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Countering Consumer Culture: Educating for Prophetic Imagination Through Communities of Practice

Christopher J. Welch

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Countering Consumer Culture: Educating for Prophetic Imagination Through Communities of Practice

Christopher J. Welch

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Few would dispute the notion that consumerism is a prevailing feature of American culture. The extent to which consumer culture dominates the way most people see the world makes imagining alternatives to consumerism almost impossible. This stultification of imagination is highly problematic. As it stands, consumer culture, measured by the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, demonstrably tends to inhibit human flourishing on personal, social, and global levels. There is a need to transform consumer culture in order to support human flourishing more robustly, and this barrenness of imagination impedes that transformation.

This dissertation assumes that it is a task of teachers in faith to educate toward cultural alternatives that better support human flourishing. This task requires engaging in and developing what Scripture scholar Walter Brueggemann calls "prophetic imagination." The prophetic imagination involves both deconstructing the taken-for-granted dominant culture and entering into a community whose practices, values, and ideals effect an alternative culture. While here focused on consumer culture, this model of educating for prophetic imagination has broader applicability; it can also be used, for example, to challenge cultures of racism, sexism, and militarism.

This education in imagination develops in what scholars of management Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger call "communities of practice." Jesus and his disciples model for Christians a community of practice that imagines and acts prophetically. Communities of practice that educate for prophetic imagination ought to measure their own imagination against Jesus's prophetic imagination, shaped by his understanding of the Reign of God. This portrait of communities of prophetic practice is fleshed out in an exploration of empirical studies of communities that engage learners and draw them into an imagination that re-shapes not only how they see what the world is but also how they envision what the world can be.

Communities of practice that educate for prophetic imagination can foster the transformation of consumer culture into a culture that better supports human flourishing. In order to do so, however, they must start with an anthropology that adequately understands what flourishing entails. These communities ought to be attentive to three aspects of the human person that tend to be given short shrift in consumer culture: the person's role as a creative producer, the person's inherent relationality, and the person's need to embrace finitude, the limitations of human capability.

The Church should be utilizing communities of practice to overcome the sterility of imagination and contribute to a culture of what might be called *humanizing plenitude*. This culture supports the fullness of human thriving by re-imagining what that thriving entails and engaging in practices to facilitate it. The Church as teacher can be involved in this education for the purpose of cultural transformation to enhance human flourishing in various arenas. Finally, this

dissertation particularly proposes that this education can happen in higher education, in parishes, and in collaboration with the wider community.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents vii
List of figures viiiii
Acknowledgements ix

Introduction 1
Chapter 1: The Cost of a New Bike: Mapping Consumer Culture 14

Chapter 2: Understanding the Rider: A Theological Demand for Cultural Transformation 54

Chapter 3: Rethinking What the Bike is For: Prophetic Imagination 93

Chapter 4: Learning to Ride: Identity and Imagination in Communities of Practice 129

Chapter 5: Learning to Read the Map Like a Cyclist: Pedagogy for Cultivating the Prophetic Imagination Within Communities of Practice 177

Chapter 6: Taking It to the Streets: Educating for Humanizing Plenitude in Communities of Practice 201

Conclusion 228

Bibliography 250

Appendix: Bikes for Change Qualitative Study 269

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: A Snapshot of Sheila's Ecological Map 165

Figure 2: A Snapshot of Malik's Ecological Map 166

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I hope that my thinking has been guided by Mary J. Baker's love of life and genuine appreciation for its possibilities.

Introduction

I live in a city with a major marathon, where world-class runners from around the globe garner significant appearance fees and compete for prize money and sponsor recognition. A few years ago, on the weekend of the big race, the girls' track coach at a Catholic high school where I had taught organized a trip into the city for athletes to attend an event with one of America's top women marathoners. On the surface, it sounds great – allowing young women to meet a competitive, successful, and personable woman athlete, a model of confidence, dedication, and passion.

However, there are reasons for concern about this seemingly innocuous trip. The athlete was sponsored by athletics giant Nike, and the event was held at their own store, where the coach worked part-time. The athlete's talk focused less on her experiences as a woman and an athlete than on the latest equipment that Nike was rolling out, and, after the talk, the athletes were given the opportunity to shop for shoes and apparel. On the team's blog, the coach posted photos of smiling student-athletes displaying their purchases for the camera. That nobody at the school found anything troubling about this event points to the extent to which a corporate-dominated culture of consumption has colonized our imaginations and contributed to our failure in Christian religious education effectively to form people whose vision, practices, and communal identity offer a viable alternative to a culture of consumption. It is fair to say that churches have not, by and large, successfully taken on the consumer culture in our teaching and preaching, in our practices as communities, and, most significantly, in our minds and hearts.

This failure on the part of Christian churches is especially noteworthy because resistance to a culture of consumption has deep roots in both American secular culture and what Thomas Groome calls the Christian Story and Vision.[1] Theologians have assessed consumer culture in light of the Gospel, and found the culture wanting. However, Christian educators have generally failed to respond pedagogically to meet the theological critiques of the consumer culture in a way that brings more abundant life to the world. In this dissertation, I hope to play a part in remediating that pedagogical failure by offering a pedagogy for bringing religious ethics more robustly back into the transformation of the American culture of consumption.

In fact, separating secular mores from religious ethics on consumption is something of a departure from earlier thinking. Sociologist Max Weber set an agenda for the conversation around an ethic of consumption when he argued that a Calvinist work ethic paired with a disdain for conspicuous consumption was the foundation of wealth generation as capitalism took hold in Britain's North American colonies and, then, the United States.[2] While the extent to which his thesis is accurate can be debated, it is certainly true that there is a way in which the "Protestant ethic" that held significant sway over public morality in the United States bound religious formation with public consumption in ways that have become more tenuous, to be sure, but have never completely been absent from American history.

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[1] Thomas H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision*, 1st Jossey-Bass ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999).
[2] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003).

This Protestant ethic certainly had some influence on the curmudgeonly son of Scandinavian immigrants Thorstein Veblen, who in 1899 decried the "conspicuous consumption" of the Gilded Age as a wasteful and reproachable marker of social status.[3] His critique took on a new cast as the ostentatious consumption of a relative few was scaled up in the Roaring Twenties. Consumers had to be taught to consume more mass-produced goods, to overcome habits of mind that valued thrift over indulgence as both a practical matter and a vague moral imperative. When the end of World War II released consumer desires pent up by depression and war, marketers again sprang into action, and found a country willing to learn the lessons of easy credit, planned obsolescence, and a throwaway psychology. They are lessons that we have apparently learned quite effectively. Although pockets of philosophical, religious, and practical resistance to consumer culture have continued to exist, by and large we must consider them to run counter to the dominant culture of the past century, and especially of the last half-century, what we might call late-modern capitalism.

It is impossible in this brief introduction to cover the full scope and history of such movements of resistance, but here I want to highlight a few important strands that are worth following and in fact picking up intentionally today. I want to lift three particular aspects up for consideration because they point to the potential for broad resonance: the importance of personal flourishing as a motive for resistance; the occasional pairing of ethics of consumption with a concern for production; and a

[3] Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013).

burgeoning concern about consumer culture among theologians, not just secular thinkers.

The element of personal flourishing is often a motive for resistance to consumerism. A number of years ago, I worked in a religious bookstore. My observation was that there were only two types of window displays that seemed to increase foot traffic into the store. (Unsurprisingly, the store is no longer in business.) Books about (or purporting to be about) the historical Jesus were the biggest draw, but a close second were books related to a "simple living" theme. The growing rich-poor gap, the increasing globalization of the economy, and the pervasive, intrusive presence of media led to a flood of works analyzing the economic and sociological implications of a growth in American spending on what had previously been considered luxury goods. "Simplicity" was an attractive antidote. Such a theme was not unique to those end-of-millennium days; in fact many of the most popular works drew quite explicitly on the historical traditions of Franciscan[4] or Shaker[5] spiritualities. What seems to have made them particularly popular at that time was a pervasive sense that a life of increasing materiality and accumulation left many unsatisfied, even world-weary, and looking for an alternative to soothe their souls.[6] There is evidence that the digital age has amplified that dissatisfaction in some ways.[7] "Voluntary simplicity" became something of a

[4] Such as John Michael Talbot and Steve Rabey, *The Lessons of Saint Francis: How to Bring Simplicity and Spirituality into Your Daily Life* (Plume, 1998).
[5] See for example June Sprigg, *Simple Gifts: Lessons in Living from a Shaker Village* (Vintage, 1999).
[6] John de Graaf, David Wann, and Thomas H. Naylor, *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic* (New York: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2002).
[7] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

watchword of the late twentieth century,[8] supplemented by "downshifting" after the century turned.[9] Books on "simplifying" and "de-cluttering" life continue to appear (and to sell well).[10] In keeping with the times, blogs and social media groups around New Minimalism and a Decluttering movement promise to help us clear out the stuff we have accumulated, primarily for the purpose of more joyful living,[11] and podcasters offer advice and companionship along a journey of simplifying.[12] Of course, some offer to teach us uncluttering with a twelve-week course, for a fee.[13] Simplicity has become another commodity whose purchase promises greater satisfaction.

In highlighting the personal satisfaction motive, I do not mean to imply that the dimensions of duty and sacrifice in resistance to consumerism have been completely absent from discourse and action. Wars have been seen as an opportunity to right the country's ethical ship of affluence, and the Great Depression and, to a lesser extent, the stagflation of the 1970s and the "Great Recession" of the first decade of the 2000s were seen by some as the "moral equivalent of war," a time to make wholesale social changes. The "voluntary simplicity" movement has always contained an element of ecological and global consciousness about it, an ethos captured in, but hopefully not reduced to, catchy slogans like, "Live simply so that

[8] Duane Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity: An Ecological Lifestyle That Promotes Personal and Social Renewal* (Toronto; New York: Bantam Books, 1982).
[9] Juliet Schor, *Plenitude : The New Economics of True Wealth* (New York: Penguin Press, 2010).
[10] See for example a recent publication, Joshua Becker, *The More of Less: Finding the Life You Want Under Everything You Own* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2016).
[11] Cary Fortin and Kyle Quilici, “What Does Your Home Say About You?,” *New Minimalism*, accessed September 8, 2016, http://www.newminimalism.com/.
[12] Zaslofsky, *The Smart and Simple Matters Podcast JoelZaslofsky.Com*, accessed September 8, 2016, http://joelzaslofsky.com/sasm-podcast/.
[13] Joshua Becker, “The More of Less,” *Uncluttered*, accessed May 3, 2016, http://themoreofless.com/uncluttered.

others may simply live." Massive industrial losses in the 1970s and 1980s, mirrored by another round of "outsourcing" of both manufacturing and service jobs in the new century, have raised some calls for "buying American" or at least "buying Fair Trade." There are indications that Fair Trade and Green Consumption movements have indeed gained some traction.[14] A globalized consciousness informs movements such as "The Story of Stuff"[15] and "Where Are You Wearing?"[16] That being said, I still contend that the personal satisfaction of voluntary simplicity has been much more prominent than have the communal and globalized aspects. As for the sense of sacrifice that might be involved, America's rejection of President Carter's admonition to "put on a sweater" rather than raise the thermostat speaks volumes. Former Speaker of the US House of Representatives Tip O'Neill famously lived by the mantra that "all politics is local." Similarly, we might say that "all consumption is personal -- or at least partly personal."

A second strand of the history of resistance to consumer culture is that while the ethics of consumption have been prominent, some voices historically and today have paired concerns about consumption with an emphasis on production. Again, the turn to production as part of the story of consumption is hardly new. Karl Marx, for instance, identified what he called the "commodity fetishism" of capitalism,

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[14] David Wann, *The New Normal: An Agenda for Responsible Living*, Original edition (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2011).

[15] See the organization's website, "Story of Stuff," *The Story of Stuff Project*, accessed March 10, 2016, http://storyofstuff.org/. The organization started with Annie Leonard's short animated film exploring the origins and the human and environmental costs of cheap consumer goods. See also Annie Leonard, *The Story of Stuff: The Impact of Overconsumption on the Planet, Our Communities, and Our Health-And How We Can Make It Better*, Reprint ed. (Free Press, 2011).

[16] See Kelsey Timmerman, "Where Am I Wearing?," *Kelsey Timmerman*, accessed September 11, 2017, http://whereamiwearing.com/. The founder of the movement took on the challenging task of tracking the sources of the clothing that reaches the United States. See also Kelsey Timmerman, *Where Am I Wearing: A Global Tour to the Countries, Factories, and People That Make Our Clothes*, 2nd ed. (Hoboken, N.J: Wiley, 2008).

where social relations in the economic realm were no longer so much between persons as between "things." For Marx, this commodity fetishism was inseparable from a system whereby capital, in owning the means of production, exploited the worker.[17] Capital alienated the worker from the product of his or her own labor and even from a level of economic and personal autonomy. The commodity fetish and the exploitation of labor were two sides of the same coin. In another reaction to the Industrial Revolution, many of the utopian communities of the nineteenth century emphasized the need for members to produce their own goods, often agriculturally.[18] The Arts and Crafts Movement of the early 1900s included a similar emphasis,[19] as did, to some extent, the Catholic Worker Movement as it grew out of Depression-era New York.[20]

This impulse to produce, and to value production, is clearly alive in American culture in various guises. Sometimes, it can become perverted into its own mindless consumerist enterprise or a mere cultural caricature. So, homebrewing hobbyism may at times devolve into a competition to create the oddest microbrew. An appreciation for well-made steel bicycle frames with lugged joints may at times devolve into an ostentatious display of perfectly-vintaged down-tube shifters and custom paint jobs that signal social position more than they symbolize a genuine

[17] Robert L. Heilbroner, *The Worldly Philosophers: The Lives, Times And Ideas Of The Great Economic Thinkers, Seventh Edition*, 7th Revised ed. (New York: Touchstone, 1999), 131–63.
[18] This life of agricultural productivity did not suit everyone. Nathaniel Hawthorne was among the Transcendentalists who founded Brook Farm, but he famously complained that having to pike hay for part of the day was not part of his own utopian vision.
[19] David E. Shi, *The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).
[20] Works both about and from the Catholic Worker movement, and its founders Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, abound. Day's own history of the movement captures much of its essence with particular poignancy. Dorothy Day, *Loaves and Fishes: The Inspiring Story of the Catholic Worker Movement*, Reprint ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003).

concern for materiality. Nonetheless, even if an appreciation of production can itself be commodified, the impulse itself has a grounding in an authentic human longing.

Nor has this emphasis on production been limited to material goods. Cultural production, such as architecture, art, and popular culture, has been part of the consumption discussion as well. For instance, the Frankfurt School of Economics critiqued the postwar consumerist system for the culturally-plebeian fare with which it flooded markets -- kitschy art and mediocre movies.[21] Later theorists, however, began to see consumers as cultural agents, not simply as passive recipients. In mixing and matching clothing styles and in producing fan fiction, consumers become also co-creators. The ways in which even consumption is part of the production of culture,[22] the production of identity,[23] and the production of meaning[24] have mingled production and consumption in cultural and sociological studies.

Finally, this concern for consumerism has a role in the American ethos in general, but it also has been an area of particular concern in Christianity, and the shifts in consumer society over the last fifty years in particular have rightly brought consumer culture into theological focus. Actually, given that concern for wealth and how it is spent has, from the very ministry of Jesus, been an ever-present feature of Christian thought and practice, it is no surprise that theological thought on consumerism has proliferated. The disjunction between theological thought and

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[21] Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *The Consumer Society Reader*, ed. Juliet Schor and Douglas B Holt (New York: New Press, 2000), 3–19.
[22] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
[23] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice, 1st ed. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
[24] Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications & Open University, 1997).

pastoral practice only serves to highlight the challenges to educating for such theological and practical alternatives.

In 1981, Catholic ethicist John Kavanaugh published the first edition of his *Following Christ in a Consumer Society*.[25] Subsequent editions followed ten and twenty-five years later. While the later editions involved some substantial changes in statistics and cultural references -- after all, the bi-polar Cold War globe of 1981 had, by 2006, recognized its thoroughgoing globalization, the breakup of the Soviet Union, the emergence of China as an economic superpower, and more -- what is remarkable is that Kavanaugh's diagnosis of the culture of consumption, as well as his prescription for a more personalist society to replace it, was largely unchanged. While Kavanaugh's work was certainly not the first book of the era to bring a theological lens to consumerism, it was perhaps the most notable. It is the kind of book about which I have heard more than one person say, "It changed the way I saw the world."

The Christian concern has not ended with Kavanaugh, of course. Theologians like Tom Beaudoin[26] and Julie Clawson[27] have taken on the challenge of ethical consumption in a globalizing economy, and Mary Margaret Doyle Roche[28] highlights a concern for a theological anthropology of children in the maelstrom of turn-of-the-century consumption. William Cavanaugh sees in the seemingly-insatiable

[25] John F. Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society: The Spirituality of Cultural Resistance*, 25th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006).
[26] Tom Beaudoin, *Consuming Faith: Integrating Who We Are with What We Buy*, Pbk. ed. (Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward, 2007).
[27] Julie Clawson, *Everyday Justice: The Global Impact of Our Daily Choices* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2009).
[28] Mary M. Doyle Roche, *Children, Consumerism, and the Common Good* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009).

consumer desire a distortion of the endless desire for God, the same distortion that St. Augustine diagnosed as the cause of the spiritual unease of his younger self.[29] Vincent Jude Miller draws on the meaning-making practices of consumption and the tendency to separate those practices from their deep roots. He sees, then, in the consumption of even religious symbols in the creation of meaning a deracination that leaves meaning and tradition ephemeral.[30] Recently, theologians like Sally McFague have connected ethical consumption with ecological concern in an era of climate change.[31] Of course, Pope Francis[32] has also lent his voice to this conversation, to much acclaim from many theologians, but mixed reaction from a wider public.

