spoke.

The last area in which I learned from Berkouwer was his openness to the Spirit and confidence in God's sovereignty. For all his reservations about the progressive wing of the Catholic church, Berkouwer does indeed want to progress. That is, he sees the future not as a devolution, but as a hope-filled place of unity to which Christ is calling us. As one who's had reservations about the current Bishop of Rome, this was heartening to me.

It's easy to use our conservatism as an excuse for disunity. To have a purity test that even the Apostles, including Judas among their number, couldn't pass. Berkouwer's hope wasn't sentimentality or naivety. To the contrary, it was the confidence that the

Father would give his Son bread, not a snake. Thus, when Jesus prays for the unity of his people, the Father will hear that prayer. Berkouwer's forward-leaning disposition is one the church could do well to adopt as it seeks to listen with respect, engage honestly, and strive toward that wholeness to which we're called.

Unity Within Denominations

While I hope I've made it clear that I value Catholicity at a global level, I also think it's important that we start cleaning up the rooms of Christendom before we clean the house. Meaning, if individuals can't stop fracturing within their denominations, how can they be expected to have unity within the broader church? The reasons for such schism are plenty, but I want to point to the one I'm most familiar with as a Reformed Christian—namely, a fastidiousness toward doctrinal purity.

If one chooses a denomination because of her "best practices," one will always be disappointed. Yet, it strikes me that this is precisely why many people choose their church tradition. And inevitably, they end up being disappointed and causing schism. After all, Calvin won't be their Presbyterian, Cranmer won't be their Bishop, and their church won't be on Wesley's circuit.

Joining a denomination because of her strengths has a way of making the convert theologically fastidious at the expense of the church's peace and unity. We view ourselves as second-generation Israelites in exile, longing for a home we have never known. Depending on what one considers the "Promised Land," the denomination is too

rigid or too lax, too ingrown or too compromising, too modern or too post-modern, too traditional or too progressive.

With this mindset, the pastor-brother who does things differently is viewed as a competitor at best, and mere rust on a ship at worst. Churches, further, are simply battle grounds to be won or obstacles to be overcome. Everything becomes a purity test and everyone else fails.

This “competitor” and “battle” mentality is the natural result of choosing a denomination based on “best practices.” After all, think of the theological cage fights which brought one to the denomination in the first place. The choice between Catholic and Protestant consisted of a 4th century theologian against a 16th century theologian. If the Protestant won, you then pitted representatives from various traditions against one another: Calvin v. Arminius, or Whitfield v. Wesley.

All of this tussling and one still hadn’t landed on a denomination. Now one had to have Schaeffer v. Van Til, or Keller v. Hart. Each battle got more and more precise, moving from boxing matches, to basketball games, to chess tournaments. The circle of orthodoxy got smaller and smaller with each jousting round.

Of course, the problem isn’t with the competitions themselves. If there is such a thing as “truth” it’s worth finding, and we shouldn’t expect to come to it without much agony and sacrifice. The problem is with the stakes of the fights: namely, unity. If Keller beats Hart, you join the Presbyterian Church in America instead of the Orthodox

Presbyterian Church. However, there are people who sound more like Hart than Keller at the PCA General Assembly.

Surely, this won't do—after all, Keller won! One makes it their job, then, to reenact the “Keller v. Hart” match on the floor of General Assembly and in the halls of one's church. Again, in the mind of the arguer, the stakes are the same: denominational loyalty. The winner is “in” and the loser is “out.”

The alternative to choosing a denomination because of her “best practices” is choosing a denomination because of her “worst practices.” Then, one's choice isn't between “X 4th century theologian and Y 16th century theologian.” One can keep them both! Rather, one will decide between X sin (praying to an icon, say) and Y sin (anemic view of the sacraments, say).

Catholicity will be achieved if, in the first place, we choose our denominations because, at their worst, they still don't command us to do something God forbids or forbid us from doing something God commands. Meticulously account for the “worst” in each denomination, all along the way asking: “Can I live with this?”

If you one can't live with X in a denomination, then one should spare everyone the heartache and not join the denomination which consists of many who hold to X. However, if one is able to live with the state of the denomination, even after evaluating what you perceive to be her “worst practices,” then by all means, one should join.

This doesn't mean, of course, that one can't debate serious theological issues with one's brothers and sisters. It simply means that one's brothers and sisters are just that,

and neither the “winning” nor “losing” party will be excluded from the next family picture. We have to learn to make our peace with the church’s purity, and then do your best to preserve her purity and peace.

Micro Catholicity in the Neighborhood

Having discussed the importance of unity, and specifically denominational loyalty, I’d like to tie this chapter of my dissertation together with the rest of my dissertation. I’ve argued that cultural transformation is possible, but only if it’s pursued at a local level. In other words, it’s possible to renew a city block with concentrated effort, but national politics being as remote as it is, there’s little chance our efforts locally can correlate with national, political transformation. That being the case, the church should reinvest in her micro-cultural context. She should do the hard work of building programs and organizations that will revive the life of the neighborhood.

This applies to ecumenical relations too. If the church shifts to ecumenical relations at the diaconal level, as I’ve suggested, churches can engage one another in a more honest way. The Eastern Orthodox won’t need to compromise their distinctives as they work with the Pentecostals to make sure the neighborhood kids have a place to do homework after school. This sort of “structural unity” can lead to a “theological unity,” Lord willing. The goal would be for churches to work together more closely in acts of mercy and in so doing create the conditions necessary for an honest dialog to occur.

Again, this unity wouldn’t originate at denominational headquarters, it would originate at the neighborhood level. It would require churches to have more dialog with

the church down the street of a different denomination than with churches of their denomination in a different city. A micro-Catholicity, in other words, would require an identity that's geographically specific and theologically general.

This is the opposite of how we typically think of ourselves. In a globalized world, we typically think of ourselves as non-placed. That is, we're citizens of the world. Conversely, we tend to identify with very particular theological traditions. Micro-Catholicity would invite us to reverse that. It would invite us to see ourselves as citizens of a particular place while placing theological identity as generally Christians.

In conclusion, as a priest seeking to apply Catholicity practically, I've tried to argue first that the church, insofar as it provides moral formation and institutional connectivity to a population, is of value to the civic life of our country. Second, I've argued that real, embodied, unity between believers is the desire of our Lord and a real possibility by starting at the local, "diaconal" level of need. The third point is that the first step to a broader Catholicity will be through accepting the flaws in our particular denominations. Lastly, I tried to place this chapter in the larger context of my general thesis—namely, that place matters in how the church thinks through her mission to renew culture.

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