So, then, given all of this concern, what is remarkable is how little has changed, how rarely this theology is preached from pulpit, or how rarely it seems to land in the pews, in parish religious education programs, in our high school and university classrooms, in our adult conversations, and, most importantly, in our practices and our imaginations. In this work, then, I critique the Church's failure to respond adequately to the malaises of what might be called late-modern capitalism. I point then, not only to a theology to meet the challenge, but also to pedagogical principles for forming Christian communities grounded in that sound theology.

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[29] William T. Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2008).

[30] Vincent Jude Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2004).

[31] Sallie McFague, *Blessed Are the Consumers Climate Change and the Practice of Restraint* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013).

[32] Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* (Vatican Press, 2015), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

In so doing, I have in mind the different elements of the task organized as metaphors related to buying and riding a bicycle. So, in Chapter One, "The Cost of a New Bike," I look first at the contours of consumer culture today, a culture that pushes us towards constant consumption. I assert that its perpetuation is at root a failure of imagination. I am informed by a theoretical orientation that understands cultural forces not to be neutral but instead to serve certain, often material, interests. I describe the effects of this consumer culture's dominance, effects that include significant personal, social, and global damage.

In the second chapter, I judge that culture of consumption from a theological standpoint. To do so, I first draw on principles from Catholic Social Teaching on the economy, and then I turn to competing visions of the human person -- the consumerist vision and a Christian personalist vision. Because of this anthropological focus, I see the point of this chapter to be not about the bike itself but "Understanding the Rider."

Having reassessed just who is riding the bicycle, it is then time to consider what the bicycle is for, to re-envision to what ends it can and should transport us. Towards rectifying the failure to imagine a cultural context that supports a more integral vision of human flourishing, in Chapter Three, "Rethinking What the Bike Is For," I propose that what is needed is a turn to the prophetic imagination. The prophetic imagination requires a deconstruction of the assumptions supporting the dominant culture and then a re-visioning of what the culture can and should be.

It is one thing, as either a child or an adult, to learn how to ride a bicycle in a field or parking lot. It is quite another to ride in a group, on the street, in traffic. It is

a learning that occurs in doing, in watching those with expertise, and eventually gaining one's own position of expertise. In Chapter Four, "Learning to Ride," I examine the way learning occurs in communities of practice. In this chapter in particular, I draw on qualitative research conducted among participants in a community of practice whose counter-consumerist practices include repairing and riding bicycles.

Becoming a proficient cyclist also means learning where to ride. Groups of cyclists teach each other how to look at a map differently. It involves a new way of seeing the world. The cyclist may look for squiggly lines that suggest a scenic route, or seek out bike lanes on urban roads, or avoid train tracks that might cause prove dangerous to navigate. Chapter Five, "Learning to Read the Map Like a Cyclist," sees communities of practice as loci not only of learning in general, but potentially of learning the prophetic imagination.

Having decided what kind of ride will fulfill her needs, having learned the skills and attitudes of a cyclist, and then chosen a route, the cyclist gets out on the road. In Chapter Six, "Taking It to the Streets" I propose elements of a pedagogy for prophetic imagination that fosters a culture that, unlike consumer culture, promotes the flourishing of the human person. I designate it a culture of "humanizing plenitude." It is a pedagogy that takes place in and across communities of practice. Finally, in the Conclusion, I choose three venues in which the Church ought to be educating for a prophetic alternative to consumerism. The Church can and should educate towards a culture of humanizing plenitude.

It is my belief and hope that the same principles that promote a pedagogy of critical consumption through communities of practice will be useful more broadly. The Church is called to imagine and to live alternatives not only to consumerism, but also to promote alternatives to a culture that allows militarism, racism, xenophobia, and ecological destruction. Educating for the prophetic imagination in communities of practice can be a pedagogical path to a culture that promotes humanizing alternatives to those cultural problems as well.

Chapter One

The Cost of a New Bike: Mapping Consumer Culture

In a conversation with a class of high-school seniors once, I mentioned that I was dreading an errand that would bring me to a large nearby shopping mall, explaining that I did not like being in that space. A number of eyes opened wide, and one student asked, incredulous, "So, what do you ***do****? Seriously, what do you do?" She simply could not fathom that my preferred leisure activities would not involve a shopping mall. Her bemusement was not particularly about me. It was not that* ***I*** *did not enjoy going to the mall; it was that* ***one*** *would have a life without voluntary leisure time at the shopping mall. Given that the students and I had just spent several weeks exploring the personal and social dimensions of consumer culture, I was taken aback.*

This anecdote presages three aspects of consumer culture that are worth developing further in this chapter. Firstly, it highlights the extent to which consumer culture -- and a particularly-contoured consumer culture -- is deeply rooted not only in our practices but also in our imaginations. This student simply did not have at her disposal alternative visions of consumption, even though her participation in class discussions had indicated a dissatisfaction with aspects of consumer culture. Her socialization into consumerism had been so successful as to exclude any other possibility. I argue that marketing is particularly effective as a carrier of this culture of consumption, and that therefore the proliferation of digital media, in providing ever more and more pervasive platforms for that marketing, further entrenches the dominance of consumer culture in our imaginations.

Secondly, there are certainly critiques to be made of consumer culture, and I suspect many readers rolled your eyes or shook your heads in mild exasperation at the student's comment. However, such a vague distaste is not an adequate critique. We cannot dismiss consumerism simply from the position of moralizing culture cranks who bemoan the failings of "kids today!" Critiques of consumer culture are particularly ripe for such crankiness and nebulous moralizing -- as demonstrated by Thorstein Veblen's critique of the conspicuous consumption of the Gilded Age[1] or Adorno and Horkheimer's turning up their noses at the artlessness of mass culture.[2] Such generalities are not adequate for critiquing consumer culture. While I contend that contemporary consumer culture is indeed problematic, it is not because it is vaguely distasteful, but because it tends to result in significant personal, social, and ecological harms. In this chapter, I address those harms in primarily secular language. In the following chapter, I assess those harms using more distinctly theological categories. Consumer culture and the materialism that it engenders are not aligned with a vision of well-being that accords with what religious educator Thomas Groome calls the Christian Story and Vision.[3] And yet, adoption of materialist values is part of socialization into consumer culture.

Finally, it is especially appropriate that this comment came in the context of a conversation with mid-late adolescents. While the culture of consumption that I describe here can be said to be operative across age cohorts, adolescents hold a place of particular importance in it. It is adolescents who are in some ways most

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[1] Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*.
[2] Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception."
[3] Groome, *Christian Religious Education*.

thoroughly in the process of socialization into the dominant culture of consumption, and therefore most susceptible to its demands, especially because they are so deeply involved in the process of identity formation. The normalization of consumer culture by adults is rooted in our "successful" socialization into it at younger ages. Moreover, because it is in late adolescence and early adulthood that people can begin to be coached into ways of thinking and knowing that allow them to question and begin to reconstruct their personal and cultural realities, it is those groups who offer the most high-leverage opportunities for social change. Religious organizations and educators must take particular note of this group in that they represent two tasks of religious education: nurturing and socializing people into a culture of human flourishing; and coaching people into moving beyond the given culture so that they may transform into agents and creators of the culture.

Consumer Culture

In order not to fall into knee-jerk and unfocused criticism of consumerism, it is helpful to begin by establishing at least some working definitions of a few key concepts, without asking those terms to carry more clarity than the concepts themselves can bear. Then, perhaps more usefully, we can round out the definitions with descriptions of the contours of what those concepts look like in the late-modern capitalism[4] of the United States in an increasingly digital and globalized

[4] To some extent the titles we choose to name the age are contingent on an unknown future, not merely descriptive of the present in relation to the past. Granting, then, the uncertainty around the future of modernity and of capitalism as usefully descriptive terms, I find "late-modern capitalism" to be at least as good a term to name the current economic context as any other.

economy.[5] A useful starting point, then, is to draw on theologian Vincent Miller's definition of "consumer culture" as "the cultural habits of use and interpretation of commodified cultural objects."[6] In the economic sense intended here, "commodification" is a term referring to turning anything -- material goods, ideas, people -- into an object of exchange.[7] So, consumer culture includes what gets commodified (or does not), how exchange happens, what it means, how people behave around that exchange, and what ideologies, named or not, underpin the structures of exchange, the behaviors, and the meaning-making around it all. Of course, while it is tempting to see culture as a monolithic whole in which structures, worldviews, and practices are all mutually reinforcing and stable,[8] in its natural habitat culture is more fragmented, malleable, and contentious than all of that.[9]

While I focus here primarily on the ways in which consumer culture is carried in what people practice, believe, and the meanings they make, the culture does not exist apart from the economic system and structures in which it operates. An economy that is increasingly dominated by transnational corporations fosters a different culture than would, say, an economy that depends primarily on small,

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[5] While much of this analysis surely will have resonance in other contexts, especially in the North Atlantic world, the default standpoint is my own context in the United States.
[6] Miller, *Consuming Religion*, 30.
[7] It is worth noting that the term "commodification" tends to carry a negative connotation. As an economic term, it is merely descriptive, but outside of the limited field it is also evaluative. Here, at least as far as the *definition* of consumer culture goes, I intend the term neutrally. Ethicist John Kavanaugh's critique of a consumer society built on the "commodity form" convincingly and negatively evaluates that term based on the idea that there are certain ways in which persons and what they have to offer should not be treated like every other commodity. They have a particular dignity beyond the marketplace. This critique informs my own critique of the culture of consumption in Chapter Two. See Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society*.
[8] Clifford Geertz, “The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays” (Basic Books, 1973).
[9] Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997). Miller's observation about the culture of late modern consumer capitalism makes this same point, but further complexifies it. He marvels that one characteristic of consumer capitalism is its ability to absorb and even commodify even the most trenchant critiques of its values and practices. Miller, *Consuming Religion*.

locally-owned businesses. As psychologist Helga Dittmar puts it, consumer culture can be seen as the "sociological and ideological manifestation" of late-modern capitalism.[10]

In the United States, this capitalism is reflective of a neoliberal economic and political ideology that takes for granted that nation-states must cede control to the "invisible hand" of the global marketplace, with any sort of intervention in the market being seen as unnatural and contrary to economic flourishing. The dominance of large corporations in shaping and perpetuating this ideology leads psychologist Tim Kasser to name this late capitalism as "American Corporate Capitalism."[11] The values and principles that are especially characteristic of the current consumer culture, then, draw on the liberal values of individualism, privacy, and possessiveness.[12] There is an emphasis on self-interest, a strong desire for financial success, high levels of consumption, competitive interpersonal styles, and an orientation towards power and achievement.[13] In other words, consumer culture is comprised of a complex system of ideologies, structures, and practices that prioritize, at both personal and collective levels, competition, consumption, and self-interest.

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[10] Helga Dittmar, "The Costs of Consumer Culture and the 'Cage Within': The Impact of the Material 'Good Life' and 'Body Perfect' Ideals on Individuals" Identity and Well-Being," *Psychological Inquiry* 18, no. 1 (March 1, 2007): 23–31, doi:10.1080/10478400701389045.
[11] Tim Kasser et al., "Some Costs of American Corporate Capitalism: A Psychological Exploration of Value and Goal Conflicts," *Psychological Inquiry* 18, no. 1 (2007): 1–22, doi:10.1080/10478400701386579.
[12] Trevor Norris, *Consuming Schooling and End of Politics.* (University of Toronto Press, 2010).
[13] Kasser et al., "Some Costs of American Corporate Capitalism."

Consumerism and the Hegemony[14] of Consumer Culture

For many, it is the sheer scale of consumption that marks the contemporary consumer culture as distinctive, as deserving the "consumerist" title. Political scientist and sociologist Colin Campbell, though, sees the mass scale of consumption -- and of production -- as only part of the story. What really distinguishes the current consumer culture from that of any previous era is that consumer desire seems to be inexhaustible.[15] More even than that insatiable desire, though, what marks consumer culture is the dominance of the consumptive aspect of consumer culture in our broader practices and in the way most of us view the world. What philosopher Charles Taylor calls the "social imaginary," the way a typical person in a society understands the world,[16] has been thoroughly imbued with the values, principles, and assumptions of the consumer culture of late-modern capitalism. Consumerism is not only normative; in most of our[17] imaginations, there is not even an alternative.

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[14] "Hegemony" can carry Marxian connotations. I do intend those connotations here in the sense that this analysis of consumer culture is oriented towards the notion that ideology and values are neither neutral nor accidental. They tend to support the privileged position of particular groups, reinforcing their power. Hegemony, for the Italian Marxist thinker and activist Antonio Gramsci, involves the diffusion of thought, norms, values, tastes, and practices throughout society. It has an economic base, but need not be limited to economics. Crucially, this hegemony "results from a combination of coercion and consent," so that even those who do not benefit from the hegemonic culture may be coopted into it. See Hagai Katz, "Gramsci, Hegemony, and Global Civil Society Networks," *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary & Nonprofit Organizations* 17, no. 4 (December 2006): 335, doi:10.1007/s11266-006-9022-4.

[15] Colin Campbell, "Consuming Goods and the Good of Consuming," in *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader*, ed. Lawrence B. Glickman (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1999), 19–32. In keeping with the caveat from earlier in the chapter, it is important to note that Campbell does not, with this description, dismiss consumerism as an unalloyed evil. He sees consumer desire as a spur for creativity and variety, at least in the limited realm of personal style and expression.

[16] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 171–76.

[17] My use of the first person plural in this cultural analysis reflects a consciousness of my positionality. Embedded in this culture, I am shaped by it and sometimes blind to it, even as I try to "see" it.

Cultural critic Benjamin Barber points out the irony that such an all-encompassing ideology is so unconsciously accepted or, in some circles, even uncritically celebrated.

> When society is dominated by religion in every sector and domain, we call it theocracy and protest it as a form of tyranny. And when it is dominated by policies so that neither private life nor economics nor religion is safe from politicization, we call it totalitarianism and deem it the very negation of all liberty. Yet when commerce dominates our life world in every aspect, we call it liberty and celebrate it as putative empowerment.[18]

Nothing conveys the power that consumer culture exercises over our imaginations quite as clearly as does a look at the role and impact of marketing, which is in many ways the engine that drives that culture. It effectively carries the culture in a way that purposely subverts critical consciousness, reflective discernment of the culture and our place in it.[19] Marketing does not occur in isolation, however. It is part of the broader system of ideologies, institutions, and relationships in consumer culture. We understand advertisements because they operate within the framework of a consumer culture whose symbols we already understand, whose signifiers we are always learning (and, arguably, creating). As we continue to learn those signifiers and symbols, we are further socialized into the culture of consumption; that socialization reinforces the cultural framework as legitimate.

This framework of cultural signifiers is both obvious and subtle, hidden in plain sight. We know it, but we often do not reflect on it. We see it, but fail to be aware that we see it. Consider a glossy photo of a late-model pickup truck, gleaming,

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[18] Benjamin R. Barber, "Foreward," in *Consuming Schools and the End of Politics*, by Trevor Norris (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), xv.

[19] Barak Goodman and Rachel Dretzin, "The Persuaders," *Frontline*, November 9, 2004, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/persuaders/.

but for a spattering of mud. We already know the narrative about whose truck that is, what he (yes, "he") enjoys, and how his masculinity is wrapped up in financial and social success. We do not need to have the story told to us -- we have already been socialized into it.

There is, then, an educative function to advertising. It offers us products and brand identities, but it also tutors us in desire. It taps into our desires, perhaps even creates our desires, but also teaches us what and how to desire. For instance, we do not simply or naturally desire SUV crossovers, economical hybrids, or muscular pickup trucks. We are offered, in a sense, a catalogue of products, identities, and values into which we can imagine ourselves living -- but not an infinite catalogue.[20] Marketing must train us to desire from among those choices. It involves an opening of (limited) possibilities, a tutoring in imagination, a formation of desire. Our desire is real, part of the human condition; our imagining that this desire is to be fulfilled from among the lifestyle options offered by the market is socially constructed. In our imaginations, though, there is no alternative.

What makes marketing especially effective as a carrier of consumer culture is precisely that its ubiquity makes it hard to notice. For instance, in discussing specifically the role of McDonald's in shaping American consciousness, patterns of consumption, and identity, the late advocate of critical and activist pedagogy Joe Kincheloe points out that McDonald's became part of Americana without our awareness. Somehow, cheap food, American flags, Ronald McDonald, and "All-American" kids became conflated in our imaginations. It is hard to discuss

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[20] Miller, *Consuming Religion*.

consciously because it is difficult to define just how this sort of power works.[21] At some level, though, successful marketing messages connect those cultural signifiers with legitimate sources of power and meaning. These "legitimation signifiers," Kincheloe argues, "work best when they go unnoticed."[22] And so Subaru commercials do not simply offer us a safer, faster, more luxurious, or more enjoyable drive, but instead tell us that "love" is what "makes a Subaru a Subaru."[23] In isolation, of course, such a statement about a car is patently ridiculous. It is only our lack of careful, reflective attention to the way that Subaru advertisements conflate friendships, family, and a healthy outdoors-oriented lifestyle with "love" that allows such a slogan to pass unnoticed by our consciousness, lost among the 6,000 marketing messages that the $300 billion marketing industry streams to the average North American daily.[24]

Such a culture is also most effective when transmitted early, and children and adolescents are among those socialized into some version of a consumer culture. From the perspective of those most invested in maintaining the culture, sociologist Norman Denzin describes the ideal child consumer as "a person who knows how to buy, wear, eat, watch, drink, and exchange cultural signifiers of childhood."[25] Child

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[21] Joe L. Kincheloe, "Consuming the All-American Corporate Burger: McDonald's 'Does It All For You,'" in *Critical Pedagogies: Living and Learning in the Shadow of the "Shopocalypse,"* ed. Jennifer A. Sandlin and Peter McLaren (New York: Routledge, 2010), 137–47.
[22] Ibid., 147.
[23] For a brief, popular description of the success of Subaru's "Love" marketing campaign, see Steve Olenski, "Subaru: The 50-Year-Old Brand Built On Love," *Forbes*, June 29, 2017, https://www.forbes.com/sites/steveolenski/2017/06/29/subaru-the-50-year-old-brand-built-on-love/.
[24] Valerie Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, "Beyond the Culture Jam," in *Critical Pedagogies: Living and Learning in the Shadow of the "Shopocalypse,"* ed. Jennifer A. Sandlin and Peter McLaren (New York: Routledge, 2010), 224–36.
[25] Norman K. Denzin, "Foreward," in *Critical Pedagogies: Living and Learning in the Shadow of the "Shopocalypse"* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), xiii.

advocate Susan Linn,[26] sociologist Juliet Schor,[27] and others[28] have documented how marketing messages are aimed at children at younger and younger ages, so that branded characters and logos are part of their environment even from the cradle.

The reach of marketing of specific products and, more importantly, the training in desire and the reproduction of a culture of consumption that attaches to marketing is ramped up in the digital age. Marketers find more and more platforms with which to work; the marketing becomes ever more ubiquitous, and often more seamlessly introduced into the lifeworld of the consumer. The ways that this marketing takes place in the ever-proliferating platforms of the digital age are particularly well-suited to flying into our imaginations underneath the radar of conscious reflection. Without our really knowing it, consumerism easily gets wrapped up in our understanding of our relationships, our selves, and our understanding that this is just how the world naturally works.

In the age of hyper-connectivity, consumers are, more than ever, interactive with content and with other users. Given their presence on the ever-shifting landscape of social networks, it should be no surprise that youth and young adults are the most prolific producers and consumers of digital content. It would be foolish to generalize too much about "the social media behavior of youth." There are many motivations, many types of actions, many platforms, and many ways in which people -- but especially youth and young adults -- use social media to express

[26] Susan Linn, *Consuming Kids: The Hostile Takeover of Childhood* (New York: New Press: Distributed by W.W. Norton & Co., 2004).
[27] Juliet Schor, *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture* (New York: Scribner, 2004).
[28] See Adriana Barbaro and Jeremy Earp, *Consuming Kids: The Commercialization of Childhood*, DVD (Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 2008).

themselves, explore identity, and manage their relationships.[29] However, there are certainly many for whom the goal of creating or at least promoting a popularly viewed meme is itself a goal. Users repost and add comments to jokes on Tumblr. Some people collect Instagram followers like previous generations collected bottle caps or baseball cards. Networks shift rapidly, and with them cultural and financial power. In the social media age, small stars glitter then die with amazing speed. With these shifts come shifts in marketing as it attempts to catch the light of those stars before it fades out.

The "culture industry" of mainstream media still exists, but there are now also alternative venues of cultural content that have reshaped that industry to some extent. The industry's larger-than-life, heavily-produced stars like Beyoncé, Taylor Swift, and One Direction are still major forces. For instance, One Direction was comprised of five teens who auditioned for a British television talent show as individuals. Producers saw the potential in marketing them as a boy band, and promoted them to international stardom. (By the time I write this, they have already dissolved the band and are working on solo careers.) It is easy to critique the way these artists have benefitted from the marketing machine.[30]

The marketplace of cultural production is more diverse now. It would seem, with the audio and video recording tools that are widely available now, and with the distributive power of interactive social media, that cultural content production has

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[29] Turkle, *Alone Together*.

[30] My critique is not necessarily about the quality of the artistic product, although the mediocrity of mass culture was certainly part of what drove the Frankfurt School's distaste for the "culture industry." See Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception." My critique is more about the standardization of the system of star-making.

been thoroughly democratized. Outside of the purview of the Hollywood culture industry, the video-sharing website YouTube has provided a platform for self-made pop culture stars who develop large fan-bases. There is, or at least seems to be, a more personal touch, a less-slick feel. The YouTubers are more relatable, strumming songs in their bedrooms or cracking wise in their own kitchens, often with remarkable sound and video quality. Even this grass-roots movement, though, is not immune from the pervasive commodification that defines consumer culture.

Naturally, marketers have sought to attach their brands to the goodwill that social media "stars" have with their fans, and some social media personalities with large followings have been happy to try to capitalize. For some, this capitalization simply comes in the form of monetizing their blogs/pages with banner advertisements, and Google AdSense is designed just for that purpose. Unsurprisingly, some groups of users have taken to forming collectives that repost each others' posts and drive traffic to each others' pages, a mutually-beneficial arrangement when monetization is based at least partly on the number of hits a page receives.[31]

In other cases, social media personalities are paid directly to promote specific products or brands. Celebrity endorsements have been part of marketing for ages, especially accelerating as consumer culture began to boom in the 1920s.[32] Glamorous movie stars modeling Cover Girl makeup are part of what we expect in the magazine reading experience. Sports heroes chugging Gatorade are part and

[31] Elspeth Reeve, "The Secret Lives of Tumblr Teens," *New Republic*, February 17, 2016, https://newrepublic.com/article/129002/secret-lives-tumblr-teens.
[32] Kerry Segrave, *Endorsements in Advertising: A Social History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005).

parcel of watching a game on television. What is notable, however, is that in the (sort of) intimate social media world, these endorsements take on a different cast; they are product recommendations between friends, not so easily partitioned off in our minds as "advertisements."

These endorsements often come in the form of "native ads," brought up in the context of a tweet or video post. What is striking is how unsophisticated these plugs sometimes are, at least compared to the slick product placement that permeates film and television. For instance, Colleen Ballinger, creator of the YouTube comic character Miranda Sings (who was famous enough to get a spot as a guest on Jerry Seinfeld's *Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee*), also has a multi-platform social media presence as herself, not just as Miranda. In a weekly YouTube segment, Ballinger answers fans' questions. In one segment, she answers a "question" about her favorite snack with a paean to a health-food home delivery service by saying, "As you guys know, I love Nature Box, I talk about them all the time," and then explains the company's service before naming one of their products as her favorite.[33] In another, less ham-handed, case, she answers a question about her underwear, and then adds, "And speaking of my underwear, I recently became totally obsessed with a company called MeUndies." Again, she explains the company's service. (I can only imagine what kind of unfiltered questions people send her!)

It would seem that this advertising would be nothing new, nor particularly effective, nothing more than name recognition. The truth may be more complex. For

[33] PsychoSoprano, *HOW I BROKE MY TOE!*, YouTube video, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ECENF_jopI4.

instance, the British media watchdog agency OfCom found that, even among 12-15-year-olds, while nearly half thought that vloggers[34] like Ballinger are paid to pitch the products they mention, the other half thought that they were simply sharing their own personal tastes for products that they genuinely liked or that they mentioned products because they thought their viewers might really like them.[35] And by way of contrast with the voiceover at the end of TV game shows that announces who has paid promotional fees, Colleen Ballinger is under no such obligation to disclose who has paid her to endorse products.

As with all celebrity (or friend) endorsements, even if intellectually we know that the endorser is paid for the advertisement, our emotional affinity for the character can circumvent any obstacles that knowledge might provide. A personal anecdote brought this reality into sharp relief for me. A friend's seventeen-year-old daughter, a big fan of Ballinger's Miranda Sings character, told me that she "loved" Nature Box. When I asked if they as a family had subscribed to the service she said no, and that in fact she had never had any of their snacks. "But a lot of the YouTubers I follow endorse them."

Certainly, there is contention around this type of advertising on social media -- at least on some platforms. For instance, a pair of young men who were making a substantial living with a site that got Tumblr users to repost a plug for a potentially-dangerous diet supplement advertorial ("My friend used this and she lost a bunch of weight really fast!") were suspended from the site, although it is not clear whether

[34] "Vloggers" are video web loggers, bloggers with video instead of written content.
[35] OfCom, "Children and Parents: Media Use and Reports," accessed March 10, 2016, http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/media-literacy/children-parents-nov-15/charts_section_6.pdf.

that was because Tumblr's executives, responsive to the demands of their users, were opposed to all such advertising, whether the executives were alarmed that the product could be particularly dangerous for their core group of users (adolescent girls), or some other reason.[36] Given the hegemony of consumer culture, however, it would be surprising if this sort of rejection of native advertising of social media were to become a far-reaching policy across platforms.

Another way in which marketing becomes both more all-encompassing and more naturalized in the digital age is through the mining of Big Data. Part of what is (relatively) new for consumption in the social media age is just how much data exists on consumers as groups and even on persons as individuals. This data is collected, mined, analyzed, and bought and sold. Sociologist Helen Kennedy writes about the effects of this mining. What is remarkable is just how pervasive and normal this data mining has become. She notes how much it shapes the experience of citizens and consumers.[37] On a small and visible scale, we can see online retailer Amazon personalizing our experience by suggesting items based on our browsing and purchasing history; their analytics categorize our interests and personal characteristics based not only on what he have told them but also on what the rest of their data tells them about people "like us."

Another aspect of this data mining that is notable is the extent to which users are not quite sure what is and is not fair game, how much personal information ends up with whom. Nor are we often cognizant of just how sophisticated the analytic

[36] Reeve, "The Secret Lives of Tumblr Teens."
[37] Helen Kennedy, *Post, Mine, Repeat: Social Media Mining Becomes Ordinary* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

algorithms can be as they sift through this data.[38] Much of the data that is collected from or about us is part of the price we pay for the social media and other web applications we thought we were getting for free. This is true for the giants of the web -- the Googles and Facebooks, for sure, but extends from there to nearly everything we do on the web. It is much more complex than "liking" brands, bands, and movies on Facebook (although we can do that). If we post suggestions and reviews to social bookmarking sites like Goodreads; if we share and follow with friends on Strava our marathon training progress, or if we mention "pizza" on Tumblr, that data is collected. We have perhaps unknowingly, or at least unthinkingly, bought these services with valuable market data, both personal data and market-level data. As international privacy law expert Neil Richards puts it, Target does not need you to announce a pregnancy. If their data analytics see you suddenly buying more vitamins or browsing for scent-free lotion, they know enough to start sending you coupons for items related to pregnancy and maternity.[39] Such is the character of the hegemony of consumer culture. It is certainly true that coercive power does not need to be deployed when a population willingly, and perhaps even unconsciously, submits to the dominant regime.

The result, then, is what some call "360 Marketing."[40] Marketing overwhelms us, not simply the commercial that interrupts a TV show or the glossy magazine ad that tries to draw our attention from the story we are reading, not simply billboards

[38] Certainly, making sense of such huge quantities of data is hardly an exact science. Journalist Joel Stein's attempt to contact numerous companies that collect, collate, and analyze data revealed that some had better information on him than others, or had placed him into some market segments that sometimes missed the mark badly. Joel Stein, "Data Mining: How Companies Now Know Everything About You," *Time*, March 10, 2011, http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2058205,00.html.

[39] Neil M. Richards, "The Dangers of Surveillance," *Harvard Law Review* 126, no. 7 (May 2013): 1934+.

[40] Barbaro and Earp, *Consuming Kids: The Commercialization of Childhood*.

by the highway or on the train. It arrives through product placement in film and television, banners on blogs and websites, email come-ons, and then more subtle promotion in the content of influential blogs and podcasts. As our minds block out the old types of ads (fast-forwarding through commercials, making sure not to click through on banners), marketers seek new ways to cut through the clutter, so that our minds have fewer and fewer spaces of respite.

The ubiquity of marketing is part of what makes the consumer culture it carries hard to identify, allowing us to submit willingly to its hegemonic power. Juliet Schor identifies our lack of reflectivity as one problem with contemporary consumerism. People are not consuming consciously, are not reflecting on our consumer environment consciously. She has pointed out that our consumer behaviors and our professed values are inconsonant.[41] We assume consumer society as natural, when of course it is created -- an ever-evolving creation, but one whose main features are only visible in the last century or so.[42] Schor notes of the United States that half of the country claims not to be able to afford the things they "really need," including, remarkably, twenty-seven percent of households with an income greater than $100,000 per year. Nonetheless, while the vast majority of poll participants characterize their fellow Americans as "very materialistic," only eight percent say the same thing about themselves. There is a way in which these results

[41] Juliet Schor, *The Overspent American : Upscaling, Downshifting, and the New Consumer* (New York: Basic Books, 1998).
[42] Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003).

speak to the insidiousness of consumer culture, the level to which it has been naturalized. [43]

The extent of this naturalization is impressive, as is our resistance to reflection on it. Even when we think we have been inoculated against it with a little bit of awareness, the less we have searched our souls, the more grossly we overestimate our immunity. Culturally, we are subject to the Dunning-Kruger Effect: those who are least proficient are also least aware of their lack of proficiency.[44] A student I taught, a high school senior, once wrote about her belief that she had transcended consumer culture. "Tweens are more likely to fall into marketing's trap because they're willing to do everything to 'fit in.' It's hard to avoid this because everyone, at some point in their life, wants to be accepted. It's just part of human nature. However, eventually people grow out of it. . . . I think this is when you become an 'older' teen (about people my age.)" I suspect that this young woman would now look back at this comment and cringe at her naiveté, but of course in the moment she could not see the extent to which she was still in the grasp of the culture.

At issue, then, are the means and the extent to which people live out and live into the values of consumer culture, and the personal, social, and environmental ramifications of our doing so. Unsurprisingly, exposure to consumer culture is

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[43] "Naturalization" is another term with Marxian roots. It is the understanding of what is humanly created -- cultural and social products -- as if they were natural. Brazilian educator Paolo Freire sought to bring peasants not only to literacy but also to political consciousness and agency partly by prompting them to discern what was truly "natural" versus what was "cultural" in their worlds. Undoing naturalization is part of conscientization. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York, NY: Continuum, 1970).

[44] Justin Kruger and David Dunning, "Unskilled and Unaware of It: How Difficulties in Recognizing One's Own Incompetence Lead to Inflated Self-Assessments.," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 77, no. 6 (December 1999): 1121–34, doi:http://dx.doi.org.proxy.bc.edu/10.1037/0022-3514.77.6.1121.

causatively correlated with an assimilation of its values, what Kasser calls "materialism" that is both aspirational and dispositional.[45] While not all psychological studies of materialism[46] utilize a single universal definition, most use some sort of definition of materialism as a "value or goal that reflects the extent to which an individual believes that it is important to acquire money and possessions, as well as to strive for the related aims of an appealing image and high status/popularity, both of which are frequently expressed via money and possessions."[47] I argue that the adoption of materialist values is symptomatic of "successful" socialization into consumerist culture.

Consumerism is, then, aptly described as a culture of consumption marked by the stimulation, or at least the manifestation, of desire for material goods, produced on a massive scale. What is especially noteworthy, though, is that the social imaginary has been so thoroughly dominated by the assumptions and values of this consumer culture. Its hegemony is nearly unchallenged. Merely living in this culture over time, and especially developing in it, exposed to the marketing and other messages that normalize it, further solidifies its dominance in our imaginations.

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[45] Tim Kasser, *The High Price of Materialism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

[46] These operative definitions and measures of materialism do not get at all that is involved in a personal assimilation into and practice of consumer culture. First of all, while the values or dispositions defined as materialism may plausibly be linked with consumption and the way we make sense of that consumption, too often that link stands unproven. For instance, early attempts to measure materialism constructed it as a combination of nongenerosity, possessiveness, and envy. Tim Kasser, "Materialistic Values and Goals," *Annual Review of Psychology* 67 (January 4, 2016): 489–514, doi:10.1146/annurev-psych-122414-033344. Alas, it is hardly clear that possessiveness identified as answering on a survey that one "hates to lose things" is really the kind of materialism that concerns us as resulting in or from a throwaway culture of planned obsolescence. Another concept that Kasser has used as a stand-in for "materialism" is what he calls "extrinsic motivation," an overall orientation towards acting (including consuming) in order to please or impress others, often at the expense of voice, autonomy, and authenticity. Kasser, *The High Price of Materialism*. The conceptual framework that Kasser has constructed makes a great deal of sense given that he has found in people with extrinsic motivation a correlation with other measures of materialistic values, but it is not at all clear that we can simply reduce that extrinsic motivation to a materialistic orientation. Instead, we ought to be exploring more fully how and why they are correlated.

[47] Kasser, "Materialistic Values and Goals."

There is a process whereby children and youth are socialized into this culture, and so as adults we continue to buy into, and pass on, the culture of consumption. The democratized economy of the digital age exacerbates rather than undercuts this dynamic of socialization into consumerism.

Cause for Concern -- Personal, Social, and Ecological Harms

The mere fact that consumer culture has achieved a dominance over our practices and our imaginations is not by itself problematic; what is problematic is that this culture causes significant harm on the personal, social, global, and ecological levels. Consumerism has its boosters, those who consider it the driving force behind economic development, and those who consider consumer choice to be the apotheosis of personal freedom. However, concerns about its shortcomings should not easily be dismissed. To some extent, we all buy into these consumerist values that we do not so much actively accept as simply breathe in. We cannot help but identify "goods" with "the good life." Tim Kasser identifies why this is problematic:

> It would be one thing if the messages of consumer society were true, but they are not. It would be another thing if these messages were benign lies, but they are not that either. As it turns out, empirical research documents that there is a high price to pay when people take on the messages of consumer society and organize their lives around materialistic pursuits.[48]

[48] Tim Kasser, "Materialism and Its Alternatives," in *A Life Worth Living: Contributions to Positive Psychology*, ed. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Isabella Celega Csikszentmihalyi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 201–2.

Personal Harms

Materialism, identity,[49] person

With his research into the sociology of consumer behavior, L.J. Shrum has recently proposed a definition of materialism that gets to the performative aspects of consumption and they way consumer practices function in the construction and maintenance of an identity. Hence, he calls materialism "The extent to which individuals attempt to engage in the construction and maintenance of the self through the acquisition and use of products, services, experiences, or relationships that are perceived to provide desirable symbolic value."[50] Such a definition is useful in that it allows us to understand materialism as the internalization of consumerism. If consumerism is the worldview of consumer culture, then perhaps materialism is the personal manifestation of that worldview. Given that this emphasis on the construction and maintenance of the self puts identity front and center, this manifestation of consumer culture is then integrally the concern of any religious education that proposes to deal with the wholeness of the human person.

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[49] A note about my use of terminology is in order. Although I am focusing on "identity," I do not use the term restrictively. Therefore, I do not want to have a limited focus on identity as being achieved or not achieved, which some might construe as a task to be accomplished in the course of a healthy psychosocial development. See, for instance, James Marcia E., "Common Processes Underlying Ego Identity, Cognitive/Moral Development, and Individuation," in *Self, Ego, and Edentity: Integrative Approaches*, ed. Daniel K. Lapsley and F. Clark Power (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1988), 211–25. Different strands of psychology, while perhaps starting from different points and using different terminology, can fruitfully be understood to be in parallel or at least in conversation. Hence, Marcia points out that whether we are looking at the processes of achieving ego identity, individuation of the self, or cognitive moral development, we are looking at many of the same types of movements and developments. Although some may offer precise distinctions between such terms, here also I do not believe that the terms can bear more precision than the concepts warrant. Identity is part of the understanding of the self. Perhaps for the moment we could say with social ethicist that Roger Bergman that the self is where personal identity meets moral commitments that issue in both understanding and action. Roger Bergman, *Catholic Social Learning: Educating the Faith That Does Justice* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011).

[50] L. J. Shrum et al., "Reconceptualizing Materialism as Identity Goal Pursuits: Functions, Processes, and Consequences," *Journal of Business Research*, Recent Advances in Globalization, Culture and Marketing Strategy, 66, no. 8 (August 2013): 1180, doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.08.010.

In exploring stages of faith development, James Fowler draws on the idea that faith involves trust in and dedication to values.[51] Especially important are what Fowler calls the "centers of supraordinate values," those values around which other values constellate, those values that are most basic.[52] Who we are, and who we consider ourselves to be, consists of our dedication to these values. "We become," says Fowler, "part of that which we love and trust."[53] Identity is not simply about naming central values; it is about both knowing and living. Psychologist Augusto Blasi's concept of "moral identity" is useful as a "structure" that mediates between cognition and action. Part of self-identity is about commitment to those centers of supraordinate value. Responsibility, then, is an extension of moral identity. Integrity of self, integrity in this identity, involves moral activity that is consistent with those commitments.[54] Again, then, this confluence of faith, value, moral commitment, and moral action in the self makes identity a concern for religious educators.

When it comes to identity and consumer culture, there is little doubt that the most powerful force in consumerism today is the brand. Although this focus on the power of brands is not entirely new, it is perhaps more important than ever. Indeed, marketers focus almost exclusively on selling the brand more than the product. Brands have value that is only partly tied to or reflected in the material assets of the

[51] Fowler's understanding of what faith is owes much to the conceptual framework laid out by Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith: What Faith Is, What Faith Is Not, Symbols of Faith, Types of Faith, The Truth of Faith, The Life of Faith* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Brothers, 1958).
[52] James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, Reprint (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995).
[53] Ibid., 18.
[54] Augusto Blasi, "Moral Identity: Its Role in Moral Functioning," in *Fundamental Research in Moral Development: Moral Development: A Compendium*, vol. 2, ed. Bill Puka (New York: Garland, 1994), 168-79.

corporations themselves, and the brand is meant to stir feelings only partly connected to the particulars of the product. TV commercials for Nike, for instance, one of the most valuable and easily recognized brands in the world, rarely sell us athletic shoes, clothing, or helmets. They sell us Nike. Practical theologian Tom Beaudoin[55] likens this phenomenon to a dualism that wants to elevate the soul (brand) above the body (product).

Brands do not strive simply to engender loyalty among consumers;[56] particularly when marketing to adolescents, brands seek to foster love[57] and identity. We identify ourselves by what we wear, what we use. Even for adults, marketers speak of creating that elusive aura around a brand that converts a mere logo into a "lovemark."[58] The goal is for brands to shape the centers of supraordinate value, to encourage us to put our faith in the values of the brand or even the brand itself.

The problem is that identifying ourselves so closely with brands inhibits us from exploring and expressing our full humanity, perhaps from building an identity around a career interest or as someone who contributes to society as a whole.[59] I admit that this last claim seems to be something that could be overstated. After all, we do more or less successfully juggle different aspects of identity, different *personae*, in what is still a reasonably coherent and integrated self. Moreover, especially in adolescence and young adulthood, exploration allows for the testing

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[55] Tom Beaudoin, *Consuming Faith* (Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward, 2003), 68-9.
[56] The language of "brands striving" for a goal is metaphorical; a brand itself is not an agent. The agents in question are the owners of brands and the marketers who seek to maximize brand value.
[57] Gene Del Vecchio, *Creating Evercool: A Marketer's Guide to a Kid's Heart* (London: Pelican, 1998), 9.
[58] "The Persuaders." *Frontline.* PBS. 9 November 2004.
[59] American Psychology Association, "Driving Teen Egos – And Buying – Through Branding," *Monitor* 35 no.6 (June 2004): 60, http://www.apa.org/monitor/jun04/driving.aspx

that is part of the development of ego identity.[60] However, there is empirical evidence supporting the claim: the dominance of a consumerist cultural narrative in the lives of adolescents does indeed translate to a similar hegemony of the values and goals that support that system. They "crowd out" other values and goals, even limiting their exploration.[61] Adapting James Marcia's work on identity development, we can say that other options, then, are "foreclosed."[62] In other words, the values and goals around which a person builds a sense of self, the values and commitments that define who we are and in which we place faith, in large part are dictated by consumer culture.

Practices of consumption have an outsized power to shape individual identities in the service of consumer capitalism,[63] and so marketing often effectively targets vulnerabilities in our processes of identity formation. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to consumerism's effects on well-being. For instance, Schor cites exposure to consumer culture as a cause of depression, low self-esteem, anxiety, and parental conflicts.[64] Her conclusions have been confirmed and refined in later studies.[65] Jean Twenge find that rates of depression, anxiety, and other

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[60] Marcia, "Common Processes Underlying Ego Identity, Cognitive/Moral Development, and Individuation," 213.
[61] Kasser, and others, 2.
[62] Marcia, "Common Processes Underlying Ego Identity, Cognitive/Moral Development, and Individuation."
[63] Jennifer A Sandlin and Peter McLaren, "Introduction: Exploring Consumption's Pedagogy and Envisioning a Critical Pedagogy of Consumption -- Living and Learning in the Shadow of the 'Shopocalypse,'" in *Critical Pedagogies: Living and Learning in the Shadow of the "Shopocalypse,"* ed. Jennifer A. Sandlin and Peter McLaren (New York: Routledge, 2010), 1–20.
[64] Schor, *Born to Buy*.
[65] P.A. Bottomly, "Measuring Childhood Materialism: Refining and Validating Schor's Consumer Involvement Scale," *Psychology and Marketing* 27, no. 10 (2010): 717–39.

mental disorders have risen steadily among US adolescents since the 1930s, and fingers materialism as at least a contributing cause.[66]

For nobody is this vulnerability targeted more effectively or more harmfully than for adolescent girls. It has been the contention of cultural scholar and activist Jean Kilbourne that in advertisements, movies, television shows, and other media, girls are presented with contradictory expectations about how to look, how to behave, and what to expect for themselves. Many of these expectations include some kind of perfection. They are, literally, at great pains to meet these expectations.[67] The goal of "flawless beauty" is certainly the most obvious of these. Exploiting or exacerbating anxiety about weight or other aspects of appearance is highly profitable. While exploiting these insecurities, including body image insecurities, sells products, it also leads to self-objectification among girls and women. These marketing tactics are causally related to depression, anxiety, eating disorders, decreased academic achievement, and even decreased political efficacy.[68]

There is a counter-argument to this critique of consumerism as harmful. In a free-wheeling, democratized, digital age of hyper-connectivity, some propose that the old paradigms of consumer culture break down, liberating consumers with access to new ideas, new goods, and new services. The consumer has greater influence on producers of goods, and has greater agency in the use of goods in constructing their own identity. Instead of fitting into a single prescribed identity,

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[66] Jean M. Twenge et al., "Birth Cohort Increases in Psychopathology Among Young Americans, 1938–2007: A Cross-Temporal Meta-Analysis of the MMPI," *Clinical Psychology Review* 30, no. 2 (March 2010): 145–54, doi:10.1016/j.cpr.2009.10.005.

[67] Jean Kilbourne, *Deadly Persuasion : Why Women and Girls Must Fight the Addictive Power of Advertising* (New York: Free Press, 1999).

[68] Jennifer Siebel Newsom, *Miss Representation*, DVD (Sausalito, California: Ro*co Films Educational ; San Francisco, California, 2011).

we are able, even at relatively young ages, to engage in identity construction using brands. We express ourselves with brands and styles, mixing and matching in a *bricolage* of personal empowerment. Brands, and consumer goods of all sorts, for that matter, can be seen to facilitate rather than inhibit the important work of identity construction.[69]

When it comes to consumer agency and identity creation, adherents of the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies are quick to point out the ways that consumption can be a site of resistance to massification[70] and a site of individual exploration.[71] People may wear fashion as a uniform, yes, but they also frequently mix and match, creating their own styles. However justly its excesses may be maligned, the studied irony of the so-called hipster subculture[72] of the last decade is certainly at least partly a medium for tweaking, parodying, or carving space out of a

[69] Douglas B. Holt, “Why Do Brands Cause Trouble? A Dialectical Theory of Consumer Culture and Branding,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 29, no. 1 (June 2002): 70–90.
[70] Paolo Freire contrasts massification with education. Education involves critical consciousness and agency. Massification is the educative equivalent of factory production. It aims at a standardized and acritical accumulation of knowledge and attitudes, generally in support of the dominant regime. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 32–40.
[71] Hall, *Representation*.
[72] It is, as noted above by Tanner, dangerous to try to define a particular culture too precisely, especially in a postmodern world, and the hipster subculture is no exception. What people recognize as this subculture tends to be characterized by the re-appropriation of vintage styles of dress and grooming, often with the intent of mixing styles from different eras so as to completely deracinate them. Stereotypes of this subculture note how much work goes into making style appear effortless.

mass culture.[73] In such a subculture, the quest for the unknown, the new, or the not-yet-popular becomes itself the mark of cultural capital.[74]

Arguably, it is the brands who court and play to the desires of the consumers, not *vice versa*. Journalist Malcolm Gladwell calls marketers who look for innovative styles used and worn by the "right" people "Coolhunters."[75] These Coolhunters try to incorporate those styles into their branded products.[76] It is the trendsetters, not the brands, who hold the real power and agency. The argument is that corporations do not force us to love their brands and to conform to the brand's image; they try to create brands that we will love, that will allow us to express who we consider ourselves to be and to work out our identity. Consumers, then, are better able to act as co-producers of their own identities and as producers of culture.

While there may be some truth to such an analysis of the shifting contours of consumer culture, the extent to which consumers also become producers -- of both identity and culture -- is overstated. Certainly, in some ways, producers are more responsive to the consumers. Marketing is not only about selling what is produced;

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[73] Miller, though, is on the mark when he points out the totalizing nature and strength of contemporary consumer culture, that it is able to commodify even anti-consumerist identity into goods and services to be bought and sold. Miller, *Consuming Religion*. TOMS shoes became *de rigeur* for their simplicity of appearance and charitable mission; geekdom is no longer a mark of shame for adolescence, but an identity proudly chosen and performed in robotics competitions, yes, but also Doctor Who series watched, Star Wars trivia memorized, and t-shirts, key rings, or costumes worn. Not only are subcultures capitalized, but so even is a vaguely anti-consumerist countercultural ethic. Capitalized, commodified, and contained.

[74] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction : A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984). Cultural capital refers to knowledge, skills, mannerisms, and institutional qualifications that allow for social mobility. While Bourdieu looks primarily at the ways in which cultural capital reinforces the realities of social class, we can also easily imagine cultural capital as allowing -- or limiting -- movement across subcultural groups or communities. While one may be able simply to join, say, a bicycle club by signing up and paying dues, one does not really become a member of a cycling sub-culture without mastering certain types knowledge, lingo, and mannerisms in a way that seems natural.

[75] Malcolm Gladwell, "The Coolhunt," in *The Consumer Society Reader*, ed. Juliet Schor and Douglas B. Holt (New York: New Press, 2000), 360–74.

[76] Naomi Klein, *No Logo*, 10th Anniversary ed. (New York: Picador, 2009), 72–73.

there are tremendous resources that go into finding out what it is that consumers want, often in smaller and smaller market segments. This producer responsiveness to the variegated consumer niches has increased the variety and intensity of ways in which marketers try to sell the stories of their brands, drawing consumers into a marketing maelstrom that is ever more pervasive. That responsiveness also depends on the collection and analysis of personal and market data mined from all sorts of internet activity. It is our very activity on the net that allows marketers to target us more directly and from more points in the media. However, while the Coolhunters are indeed looking for those fashion leaders who drive trends, they then co-opt those styles, brand them, and offer them to the vast majority of people who are not the innovators.[77] As sociologist Douglas Holt points out, with the brands we can construct our identities, but within limits. We do so with the pieces the brand market provides to us.[78] We can play, but only with the toys that we have bought. While of course our identities are multi-faceted, there is a way in which the market both provides and limits options in the construction of identity around values and commitments. Given these limitations, then, the market does not provide an adequately expansive "language" for expressing who we are or can be.

This same argument that the market limits as well as provides the tools for resistance applies when looking at other manifestations of the proclivity towards mixing and matching, cutting cultural markers into shreds and then recreating them in an original style. The social media networks give people more tools and a greater

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[77] Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, 1st ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 2000).
[78] Holt, "Why Do Brands Cause Trouble? A Dialectical Theory of Consumer Culture and Branding."

potential audience for this work than ever before, especially for youth and young adults. Web tools make it easy to capture and alter a photograph from the campaign trail, for instance. A juxtaposition of two culturally disparate icons, for instance, seeks with more or less success to arrest the viewer, at least for a moment. A photo of Hillary Clinton with a caption mimicking Yoda's speech pattern. Mr. T. telling us, "It's April, Fools!" on April 1. Olympic gymnast McKayla Maroney caught on the podium with a sour look on her face -- the possibilities are endless and are easy. Parody has long been a popular form of expression for subcultures and countercultures. Never has it been more accessible than it is today, though. Nor does it need to have a point. It can be social commentary, but it need not be. In fact, sometimes the creation and fleeting popularization of this *pastiche* or reworking of a cultural signifier seems to be the goal itself.

Still, in many ways, the consumers' agency is overstated. They may be reassembling puzzle pieces into new patterns, but they are still using the same puzzle pieces. By and large this area of cultural rearrangement, pastiche, and even parody by and large still must make do with the pieces of what consumer culture has offered. Darth Vader might ride a unicorn in a clash of cultural signifiers, but the image still makes sense with (and makes use of) the highly successful and tremendously merchandised Star Wars franchise.

Materialism and Well-Being

While I have noted above some legitimate dispute over just how to define and measure materialism, it seems that measures of materialism using even varying

definitions have a good degree of reliability. Since it is those measures of materialism which have been correlated with exposure to consumer culture and whose effects on well-being have been measured, we must utilize them. In any case, when the social scientists cited in this chapter discuss "materialism" in their studies, it is probably safe for us to read that as something like "materialist consumerism." And it turns out that this materialist consumerism is correlated with ill-being. Among the personal effects associated with materialistic values are depression, anxiety, narcissism, increased substance use, physical symptoms like headaches and stomachaches, and a lower frequency of the reported feeling of pleasant emotions. These negative effects appear across a broad span of ages.[79]

Part of what happens, it seems, is that the maelstrom of marketing presents choices that are simply overwhelming to some of us. While some people ("satisficers") find more consumer choice helpful and conducive to happiness, those who have a tendency always to look for more ("maximizers") are never content with the choices.[80] In fact, the more choices, the more opportunities for doubting that we have made the best choice, and the less happy we are. We worry more about our position comparative to others, regret our decisions, and blame ourselves, then, for our inadequacies. Infinite choice in goods, identity, and relationships tends to lead some people, paradoxically, into feelings of loneliness and depression.

[79] Kasser, "Materialism and Its Alternatives."
[80] Barry Schwartz et al., "Maximizing versus Satisficing: Happiness Is a Matter of Choice.," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 83, no. 5 (November 2002): 1178–97, doi:http://dx.doi.org.proxy.bc.edu/10.1037/0022-3514.83.5.1178.

Helga Dittmar has conducted an extensive meta-analysis of studies of materialism and well-being, variously defined and measured.[81] While she and her team noted some factors that seemed to exacerbate or militate the effects, well-being and materialism are strongly negatively correlated. The most strongly measurable negative effects of materialist values on well-being come in exacerbating negative self-appraisals, promoting risky health behavior and compulsive buying. Also significantly affected are subjective well-being, the quality of affective experience, and physical health. So, while Dittmar has found marketing to be a strong cause of the negative well-being associated with materialism,[82] in the digital age a respite from marketing is clearly harder than ever to find.

It would seem, then, that the negative effects of exposure to consumerism and the adoption of materialist values are fairly pervasive. In the context of the One-Third world, they are strongest for those whose ability to fulfill their desires is least. On the personal level, those who are psychologically least satisfiable are most easily subject to marketing messages that promote that dissatisfaction. More broadly, though, socioeconomic status (SES) also plays a role in this problem. Persons of lower SES tend to score higher on self-reported scores of materialism.[83]

The strong correlations between materialism and various aspects of personal ill-being beg the question of whether poor self-esteem and a lack of autonomy cause

[81] Helga Dittmar et al., "The Relationship Between Materialism and Personal Well-Being: A Meta-Analysis," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 107, no. 5 (November 2014): 879–924, doi:http://dx.doi.org.proxy.bc.edu/10.1037/a0037409.
[82] Dittmar, "The Costs of Consumer Culture and the 'Cage Within.'"
[83] Ibid. Globally, the very wealthy and the very poor seem least affected by the commonly-measured ills of materialism on the personal level.[83] It may be that the poorest of the poor have no real vision of attaining consumer status, that basic survival is what garners their attention. The wealthiest are, at least when it comes to material goods, able to meet their desires. It is the vast middle, though, for whom the carrot is always visible but also out of reach, who are most affected.

materialism or *vice versa*. The answer seems to be that they are mutually-reinforcing. There are personal characteristics and experiences that seem primarily to be associated with certain needs being unfulfilled that make people vulnerable to materialistic values and less-controlled consumptive behaviors.[84] In other words, our popular notion that our consumerism is most powerful when we are trying to fulfill some sort of unmet need psychological need is accurate.[85] Conversely, the adoption of materialistic values and the attempts to fulfill material desires crowds out other goods in one's life, and leads to further dissatisfaction.[86]

Social Harm

Beyond the negative effects of consumerism on individuals, especially on young people, there is concern about its social effects. Philosopher Charles Taylor has raised the concern that the individualism fostered by consumer culture fosters a complacency with privatized life and decreases civic participation.[87] Almost two decades ago, Robert Putnam documented what he called the “collapse of American community." In many spheres of public life, participation has decreased markedly. Both formal and informal participation in political and other forms of civic life have dropped off dramatically.[88] He fingered a number of causes. One is the “work and spend treadmill” that leaves people working long hours to afford the goods that they

[84] Note, though, that Schor's research disagrees. In her estimation, unhappy and anxious children and teens are not drawn to materialism; the arrow of causality only points one way. Schor, *Born to Buy*.
[85] Kasser, *The High Price of Materialism*.
[86] Dittmar et al., “The Relationship between Materialism and Personal Well-Being.”
[87] Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).
[88] Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

want, and then wanting to use those goods in private.[89] This dearth of community connection tends to keep the poorest and most vulnerable poor and vulnerable, at significant cost to the society as a whole.[90] Materialistic pursuits crowd out both the time and energy for deeper personal relationships and for community involvement.[91] The wealthy can make up for a lack of community centers, public playspaces, and even adequate public education in a way that the poor cannot.

In speculating about this enervation of community structures, Taylor hearkens back to Alexis de Tocqueville's famous description of "soft" despotism. The powers-that-be rule not with force but with an immense educative power.[92] The educative power exerted here is what the great popular educator Paulo Freire described not as real education but as "massification," an acritical deposit of ideas and images that allows elites to manipulate people into an "unthinking manageable agglomeration."[93] The mass media, and its marketing arms in particular, appear to be successful carriers of this domesticating ideology.

The concern, then, is that consumer capitalism has hollowed out the public spaces. Historical memory is replaced by spectacle, celebrity culture, and an individualism that goes beyond the search for authenticity and into self-obsession. There is no space for shared responsibility and concern for the public good.[94] Educator Henry Giroux has argued that the market values of consumer capitalism

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[89] See also Juliet Schor, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).
[90] Robert D. Putnam, *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015).
[91] Kasser, *The High Price of Materialism*, 61–62.
[92] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 2007.
[93] Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, ed. and trans. Myra Bergman Ramos, 1st American ed. (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), 8.
[94] Richard C Mitchell and Shannon A Moore, "Introduction," in *Politics, Participation, and Power Relations: Transdisciplinary Approaches to Critical Citizenship in the Classroom and Community*, ed. Richard C. Mitchell and Shannon A. Moore (Rotterdam; Boston: Sense Publishers, 2012), 1–8.

simply have nothing to offer in terms of guidance on matters of the public good -- it is not what they are built for.[95]

It seems, also, that these dynamics are, if anything, exacerbated in the digital age. For all of the hopes that have been expressed that social media are creating a new commons, a new public space that can reinvigorate American democracy and civic life, MIT's Sherry Turkle, long interested in what technology does to and for the person and society, has contended that these hopes have gone unfulfilled. The social capital[96] that circulates in online networks generally at best mirrors the social capital of face-to-face networks.[97] Social networks allow us to keep our contacts at a "safe" distance, to such an extent that Turkle is unwilling to write about these networks as online "communities."[98]

In fact, part of what Turkle has discovered is that this push away from deeper personal involvement has been accelerated by the ways in which we communicate in the digital age. The availability of social media, texting, and messages applications tends to allow us to keep others at a "just right" distance. Getting in touch is easy. Developing depth in conversation and in relationships is more challenging, and many feel ill-equipped even to do it.[99] The age of social media and digital communication, in her estimation, is not resulting in an increase in the social capital that allows people to make things happen collectively. In fact, while we can all think of ways in which people have indeed leveraged social media to mobilize social capital, on balance she finds it to be

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[95] Henry A. Giroux, "Turning America into a Toy Story," in *Critical Pedagogies: Living and Learning in the Shadow of the "Shopocalypse,"* ed. Jennifer A. Sandlin and Peter McLaren (New York: Routledge, 2010), 249–58.
[96] By "social capital" I mean the productive aspects of relational networks among persons. The term is often connected to Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.
[97] Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015).
[98] Turkle, *Alone Together*.
[99] James Twitchell, "Two Cheers for Materialism," in *The Consumer Society Reader*, ed. Juliet B. Schor and Douglas B. Holt (New York: The New Press, 2000), 281–90.

more of an impediment than a catalyst. Hence, if digital pursuits are themselves replacing personal and community relationships, then we feel the costs of materialism even more sharply than we did before we could communicate from our smart phones using a string of emojis on WhatsApp.

Global and Ecological Harms

Sometimes, our discourse on consumerism, especially in recent years, has sought to move past the consumption of goods into the consumption of branded identities, from material goods to services and to ideas. While there is something useful to this sort of layer of understanding consumption, Tom Beaudoin also warns us of a danger of "economic docetism."[100] While we consume identity, brand, and ideas, we cannot separate all of the above from the material products -- products whose raw materials are extracted from the earth, whose manufacture pours pollutants into air and streams, and whose producers are often far from our consciousness. When it comes to the conditions of labor, nowhere have more egregious and consistent abuses been recorded than in textile industries.[101] It is has been nearly twenty years since this particular issue became part of the popular public discourse, with Wal-Mart, Nike, and Kathie Lee Gifford among those put in the public crosshairs in the late 1990s, and while there are certainly ongoing projects that seek to focus consumers around such issues, like Annie Leonard's "The

[100] Beaudoin, *Consuming Faith*.
[101] Klein, *No Logo*.

Story of Stuff"[102] or Kelsey Timmerman's "Where Am I Wearing,"[103] there is also a sense of consumer fatigue, passivity, or fatalism that obfuscates consumer consciousness or at least consumer activism. As I mentioned in the Introduction, there is evidence that such movements might indeed have staying power, but it is not clear whether that will be the case.

At least partly as a result of this consumption and the extractive attitude that underlies it, ecological disaster looms. Our consumption has already in many ways overshot the Earth's capacity to absorb it,[104] and, in another example of the market's failure to account adequately for matters of the public good, the effects of ecological overshoot fall disproportionately heavily on those who are already poor and vulnerable. While this dissertation is not specifically about either the unconscionable plight of garment workers in the Two-Thirds world or the ecological disasters of global warming and their connection to consumer culture, one could certainly argue that these particular consequences of global capitalism and the consumer culture that feeds it are so dire as to trump any of the other consequences on which this dissertation puts more emphasis.[105]

The characteristics of consumer culture, then, are implicated in demonstrable personal, social, and ecological harm, especially to persons and communities that are particularly vulnerable. Because this culture is so naturalized as to be almost unnoticed, making it visible and challenging its hegemony is a

[102] Leonard, *The Story of Stuff*. See also the project's website, with the simple-but-sophisticated videos that helped the project first launch. http://storyofstuff.org/
[103] Timmerman, *Where Am I Wearing*.
[104] Schor, *Plenitude*.
[105] For such an analysis regarding climate change, see Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*, First Simon & Schuster hardcover edition.. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014).

pedagogical task, a task for those who, like Christian and other religious educators, are concerned with harm done to God's children and God's world.

Adolescent Learning and Adult Transformation in a Consumer Culture

The conceptual categories of constructive-developmental psychologist Robert Kegan[106] prove useful to us for making sense of the way marketing to children and the consumer behaviors of adolescents are relevant to the ways emerging adults[107] and older adults participate in, are formed by, and shape consumer culture. Kegan sees us not only learning information, but also developing in the ways we make sense of that information. He is less concerned with *what* we know than he is about *how* we know. He offers a typology with five different, progressively more complex, ways of knowing through which our thinking may develop. Of greatest import here are his third and fourth categories. The third-order way of knowing belongs to what Kegan calls "the socialized mind." It is in many ways a task of adolescence to develop this way of knowing, to learn how the culture at large expects one to know. In the contemporary culture of consumption, this third-order way of knowing would thus be overwhelmingly conventionally consumerist.

In many ways, if the social norms and ways of knowing are adequate, then so too is a third-order way of knowing adequate. If, however, the culture into which

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[106] Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).
[107] Jeffrey Arnett has helped us to zoom in on the granularity of the transition from late adolescence into adulthood by looking at (roughly speaking) the twenties as "emerging adulthood." See Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Debating Emerging Adulthood: Stage or Process?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

one is socialized is lacking, then the self formed in that culture will suffer. A self who is able to author, at least in part, its own identity is the product of what Kegan calls a fourth-order way of thinking. This "self-authoring mind" sees itself as an agent not only in its own development but also in the construction of the culture itself. It sees the culture not as given but as contingent, changing, and open to influence. The self-authoring knower is of course influenced by culture, but is not completely subject to it. She can see it as something outside of her, can hold it at arm's length, and can observe it as an object.

Most cultures -- and this is certainly true of consumerist culture -- are inherently conservative. They socialize into third-order knowing. They want us to understand and buy into the culture's values, ideologies, and practices. To this end, the socialization of children and adolescents into a culture of consumption can hardly be a surprise. Given the harms of such a culture, though, it behooves us to help people move into ways of knowing that allow them to co-author selves distinct from the culture, and to co-create a culture (or subcultures) with different values. Hence, when cultural critic Benjamin Barber[108] rails against the way consumer culture "infantilizes" adults, what is most useful in his screed is his objection to the way people are socialized into a consumerist culture and then frozen there. Such is the hegemony of consumer culture -- it militates against fourth-order knowing and acting, against the authoring of new selves and a new culture.

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[108] Benjamin R. Barber, *Con$umed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), http://www.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip075/2006039751.html.

The transformation from this third order to this fourth order way of knowing is, it seems, a process that can fruitfully be begun in late adolescence and be part of a process through early adulthood and later. Using Kegan's conceptual framework, then, the link between adolescent consumption and the way we educate adults, in our churches as well as in our colleges and universities, is two-fold. First, as many young adults are in the process of a third-order socialization, we should strive to help socialize them into a culture, or at least a sub-culture, more adequate to personal and social well-being than is consumerism. Second, it is in colleges and universities and beyond that emerging adults are ready to be coached towards fourth-order ways of knowing, where they can begin to author themselves in ways somewhat at variance with the dominant culture, and where they can begin to try out commitments to "worthy dreams"[109] like cultural change.

A Challenge for the Church

The culture of consumption is dominated by values and practices that foster materialism, at the cost of personal, social, global, and ecological well-being. It is a culture that is reproduced, among other means, through marketing, a marketing that is ever expanding into new platforms and more thoroughly integrated into our lives and personhoods. It is a culture into which we are unwittingly socialized, and is a culture that would seem to brook no alternative. As theologians and educators, then, we must in the ensuing chapters assess this culture's theological adequacy. Because the consumerist culture into which we have been socialized is so all-encompassing

[109] Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

to have squeezed out of us our ability to imagine alternatives, the Church shares with others the challenge of envisioning and effecting a more adequate culture of consumption and of proposing means of educating for those alternatives in the midst of a culture that so effectively socializes for its own reproduction.

Chapter 2

Understanding the Rider: A Theological Demand for Cultural Transformation

The previous chapter contains a description of the contours of consumer culture, including some of its personal, social, global, and ecological effects. Here I offer some of the theological critiques of this culture. Consumer culture is found wanting both because of the misshapen anthropology with which it operates and because the realities of its effects on people do not accord with key Christian principles such as the promotion of the common good and the option for the poor. In this chapter I call for a transformation of the culture of consumption into a culture that liberates persons for human flourishing -- what I designate a culture of *humanizing plenitude.* A culture that promotes such flourishing must be grounded in a more adequate theological anthropology than the anthropology that is operative in the culture of consumption. I name three particular aspects of that theological anthropology to which those who hope to influence culture for the better ought to attend.

The current consumer culture, whose hegemony and sheer size has earned it the title of "consumerism," is problematic for human persons, human society, and the natural world. If indeed "the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the [people] of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted . . . are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ,"[1] then consumerism must be the concern of the Church. Consumerism can be critiqued

[1] Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, 1, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

theologically from at least two different vantage points: an assessment of its effects and an evaluation of the key ideas that underpin it.[2] What makes a theological critique of consumerism so urgent are the very spiritual pretentions of consumer culture, its attempts to dominate human meaning-making.[3]

In fact, there are movements that draw upon "theologies" and biblical foundations that not only support but even actively promote consumerism. Historian Kate Bowler brings into frame the loosely connected ideologies and disparate institutions that promote what is commonly known as the Prosperity Gospel.[4] It is a movement most visible among certain televangelists, but she demonstrates that its influence and appeal goes broader and deeper than Jerry Falwell's popular *The 700 Club*. Bowler argues that participation in the movement of the Prosperity Gospel is a way of "inscribing materiality with spiritual meaning."[5] For Americans of a certain age, it is almost impossible to overcome the movement's associations with the scandalous misbehavior of Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker or with Oral Roberts's threat that his failure to reach a certain fundraising goal might mean his earthly end.[6] Bowler tellingly describes the movement's rise as a

[2] I prefer to treat these three as "vantage points" rather than as "categories," which would connote a fixedness and separateness. Instead, some of what I identify from each standpoint could well be raised up for examination and critique from one of the other standpoints as well. Foundational ideas, dominant values, and the existential realities of their being practiced are mutually formative and not separable.
[3] Claiming that consumer culture "attempts to dominate human meaning-making" is useful as a rhetorical device that emphasizes what is at stake for human persons as well as capturing something of the existential experience of living in consumer culture, of having the sense of the culture's hegemony and of being manipulated. On the other hand, I do not wish to claim that the culture itself has agency and intentionality. Culture is, after all, constructed and therefore also changed by the humans who live it.
[4] Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
[5] Ibid., 8.
[6] While Prosperity Gospel has manifested itself most vigorously in recent years in parts of Asia and Africa, its American versions are of primary interest here because they are a product of and response to the conditions of the particular American consumer culture.

"transformation of popular religious imagination,"[7] whereby the believers' faith overcomes any obstacles to demonstrable health and wealth.

In its most naive and unsophisticated forms, the Prosperity Gospel urges adherents to "name it and claim it": Believe now, pray correctly, and your faithful prayers will unleash the spiritual forces that will turn your prayers for health and wealth into reality. It comes across as a combination of Norman Vincent Peale's *Power of Positive Thinking*, Christian pentecostalism's faith in the efficacy of the Holy Spirit, and an eschatology that thoroughly collapses all hope into an immanent and imminent present. The movement draws scorn as merely providing a thin veneer of Christian respectability over naked materialism, and many observers understandably distrust its purveyors as cynical flimflam artists. Nonetheless, the Prosperity Gospel movement is a real, if, I argue, misguided, means of addressing human needs for meaning in material reality. Many pastors whom Bowler associates with the movement are reluctant to claim the title of "prosperity preachers," because of those very negative connotations. Instead, they grapple with tensions between the promise of abundant life in Christ (John 10:10) and what Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer so movingly describes as the "cost of discipleship."[8]

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[7] Bowler, *Blessed*, 7.
[8] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 1st Touchstone ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995).

Judging the Signs of the Times in Consumer Culture

By many criteria, the effects of consumerism must be judged unacceptable.[9] In particular, of course, we are concerned with judging consumerism by the standard of the Reign of God as revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures, in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and in the Christian tradition over the centuries. Here I draw on the themes of Catholic Social Teaching (CST),[10] not because the judgments are sectarian. Indeed, the tenets of CST have fairly broad traction, not only in ecumenically Christian conversations, but in Catholic-Jewish dialogue as well. Such should not be surprising, if the vision of Catholic Social Teaching is grounded Jesus's proclamation and inauguration of the Reign of God. After all, in many ways Jesus's religious vision was not so much revolutionary as it was radically conservative in

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[9] Joseph (later Cardinal) Cardijn, who founded the Young Christian Workers movement in Belgium, articulated a methodology for social analysis and action that has become the norm particularly in Catholic Social Teaching. This "See-Judge-Act" methodology begins with social analysis of the reality of a situation, requires judging that reality, and then demands pastoral planning and action based on that judgment. For a brief discussion of the methodology and its influence on the Catholic lay movements from which it emerged, see Claire E. Wolfteich, *American Catholics Through the Twentieth Century: Spirituality, Lay Experience and Public Life* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), 166–68. Pope John XXIII adopted and advocated this methodology in his encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, and its influence on Catholic Social Teaching since then is notable and visible. Pope John XXIII, "Mater et Magistra" (Vatican Press, 1961), 236, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_15051961_mater.html. The methodology is often represented as a cycle, with the actions then leading to a new round of observation and social analysis. The cyclical nature of the methodology allows others to prioritize action as then leading to a clearer revelation of social reality to be analyzed.

[10] Most formally, Catholic Social Teaching can be found expounded in a set of documents promulgated by the Roman Catholic Church since 1891. Prominent among them are papal encyclicals that particularly address social issues. Documents from the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and from various regional and national episcopal conferences are also often cited among the formal teachings of CST. Generally falling in between very broad doctrinal tenets on one hand ("God is love") and specific policy proposals on the other, Catholic Social Teaching is comprised of what may be called "middle axioms," principles meant to guide social action amidst historical contingency. Principles that have appeared repeatedly in the documents and that tend to appear more broadly in both formal and informal discourse from the Vatican gain status as the real substance of CST. Commentators often refer to these core principles as "themes" of CST. Although there is no formal designation of what constitutes a theme of CST and what those themes are, there is certainly general consensus on at least much of what fits the category. See for instance social ethicist Thomas Massaro, SJ, who identifies nine themes, and educator Kevin McKenna, who focuses instead on seven themes. See Thomas Massaro, *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action*, 2nd classroom ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012). See also Kevin E. McKenna, *A Concise Guide to Catholic Social Teaching*, Revised ed. (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2013).

that it drew on the God revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures. As the Jesuit theologian Roger Haight points out, "It would be surprising if the God of Jesus were not substantially the God of his Jewish upbringing . . . . Jesus's teaching and mediation of God substantially confirm and ratify this tradition."[11]

I focus here on two themes of CST to provide criteria for considering the impact of consumerism: the promotion of the common good and the option for the poor and vulnerable. Later in the chapter, I ground these principles in a vision of liberation for the human person in society, but for the time being, I merely posit them. Judged against both of these criteria, consumer culture exhibits significant deficiencies.

Consumerism Fails to Promote The Common Good

One of the great failings of consumerism, judged from the perspective of CST, is that it focuses attention on the privatization of goods, at the expense of the common good. There are two main ways in which the "common good" gets used in the documents of CST and in the work of theological ethicists like David Hollenbach, whose use of the concept is very much in consonance with its use in those documents. The first usage of the common good is as the conditions in society that allow for human flourishing.[12] For instance, the Vatican II document *Gaudium et*

[11] Roger Haight, *Jesus, Symbol of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 89.
[12] While terms such as "human flourishing," "human fulfillment," and "human development" have broad purchase in theological (and other) discourse, and I use them extensively, I want to add a caveat. There are two dangers. One is that "flourishing" or "development" or "fulfillment" may be interpreted as having a single, normative end. While not all development is equally good, and I hope that the anthropology I posit points to some of the common or essential aspects of that development, neither is flourishing monochrome. There are different aspects of human flourishing, and different people may, to some extent, flourish in different ways. One person, in fact, may flourish in different ways. The second danger, then, is that of

Spes calls the common good the "sum of those conditions of social life which allow groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment."[13] Fifty years on, Pope Francis takes this definition as his own, also, in *Laudato Si'*.[14]

There is also, however, a second level to the understanding of the common good in CST, one that is grounded in a more social anthropology. It is a good in itself, a good of common life, not merely the conditions that permit individual goods. Hollenbach agrees with philosopher Michael Sandel that "we can know a good in common that we cannot know alone."[15] The good of being a community is not only an instrumental means for attaining the private goods of individuals, but is also "a value to be pursued for its own sake."[16] More recently, Benedict XVI brings together these two facets of the common good, averring that it is the "good of all of us" as well as something to be sought "for the people who belong to the social community and who can only really and effectively pursue their good within it."[17]

Both of these facets of the common good emphasize its reciprocal nature. It is something from which all draw, but it is also something to which all contribute. Contributing to and benefiting from the common good are both rights and

seeing flourishing or development as something static and something that is either achieved or not achieved. Of course, all persons are ideally moving towards greater flourishing (in all of its varieties), but necessarily flourishing in some ways but not others, or flourishing partially, not unbridled.

[13] Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 26.

[14] Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 156–58.

[15] David Hollenbach, *The Common Good and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 18.

[16] Ibid., 81–82.

[17] Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (Vatican Press, 2009), 7, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html.

responsibilities.[18] Those who are marginalized from participation in decision-making are also likely marginalized from benefitting.

I have noted in the previous chapter that consumerism tends to deter contribution to the common good in a number of ways. Sociologist Robert Putnam sees the "work and spend treadmill" as contributing significantly to the privatization of American life. People have less time to spend in relationships and in the institutions of civic life because we are working more. Then, when we are not working, we spend time privately with the "stuff" we have bought through the extra time at work.[19] For instance, my friend Kristin, between work and family obligations, only has one day a week free. Exhausted, it is easy for her to spend the day watching the expensive NFL Redzone TV package on the big flatscreen TV in her living room.

This privatization also minimizes the attention paid to public spaces and public goods. As sociologist Juliet Schor and others point out, not only does time tend to become more privatized, but so too do goods. She gives the example of children's playspaces.[20] When a community joins together in some way, through taxpayer funding or some other sort of communal fundraising and work, to build a public playground, playing field, or gymnasium, the good is also then widely available. On the other hand, a for-profit children's playspace benefits fewer people and at greater cost. Moreover, it both reflects and reinforces the work-and-spend mentality of consumer culture. The consumer spends more time and/or energy

[18] National Conference Of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy* (Washington, DC: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1986), 77.
[19] Putnam, *Bowling Alone*.
[20] Schor, *The Overspent American*.

working to earn money so that they can spend it for their children to have a birthday party at Chuck E. Cheese, but then they have less time and inclination to support a community climbing wall or staffing for a town low-ropes course or low-cost dance lessons at the municipal recreation department.

The culture of consumption suppresses an awareness of and commitment to the common good, also, through the institutionalization of what theologian Tom Beaudoin, cited in Chapter One, calls "economic docetism," the tendency to divorce the essence, the "soul," of a brand from the materiality of the product, its "body."[21] This dualism mirrors the invisibility of labor conditions from the product as seen in store or online. Corporations often work hard, in fact, to remove the consumer's experience of a product far from the reality of the product's materiality. The product can have a story, but a story that is mythological, a story that is about what the product means, not where it really comes from and who makes it.[22] This divorce between "body" and "soul" of the product made easier by the outsourcing of production in the globalized economy and the flourishing of what are perhaps mistakenly called "multi-national" corporations. The processes of production are geographically as well as psychologically distanced from the consumer. Many corporations, as they move across borders in all aspects of the business, are better characterized as "trans-national," beholden less to a multiplicity of nation-states

[21] Beaudoin, *Consuming Faith*.
[22] Consider a 2016 advertising campaign by the corporate restaurant chain Chili's. The campaign included three television spots featuring low-definition video of shaggy-haired, casually-clad young adults smiling and mugging for the (presumably Super 8) camera while 1970's classic rock music plays. The narrator tells the viewer that Chili's "wasn't started by a bunch of stiffs in suits. Sometimes, they didn't even wear shirts." The advertisers have tried to give the corporation, through the story of its origin, a "soul" of a backyard cookout that has nothing to do with the daily realities of corporate policy, employee training and retention, food supply chains, health regulations, and the politics of liquor licenses. See *Chili's: Slow Ride Chillin' Since 1975*, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKSJwc0SC6g.

than to none. Thus, the corporations behind the brands that we buy, the brands with which we identify, are frequently detached from the communities in which we live. They may not have any physical presence there, minimize the number of full-time employees, and have little commitment to the welfare of those communities.[23]

When corporations tout their presence in and commitment to a community, it does not necessarily serve the common good, but instead merely serves as one more way of distinguishing -- and effectively advertising -- the brand. For instance, a brand like Nike[24] may claim a stake in community membership by sponsoring a youth sports program. When the youth who attend the program receive a t-shirt with the Nike logo and spend their time at the program, say, learning to hit tennis balls against the background of a large banner with the Nike "Swoosh," they are certainly going to associate their participation in the program on some level with the Nike brand. Nike's sponsorship of the program develops not the community but brand loyalty. As another example, Walmart, the world's largest corporation, has often been criticized for driving local retailers out of business. In response, Walmart has launched public relations campaigns emphasizing their community rootedness. What had been a point of consumer protest is thus, to some extent, successfully commodified.[25]

[23] Holt, "Why Do Brands Cause Trouble? A Dialectical Theory of Consumer Culture and Branding."
[24] Nike is hardly unique in using such strategies. I cite them in this example simply because they have been so effective in using such strategies.
[25] Miller, *Consuming Religion*.

Consumerism Undermines Solidarity and The Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

Consumerism is not simply bad for the common good. Besides the focus that consumerism puts on private goods at the expense of the common good, consumer culture tends to foster a disposition of self-centeredness that reduces empathic feeling and the actions born of empathy, as argued in Chapter One.[26] Those whose flourishing is most neglected, then, are those who are already most burdened -- the poor and vulnerable.

Part of what shapes consumer culture is the greater interdependence of a globalizing world. On an economic level, certainly, what happens in one part of the world of one sector of the economy is likely to have effects in others. While the poor may be socially isolated and materially deprived, in fact sustained wealth depends on the development of the poor, whether it be in the relationship between urban poverty in the United States or between the global South and the global North.[27] Pope Benedict XVI presents support for economically poor countries by economically wealthy countries, then, as a win-win; it keeps economic development sustainable in both.[28]

This *de facto* interdependence breaks down barriers between rich and poor in joining their fates together. For Pope John Paul II, the virtue of solidarity is expressed by not only recognizing this interdependence in fact but also by esteeming it as a good. It is this good that then creates a "duty of all towards all."[29]

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[26] Turkle, *Alone Together*.
[27] Hollenbach, *The Common Good and Christian Ethics*, 173–211.
[28] Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 27.
[29] Pope John Paul II, "Sollicitudo Rei Socialis" (Vatican Press, 1987), 32, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis_en.html.

Solidarity, he insists, is not merely the intellectual assent that this interdependence is good. It is a "firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say the good of all and each individual."[30]

Granting John Paul II's point that the virtue of solidarity involves practices and dispositions broader than simple empathy, it is nonetheless fairly self-evident that the experience of feelings of empathy can be a spur to the practices that develop a disposition of solidarity. It is in this context, then, that we must understand the concerns voiced by social scientist Sherry Turkle in her studies on science, technology, and culture. She fears that consumer culture in the digital age makes it too easy for us to relate superficially rather than to engage in true conversation. For Turkle, what is at stake is the ability to develop empathy.[31] In this sense, too, then, the culture of consumption throws up barriers to the solidarity that I judge as an essential part of a culture that promotes human flourishing.

If, in the immediate term, we operate as if this solidarity based on material interdependence is self-evident, we do so naively. If my thriving depends also on the thriving of, say, the child laborer who makes my clothing, it is so in a roundabout way. While human flourishing is certainly not a zero-sum game -- the same conditions that encourage my flourishing will often also encourage your flourishing -- nor is it always a win-win either. Sometimes my flourishing may be in conflict with your flourishing. Sometimes sacrifices have to be made for human development. Moral theologian David Hollenbach agrees that solidarity is not simply

[30] Ibid., 36.
[31] See, for instance, Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*. See also Kasser et al., “Some Costs of American Corporate Capitalism.”

about material interdependence, but goes further to posit a moral interdependence, or at least a recognition of moral equality and a duty to act in accordance with that moral equality.[32] That duty is actualized as the option for the poor.

Asserting that Jesus centered his ministry on the poor and vulnerable meets the criterion of embarrassment,[33] and is therefore widely accepted as true of the historical Jesus. He ministered to the sick and poor, widows and orphans, and welcomed women into his ministry. Of course, choosing to align himself with the poor and vulnerable, Jesus was not doing something radically new. In fact, he was acting very much in continuity with the best of his faith, a faith in a God who asked Israel to show special care for the *anawim*, orphans, widows, and foreigners, the most vulnerable in Israel's society.[34] If the virtue of solidarity helps us to think about duties and deserts, the option for the poor and vulnerable helps us to enter into the Gospel narrative of the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.

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[32] Hollenbach, *The Common Good and Christian Ethics*, 222–23.

[33] The nineteenth-century optimism that the "historical Jesus" could and would be uncovered through the tools of modern historical research has faded, as has the hope that such a historical reconstruction would be sufficient for the life of Christian faith. Nonetheless, a faith that calls itself Christian must find in the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth something of a touchstone. One criterion that many New Testament scholars agree makes something from the Gospels virtually certain to go back to the historical Jesus is the criterion of embarrassment. Reasoning that the Evangelists would not have included in the Gospels facts or words that would tend to diminish the esteem in which Jesus would be held by readers, and in fact likely sought to eliminate such inconveniences, anything embarrassing about Jesus that did make its way into the Gospels is likely to have been so historically undeniable that it simply could not be covered up. See for instance John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1991). Meier describes the criteria he uses to establish a baseline of historically almost-certain knowledge about the historical Jesus. While Meier is arguably not faithful in his use of these criteria throughout his five-volume opus, his reasoning that what fits the criterion of embarrassment is quite certain is nonetheless sensible. Scholars tend to agree, then, that Gospel evidence that Jesus was criticized for his association with persons who were marginalized makes that association highly likely. If we note that those who were marginalized were those least likely to have protectors in society, then care for the poor and vulnerable is indeed traceable to the ministry of Jesus.

[34] While the term "option for the poor" has been used most often, the Old Testament roots of the concept are grounded in concern not only for those who are materially poor but who, like foreigners, orphans, and widows, are vulnerable to poverty or to deprivation of various sorts because they lack social or legal defenses. For this reason, I am among those who widen the principle to call it the "option for the poor and vulnerable." See, for example, Exodus 22:21-24.

While the term *option for the poor* is relatively recent in CST, the concept itself is not. It is evident even in *Rerum Novarum*, the 1891 encyclical of Pope Leo XIII that marks the start of the period of modern CST. It is a response at the social level to the structural injustices that oppress some people economically. Irish theologian Donal Dorr summarizes the option for the poor as "a choice to disentangle [institutions] from serving the interests of those at the 'top' of society and instead to begin to come into solidarity with those at or near the bottom."[35] I will add that the structural injustices are not only economic. Unjust economic conditions reinforce and are reinforced by political, social, and ideological injustices.

After the Second Vatican Council, and especially since the gathering of the Catholic Bishops of Latin America at Medellin in 1968,[36] the option for the poor has been central in the rhetoric of Catholic Church documents. The personal and social struggles of the poor are identified as the struggles of the Church.[37] The option for the poor is found in theology and in practices, but is also a hermeneutic, a way of looking at the world that prioritizes the experiences, realities, voices, and contributions of the poor.[38] The option for the poor in this sense requires actively seeing the reality of the lives of the poor. People, as moral agents, must really look

[35] Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Vatican Social Teaching* (Maryknoll, NY: Gill and Macmillan, 1983), 3–4.
[36] Taking seriously the rhetoric from Vatican II to prioritize the struggles of the poor, at their 1968 meeting in Medellin, Colombia, the Latin American Bishops' Conference (CELAM) legitimized what Gustavo Gutierrez later systematizes as the Theology of Liberation emerging from Base Christian Communities of reflection and practice among the poor and vulnerable in Latin America. While Liberation Theology and its proponents can certainly be said to have had a tenuous relationship with the Vatican, through all of the vagaries of that relationship, the "preferential option for the poor" has gained wide traction so as to be an indispensible aspect of virtually all Catholic theology, including but not limited to teachings from the Vatican. See Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson, Revised edition (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1988).
[37] Dorr, *Option for the Poor*, 157.
[38] Ricardo. Antoncich, *Christians in the Face of Injustice : A Latin American Reading of Catholic Social Teaching*, trans. Matthew J O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 72–82.

and listen.[39] In the words of the champion of global health Dr. Paul Farmer, founder of Partners in Health, the option for the poor requires that "we recognize atrocious conditions as atrocious."[40] It is for this reason, then, that the solidarity that underpins the option for the poor transcends simple charity, but involves often a challenge to the systems that create the current realities, that make some "haves" and others "have nots." The German theologian Johannes Baptist Metz challenges Christians to truly commit to the option for the poor with what he calls "class treason."[41] While in socialist discourse, concern over class treason has mostly been focused on the working class who support the capitalist status quo, against their own class interests, Metz here urges those who are beneficiaries of the unjust system to act against the interests of their own class in delegitimizing and challenging that very system.[42]

Interpreting consumer culture through the standards of the option for the poor and vulnerable calls us to judge the culture harshly. In the One-Third World, those who are materially poor and emotionally, psychologically, and socially vulnerable are those who are most exploited and who suffer most. Part of the scandal of some of the Prosperity Gospel movements is that they attract those in the

[39] Jon Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Orbis Books, 1988).
[40] Paul Farmer, *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 152.
[41] Johannes Baptist Metz, *The Emergent Church :The Future of Christianity in a Postbourgeois World*, trans. Peter Mann (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 14–16.
[42] For an assertion that persons of any socioeconomic status can commit class treason, see Barbara Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class*, Reprint edition (New York: Harpercollins, 1990),154.

most financially precarious situations and, in some cases, prey on them.[43] In the Two-Thirds World, it also the poorest and most vulnerable who suffer most in the globalization of consumer culture.

As discussed in the previous chapter, much of what advertising is about is identifying, exacerbating, and exploiting psychological vulnerabilities. The dramatic increase in advertising to children that began when the Federal Communications Commission loosened regulations on the practice[44] has allowed marketers to target the most defenseless of all, those who are unable even to recognize the difference between an advertisement and objective information.[45] Moral theologian Mary Margaret Doyle Roche finds this type of exploitation of children in consumer culture problematic not only because it targets the defenseless but also because, in interfering with their healthy psychological and moral development, it tends to make them less prepared to contribute to the common good.[46] I add also that the psychological costs to children and adolescents' emotional health puts more pressure on scarce public resources.[47] In other words, the option for the poor and the common good are not simply separate criteria by which we should judge the

[43] Rock superstars U2 spoke for many who were aghast at the naked greed of the worst of the televangelists of the 1980s, whom they saw to be "stealing money from the sick and the old. Well the God I believe in isn't short of cash, Mister!" U2, *Bullet the Blue Sky*, Rattle and Hum (Island Records, 1988).
[44] Barbaro and Earp, *Consuming Kids: The Commercialization of Childhood*.
[45] Linn, *Consuming Kids*.
[46] Roche, *Children, Consumerism, and the Common Good*.
[47] Unfortunately, blunt measurements of national well-being like Gross Domestic Product (GDP) do a poor job of accounting such costs. For instance, when the harms to children require psychotherapeutic care, those services end up being counted as strengths in GDP. Meanwhile, the human costs of suffering, the opportunity costs of what else could have been done with the time and funds, and the unknown costs of what these children then do not contribute positively to the community are much more difficult to chart. On the problem of using GDP as a measure of national well-being, or even of economic health and development, see Martha C. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2011).

culture. Generally, what is good for the poor and vulnerable in society also contributes to the common good. The two are "mutually implicating."[48]

Another element of the consumer culture's exploitation of the vulnerable is gendered. As argued in Chapter One, women in general, and adolescent girls in particular, have suffered from the ways consumerism has sexualized them. Participation in this culture has encouraged us to see a woman's value only in her sexual appeal or behavior, held women to narrowly defined standards of physical attractiveness, and imposed sexuality on women in ways that are inappropriate, including developmentally-inappropriate ways.[49] When "locker room talk" is not anomalous but is instead emblematic of the real values of consumer culture, women, especially young women, suffer.

This increased pressure on adolescents, and especially adolescent girls, is not accidental. Journalist Alissa Quart is among those who have chronicled the intentionality with which corporations have sought to "brand" teens. One of her concerns -- and what should be our concern as theologians, also -- is the manipulative aspect of brand marketing.[50] For instance, peer-to-peer marketing techniques that trade on the desire for relationship and belonging blur the lines between being a friend and being a salesperson.

On the level of the person, there is evidence that, as conventional wisdom might predict, those who are least secure emotionally are most prone to buying into

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[48] Hollenbach (2001) makes this claim about human right and the common good, and it applies equally well here.

[49] American Psychological Association Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls, "Report of The APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls" (New York: APA, 2010), 1, http://www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/girls/report.aspx.

[50] Alissa Quart, *Branded: The Buying And Selling Of Teenagers*, Reprint (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

the materialist values of consumerism and to practice conspicuous consumption. Psychologist Tim Kasser finds evidence that such insecurities can be correlated with such things as having received less-nurturing parenting and with relative material deprivation at a young age.[51] These findings fit well with Helga Dittmar's observation from a meta-analysis of studies on materialism that in economically developed countries, it is often those who can least afford to buy into the consumerist mythos, those of the lower socio-economic status, who are most prone to its lures, most likely to try to buy their way out into a status upgrade of some sort.[52]

Moreover, the poor are vulnerable in the consumer culture in structural ways. On the one hand, the culture of consumption incentivizes retail stores to schedule employees to shifts that coincide with consumer traffic. Certainly, there is a simple market dynamic at work. However, retailers schedule workers for shorter and shorter shifts, increasing the ranks of the working poor.[53] Worse, employees with hourly wages are sometimes still expected to be "on call" and prepared to come in to work, with no guarantee that they will be called in or receive any pay.[54]

No consideration of the effects of consumerism on the poor would be complete without recognizing the devastating effects the consumer boom has on labor and environmental conditions in the One-Third World. As the work of Juliet Schor has demonstrated, much of what has made the consumer boom of recent

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[51] Kasser, "Materialistic Values and Goals."
[52] Dittmar, "The Costs of Consumer Culture and the 'Cage Within.'"
[53] Susan J. Lambert, "Passing the Buck: Labor Flexibility Practices That Transfer Risk onto Hourly Workers," *Human Relations* 61, no. 9 (September 1, 2008): 1203–27, doi:10.1177/0018726708094910.
[54] "Stuck In Part-Time," *On Point*, November 15, 2012, http://onpoint.legacy.wbur.org/2012/11/15/part-time.

decades so visible has been the sheer volume of clothing and consumer electronics being bought and sold.[55] It is not so much an increase in total purchasing power as it is a dramatic decrease in the cost of these particular types of goods that has fueled the boom.

This price drop has to come from somewhere, and two of the inputs that have been minimized have been labor costs and environmental costs in the globalized economy. Stories of the abuses of labor, especially of young women, have been all too common as we have assessed the explosion of consumer markets. Manufacturers are incentivized to find places of production with the lowest labor costs, which often means inhumane and exploitative wages, hours, and working conditions. What is more, because environmental regulations also drive up production costs, manufacturers seek countries whose environmental regulations are most lax. In fact, governments desperate to industrialize in the hopes that industrialization will be the same thing as "economic development" seek to attract foreign investment in manufacturing by keeping labor costs low (such as by discouraging unionization) and minimizing or not enforcing environmental regulations. Environmental costs are not reflected in the prices of the final manufactured products. They are what economists call "externalities," costs borne by society more broadly, and often by the already-poor who live in close proximity to areas where air quality and groundwater are affected most.[56] There are also those

[55] Schor, *Plenitude*.

[56] For a layperson-friendly description of how labor and pollution abuses make the prices of consumer goods artificially low, see "Story of Stuff," *The Story of Stuff Project*, accessed March 10, 2016, http://storyofstuff.org/. Theologian Tom Beaudoin (2004) chronicles his attempt to learn the origins of some of the products he uses, but cannot get too far. His accounts of sweatshop labor, though, accord with those of many others, including journalist Naomi Klein (2009).

who see climate change, partially driven by consumer culture, as a cost born first and most heavily by the most vulnerable, but, ultimately, by all.[57] Given the high costs that cheap goods have on the poor and vulnerable, the consumer culture that promotes these abuses must be judged, theologically, unacceptable.

The Flourishing Human Person

Underpinning all of the values of consumer culture, driving the processes that result in the exploitation of the vulnerable and the turn away from the common good, is a malformed vision of what the human person is and what she is for. The critique of the late ethicist and Jesuit John Kavanaugh's in his classic *Following Christ in a Consumer Society.*[58] still stands -- at the root of consumerism is an anthropology that commodifies the person, makes her replaceable and marketable, and not valued in and for herself.[59] The human progress towards fulfillment is short-circuited, and her identity becomes swallowed up in consumption and materialism.

The theological anthropology underpinning this dissertation is variously called a Christian humanism or Christian personalism. I borrow much from the anthropology that drives ethicist John Kavanaugh's critique of consumer culture as

[57] Klein, *This Changes Everything*.
[58] Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society*.
[59] Kavanaugh's ethics is grounded in a Christian personalism that closely mirrors that of Karol Wojtyla (later Pope John Paul II). It should be no surprise, then, that Kavanaugh's own theological assessment of consumerism and the desire for a more adequate anthropology is reflected in the documents of Catholic Social Teaching issued by John Paul II and his successors, Benedict XVI and Francis. In its twentieth-century formulations, Christian personalism owes much to the work of French philosopher Emmanuel Mounier. See Emmanuel Mounier, *Personalism*, trans. Philipe Mairet (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970). Wojtyla was particularly influenced by another French philosopher, Jacques Maritain, whose Christian personalism is rooted in the theology of Thomas Aquinas. See Bernard A. Gendreau, "The Role of Jacques Maritain and Emmanuel Mounier in the Creation of French Personalism," *The Personalist Forum* 8, no. 1 (1992): 97–108, doi:10.2307/20708626. I also acknowledge a debt to another Frenchman, the practical philosopher Peter Maurin, whose personalist vision so influenced Dorothy Day as they founded the Catholic Worker movement.

one that commodifies everything and everyone. His hope for cultural change is grounded in a culture that values the human person as human person, not simply as a commodity.[60] The mere existence of such a goal for a culture, that it operate for the sake of humankind, is not itself particularly innovative. It is a codification on the collective level of Immanuel Kant's second formulation of the categorical imperative: "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end."[61] It is the same approach to cultural mores that drives Jesus to say, "The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath" (Mk 2:27).

Karol Wojtyla, later Pope John Paul II, was profoundly influential in the grounding of contemporary theology in a Christian personalism, particularly among Catholic thinkers. In his first encyclical as pope, *Redemptor Hominis*, John Paul II names the goal of Church as helping humankind, redeemed in Christ, to live into the fullness of its dignity by "being more."[62] In many other hands, the concept of "being more" is expressed in language of human flourishing or fulfillment. In other works, Wojtyla writes of the human task as "self-actualization" or "self-fulfillment." The fullness of humankind is not simply given; it is also the task of human living. Kavanaugh uses similar language. He writes of human nature as capable of

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[60] John F. Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society : The Spirituality of Cultural Resistance*, 25th anniversary ed.. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006). The clearest statement of what he calls here his Christian cultural anthropology is found on pages 75–87.

[61] Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. ed and tr H. J Paton, 3rd ed., Harper Torchbook (London: Harper & Row, 1964), 4:429.

[62] Pope John Paul II, “Redemptor Hominis” (Vatican Press, March 4, 1979), 18, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis.html.

liberation from a blind acceptance of the status quo, of being able, unlike the proverbial fish, to see the water in which we swim. This liberation changes the horizon of the human imagination and affirms the possibilities for human development. He sees the future of the person as a "creative self-project,"[63] but a project that is perpetually unfinished. A symptom, for Kavanaugh, of this unfinished task is the human condition of incompleteness, expressed in "a striving for, a being driven to, the realization of our potentialities in a mutuality of knowing and loving."[64]

This assertion then imbues humanity and human culture with theological and spiritual coloring. It is in this culture than humans continue to become who they are. In addition to their personal actions, they are both enabled and constrained by the culture in which they act. The culture, then, can facilitate or impede fulfillment, even as it is itself a human construct. As Wojtyla notes, "Man makes culture, needs culture, and through culture, creates himself."[65]

Having placed human flourishing at the center of the project of living, I must now note an inability and a reluctance to define that flourishing too narrowly or to describe it too confidently. There is room for debate over what constitutes that flourishing and whether or how we can recognize it when it is happening. Undoubtedly, there are many manifestations of human flourishing, no single *telos* towards which every person must drive. Some of the various manifestations of

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[63] John F. Kavanaugh, *Human Realization; An Antroduction to the Philosophy of Man* (New York: Corpus Books, 1971), 5–6.
[64] Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society*, 77.
[65] As quoted in Andrew N. Woznicki, *A Christian Humanism: Karol Wojtyla's Existential Personalism* (New Britain, CT: Mariel Publications, 1980), 44.

human flourishing may even appear mutually exclusive. For instance, the Prosperity Gospel's promise of health and wealth appears different from an assertion that the greatest joy is found in the fullest self-sacrifice, even to the cross. Without trying to reconcile all of the competing claims, I nonetheless assert that the collective recognition of certain experiences as fulfilling, especially when that fullness accords with the gathered wisdom of Scripture and Tradition, likely points to genuine flourishing.[66] I claim, then, that liberation unfolds in human history and is both personal and social. What is at stake is not only action for personal flourishing but also the collective creation of the conditions in which people are most likely to flourish.[67]

The Anthropology of Consumer Culture

Evidence from Chapter One pointing to personal, social, and global ill-being indicates that consumer culture is not conducive to human flourishing. This cultural failure can be traced to the inadequacy of the anthropology that is operative in a

[66] I may be mistaken in what I assert to be genuinely fulfilling, but I am confident that I am mostly looking in the right places.

[67] While here I focus on explicitly Christian values and virtues as potentially evidence of and paths to human flourishing, these values are broadly commensurate across faiths. In his classic *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1997), William James attempts a phenomenological observation and description of the human religious experience regardless of sect. His work culminates in a description of saintliness, the best of what religion has to offer. He observes in these people an asceticism, self-surrender, charity, and "strength beyond anxiety." William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Simon and Schuster, 1997), 202. Such characteristics have little in common with the power, image, competition, and concerns with personal success so characteristic of our consumerist culture; in fact, the characteristics promoted by consumerism would seem to have to be transcended, even controlled, in what most of us would view as healthy religious development. Certainly, James' study can be critiqued for its methodology and the limitations of the idea of a universalizable religious character, but many of his characterizations nonetheless ring true. There is something recognizably virtuous across religions and cultures in the "saintly" persons he describes.

culture of consumption. A culture grounded in a poor understanding of the human person is ill-equipped to foster the flourishing of that person.

Kavanaugh's critique of the consumer culture is rooted in the Marxian concept of the "commodity fetish." For Marx, the commodities that we fetishized were the material goods produced by human hands (or, more so, human labor in the factory). These commodities turned from mere "things" into idols, objects of devotion, even a type of worship. The human person, then, becomes two things only -- a laborer and a consumer of the products of his labor. For Kavanaugh, this fetishization is especially problematic when the goods, experiences, and images that we consume (and, I add, display) become who we are. Hence, "we become re-created, not in the image of a living personal God, but in the image of dead things which can neither see nor feel nor listen nor speak." He goes on, then, to describe this strange mix of self-idolatry and self-imposed limitations:

> Entrusting our identity to dead objects, we take on their characteristics and imagine ourselves to be things without capacity for listening, feeling, or truly communicating. Thus we become estranged from our very selves, from each other, and even from the living and true God. Human relationships, activities, qualities become thing-like relations, actions, qualities. . . . [I]n measuring ourselves by their qualities, we have created a false god which exacts from us our freedom and personhood.[68]

There is a faith dimension to this hegemony of consumerism, then. It depends on a misunderstanding of the human that is both idolatrous and self-alienating. The spiritual disconnect exacerbates the inadequacies and poverty of the human condition. Theologian William Cavanaugh, drawing especially on the idea of the commodity as idol, sees in this disconnect an attempt to use material goods not

[68] Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society*, 34–35.

to serve the human relationship with God but as goods in themselves, to become rather than to serve meaning in our lives.[69]

Drawing upon an Augustinian[70] view of the human person and the created world in relationship to God, we can flesh out Cavanaugh's theological critique of consumerism a bit further. The human condition is aptly described by Reinhold Niebuhr as a paradox of freedom and finitude. The human person can desire ultimacy, perfection, or limitlessness. Yet, we are also bound by finitude -- realities of death, illness, weakness, poverty, and an inadequacy to achieve what we desire. For Niebuhr, sin consists in failing to accept our finitude. This failure is at the root of our attempts to dominate others and the natural world.[71] It is akin to what Augustine describes as our lust for domination, the *libido dominandi.* These attempts to overcome our finitude through domination look an awful lot like the commodification of persons that Kavanaugh identifies as the theological root of consumerism.[72]

On the level of the person, I have noted that an attempt to overcome finitude through overvaluing of created things fails. Our deepest longings, then, are not met in created things. "They die. *We* die," says Cavanaugh. "Only God is eternal. Only

[69] Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed*, 33–58.
[70] As evidenced in the opening pages of his *Confessions*, Augustine sees the human person as created for perfection with God. The whole of the created world is good, but its goodness is a qualified good; it is good to the extent that it serves the supreme good of life with God. So, for instance, for Augustine, interpersonal love is good, but only relatively so. When we use it to replace love for God, we miss the mark. Material goods also are good only relatively, to the extent that they turn us to the supreme Good of God's love. Augustine, *Confessions (Oxford World's Classics)*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford University Press, 2009).
[71] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996).
[72] Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society*, 128.

God stops the decay of time."[73] Pope Francis describes consumerism as a "great danger in today's world" in that it leads to "desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart."[74]

Adherence to the Prosperity Gospel, I contend, is a means for people to try to harmonize the dissonance between their freedom and their finitude. Faith brings the assurance of the fulfillment of needs and a community of fellow believers. Triumph over the limitations of uncertainty, material and physical, eases the spiritual anxieties of the human condition, and does so in a way that connects its adherents with others in community. Its believers believe they have overcome finitude rather than having to embrace it.

Ever since the work of Valerie Saiving, theologians have rightly sought to describe and define sin more broadly than did Niebuhr, drawing upon the experiences of women, of black men and women, and persons outside of the North Atlantic context, and for the better.[75] However, Niebuhr's description of the human condition has enduring value, as does his description of sin. Both seem particularly apt for the human experience as both subject to and shaper of consumer culture. I make this assertion attentive to the need for care in using the word "sin." If sin is located simply in acts (committing sins), then Niebuhr is read too narrowly. With a more expansive understanding of sin, though, Niebuhr's description takes on more explanatory and descriptive validity. For instance, when sin is understood as separation from God, community, and self, attempting to overcome the dissonance

[73] Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed*, 49.
[74] Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel: Evangelii Gaudium*, First U.S. ed. (New York: Image, 2014), 2.
[75] Valerie Saiving Goldstein, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," *The Journal of Religion* 40, no. 2 (April 1, 1960): 100–112.

between freedom and finitude is fruitfully understood as a potential root of sin. Even if Niebuhr's description does not have the total explanatory power he may have proposed, it is nonetheless useful.[76]

This skewed anthropology is also evidenced in an economism that all too often permeates our discourse. By economism I mean a tendency to reduce complex phenomena to their economic factors. What starts as perhaps analytical sloth slowly transforms into a skewed way of looking at the world and at human behavior. At its most blatant, economism could be, in political calculation, for instance, seen in the use of the classical economists' construct of the perfectly rational and self-serving *homo economicus* as not simply a tool but as an understanding of the human person. Over the last half-century, even as behavioral economists have complexified this notion of *homo economicus*, the assumption that it is this *homo economicus* who is in some sense the most real, who is the core of the human person, nonetheless continues to operate more pervasively than we might imagine. Consider, for example, the popular *Freakonomics* series of books, blogs, and podcasts. The authors claim to be exploring the "hidden side of everything," offering economic explanations as totalizing.[77]

In this same vein, consumerism is built on and reinforces an anthropology that limits the person, as a consumer, to someone who makes meaning and identity

[76] James Keenan surveys theological understandings of sin. His work emphasizes that what sin is considered to be has profound effects of ethical reflection. Moving beyond the act-centered definition of sin that dominated for much of the Second Millennium, Keenan retrieves biblical notions of sin as "missing the mark" as well as contemporary notions of sin as separation. See James F. Keenan, “Raising Expectations on Sin,” *Theological Studies* 77, no. 1 (March 1, 2016): 165–80, doi:10.1177/0040563915620466.
[77] Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner, *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything*, 1st ed. (New York: William Morrow Paperbacks, 2009). The co-authors maintain a website with a blog and a podcast aired on NPR at http://freakonomics.com/.

only through the signaling she does with her consumption.[78] The rise of the brand economy is an especially egregious example of this anthropology. As indicated in the first chapter, branded identities can foreclose the exploration of other aspects of personhood, preventing the full flourishing of the human person and the full development of her potential.

It is especially important to note, here, what the human person is NOT, at least not according to the operative anthropology of consumer culture. The person may be a laborer, but is not really much of a producer. What is produced is for the sake of consumption; there is no real production as creation. The person is laborer more than creator.

This skewed anthropology is not inconsequential, no mere academic misunderstanding of the human person. The stakes, as Kavanaugh points out, are particularly high. The consumer culture underpinned by what he calls the "commodity form" is not only symptomatic of but also reinforces a devaluing of persons in all facets of public and private life -- with unacceptable consequences. American militarism is tied to the quest for cheap oil and free markets, yes, but also works because of the concomitant commodification of (and low value placed on) lives. The paucity of social programs for the poor, the marginalization of the elderly, the ruthless marketing, the sexual exploitation, and the high levels of interpersonal violence in the United States are all possible when an adequate understanding of personhood is missing from our economic equations.

[78] Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.

A Culture for the Flourishing Person More Fully Considered

If Kavanaugh rightly decries the warped anthropology of the consumer culture that commodifies the person, then with him we must put the person back at the center of the economy, back at the center of the culture. Kavanaugh calls for us to replace the "commodity form" with the "personal form."[79] The personal form of culture transcends the alienation of culture as "a frozen artifact," instead freeing the human spirit for "newness of human imagination" that enhances rather than cripples the "persistent human hopes for fulfillments, rights, and values."[80] The dominant culture can foster human liberation, but only if the culture itself is transformed. The goal of this project, grounded in Christian personalism, is transforming culture so that makes this flourishing more likely.

The inadequacy of the anthropology of consumerism cries out for a fuller and better Christian anthropology. We need to imagine differently, more robustly, what the human person is. It is not enough that we move the human person back to the center of the culture, including the culture of consumption, if that culture is to be redeemed.[81] We must also have an adequate conception of who that human person

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[79] There is something of a reductionist tendency to Kavanaugh's schema. He identifies characteristics and values of the Commodity Form and opposes them to the characteristics and behaviors of the Personal Form, in areas including knowledge, will, behaviors, affection, life, and reality itself. Most of the ills of contemporary culture are ascribed to the "thing-ness" that dominates in the Commodity Form, to the point that commodification becomes a totalizing explanation for cultural fallenness. While I fear that commodification then loses its explanatory power and simply becomes a shorthand label for anything that Kavanaugh considers ethically problematic, we need still to appreciate the value of Kavanaugh's analysis. If we see the Commodity and Personal Forms as theoretical types, existing only in mixed and diluted forms in the messy reality of culture, we are better able to utilize the analysis. Such is more in keeping, it seems, with Kavanaugh's intent for the work. In any case, it is how I use it.

[80] Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society*, 82.

[81] The language of "cultural redemption" is paradoxical when paired with a personalist anthropology. What it should convey is that because the person is of the culture, and the person's flourishing is conditioned by the culture, then the culture must be transformed so that persons can be liberated for flourishing. Because the culture is created by persons, then it can be transformed by human effort. By saying a culture can be

is, and what that human person is for, if the culture is to be truly humanized, and therefore sanctified. This dissertation is not the place for a complete Christian anthropology, but the following aspects of such an anthropology are useful in considering the transformation of the culture of consumption: *the person is relational; the person is a creative producer as well as a consumer; and the human condition is rightly subject to the constraints of finitude.*

A Relational Person

The human person is social and relational. Among the many contributions that feminist thought has brought to theology has been a thoroughgoing challenge to the modern conflation of personhood with isolation and individualism. The person in the state of nature in the philosophical schemes of the social contract theorists Thomas Hobbes,[82] John Locke,[83] and Jean-Jacques Rousseau,[84] for instance, is isolated and monadic. Society is secondary, not historically, but ontologically, to this individual person.

Drawing on, but not limited to, the experience of women, feminist thinkers have helped to reclaim relationality as central to such fundamental elements of the human being as moral decision-making[85] and epistemology.[86] Post-modern

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"redeemed" I mean that a culture can be transformed so as to better create the conditions in which human persons can be liberated for their fullest flourishing.

[82] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[83] John Locke, *Of Civil Government: Second Treatise*, Gateway ed. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1955).

[84] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, World's Classics (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[85] Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

philosophies of identity have challenged the monadic self that Charles Taylor claims "buffered" itself throughout modernity.[87] Indeed, the self is more and more seen to exist not *in se*, but only in relationship with and negotiation with the persons, culture, and communities in which it exists.[88]

Relationality is part of the essence of the human person, as reflected in further theological insights pioneered or, rather, recovered by feminist theologians. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is foundational that humans are created in the "image and likeness of God" (Gen 1:27). Catherine Mowry LaCugna is among the theologians who have delved into the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and its implications for our understanding of the *imago Dei*. She emphasizes that the Trinitarian God is not simply three persons, but persons who are in relationships of giving and receiving, with each person of the Trinity absolutely needing the others; God is relational within Godself.[89] She writes, "The doctrine of the Trinity affirms that the 'essence' of God is relational, other-ward, that God exists as diverse persons united in a communion of freedom, love, and knowledge."[90] Such a claim compels us to consider human relationality not only as essential to our personhood but also as divine.[91] Because the project of human flourishing is about more fully imaging God, then nurturing and being perfected in that relationality is part of the human task.

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[86] Mary Field Belenky et al., *Women's Ways of Knowing : The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).
[87] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2007).
[88] Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).
[89] Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992).
[90] Ibid., 243.
[91] While there is a newness and freshness to this relational understanding of the Trinitarian God, it is also a recovery of what has long been part of the Christian Tradition. It was Augustine of Hippo who characterized the Holy Spirit as the personification of the love between God the Father and God the Son.

Catholic teaching has come to emphasize this social aspect of the human person particularly in light of the multiplication of social ties within and across societies that marked the second half of the twentieth century. The Church Council Fathers at Vatican II urged that this multiplication of social ties should also promote human development.[92] For John Paul II, this multiplication of social ties is the "interdependence" within which persons and societies are mutually formative.[93]

Obviously, a social and relational anthropology (and concomitant theology) serves as a grounding for principles like the concern for the common good and the option for the poor and vulnerable. Without this understanding of the human person, these principles are somewhat arbitrary; with it, they are part and parcel of what it means to be human, to become most human. If the person is inherently social, then our life in common matters to the core of our very being and to Christian identity.

The Person as Creative Producer

Secondly, the human person is not only a consumer but also a creative laborer, a producer. Human labor is not merely for the production of what is to be consumed, but is an expression of human freedom and, in the understanding of John Paul II, an opportunity to participate in God's ongoing work of creation, to be co-creators with God. He sees work neither as a punishment for sin nor as an unfortunate consequence of humanity's fallenness, but as an essential, creative, and potentially sacred part of the human experience. He distinguishes, though, between

[92] Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 6.
[93] Pope John Paul II, "Sollicitudo Rei Socialis."

"work," which is creative and productive, and "toil," which is exhausting and minimally productive. Toil is indeed part of a fallen condition. A culture of consumption that promotes sweatshop labor conditions -- toil *par excellence* -- is indeed a fallen culture, in need of redemption. [94]

Taking seriously our roles as both producers and consumers encourages us to engage the true materiality of the human condition,[95] to overcome that "economic docetism" of which Beaudoin is so wary.[96] We are producers and consumers both as individuals and as a society. Our potential to consume and the work through which we produce are intimately related. Accepting this reality in our lives as persons is also part of considering its social importance. Juliet Schor calls this reality "true materialism."[97] True materialism is cognizant of the value of material goods -- and the real costs of those goods.

Humans not only produce material goods, but also produce culture, even as we are shaped by that culture.[98] It was one of the goals of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire that people see themselves not simply as "subjects" of the culture but as "agents," and claim that agency.[99] This understanding of the human producing cultural objects and cultural meaning is part of an adequate understanding of the human person.

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[94] Pope John Paul II, "Laborem Exercens" (Vatican Press, 1981), http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html.
[95] Nicholas Boyle, *Who Are We Now? : Christian Humanism and the Global Market from Hegel to Heaney* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 40, 117.
[96] Beaudoin, *Consuming Faith*.
[97] Schor, *Plenitude*.
[98] Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society*.
[99] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

This vision of the human person in relation as empowered cultural agents, individually and collectively, accords well with what adherence to the life of Christ seems to demand. The Jesus of the Gospels empowers people for active participation in society in the face of oppressive powers that divide, fragment, or oppress. Jesus proclaimed and enacted the Reign of God not simply to Israel, but to an Israel that was a backwater province of the Roman Empire, to a people subject to imperial domination. In the villages of Galilee, this domination tended to dispossess them of their land, concentrating wealth in fewer and fewer hands.[100]

Jesus's response was to urge cooperative empowerment, argues New Testament scholar Richard Horsley. Egalitarian social and economic relations renewed community life as a form of resistance to the overwhelming force of economic imperialism. People in the villages supporting each other could together ride out the vagaries of life at the margins as a colonized people.[101] Underlying this cooperation in community was the reality of a history of covenant, a covenant that Jesus saw as foundational for the Kingdom, a covenant he sought to renew and to enact among the people.[102] If our current reality is one also of the colonization of our minds and our public and private lives by consumer culture, we may look to a renewal of community life as a source of resistance to consumerism.

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[100] Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*, 1st Fortress Press ed (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1993), 3–15.
[101] Ibid., 209–84.
[102] Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 105–28.

Embracing Finitude

The third aspect of a Christian anthropology that is essential to a healthy grappling with consumer culture is a recognition of, even an embrace of, human finitude. Finitude is not only a part of the human condition to be saved **from**; it is part of the human condition to be saved **in.** If sin is, at least to some extent, rooted in the self-aggrandizement that is an attempt to overcome the finitude of our mortality, our contingency, our "insufficiency unto ourselves,"[103] then there is something salvific in accepting and embracing this finitude.

It is this acceptance of finitude that the political theologian Johannes Baptist Metz describes as a disposition of "poverty of spirit," and embracing this finitude despite our longings to transcend it is indeed the very task of becoming more fully human.[104] Of the Incarnation, God's becoming human, Metz writes, "To become human means to become 'poor,' to have nothing to brag about before God. . . . Becoming human involves proclaiming the poverty of the human spirit in the face of the total claims of a transcendent God."[105]

Metz goes on to describe God's self-emptying into a Christ who was truly human, truly poor in spirit, as the model of humanization. "Christ showed us," he says, "how to really become human beings."[106] Becoming most fully human is to be liberated from "slavery" to the anxiety brought on by a rejection of finitude; it is to be liberated "obediently accepting our innate poverty."[107]

[103] Johannes Baptist` Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*, Revised (Paulist Press, 1998), 25.
[104] Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*.
[105] Ibid., 10.
[106] Ibid., 19.
[107] Ibid., 28.

By contrast, so much of what drives consumerism are the cultural messages that assure us that we can have it all, than we can be everything, and that we can achieve it for ourselves; constantly chasing this transcendence of all human limits contributes tremendously to the anxiety and fragmentation of the age. We are left with an inability to prioritize and order our ultimate values, an inability to accept some as more valuable than others. Constant attempts to overcome or ignore finitude make it virtually impossible to, in the language of James Fowler, integrate "centers of supraordinate value" into a coherent whole. Everything becomes most important. Fowler calls this a functional polytheism. He notes, "the practical impact of our consumer society's dominant myth -- that you should experience everything you desire, own everything you want and relate intimately with whomever you wish -- is to make the polytheistic pattern . . . seem normative."[108]

These attempts to ignore or overcome finitude are also characterized by an extended narcissism. Psychologists Daniel Lapsley and Kenneth Rice describe a transitory state of narcissism that is normal in adolescence, a narcissism characterized by personal fable constructions ("I am unique") and imaginary audience ("Everyone is looking at me"). Part of what narcissism entails is an inability to engage in self-reflection in a deep way.[109] Narcissism is, in essence, based in the assumption that we are in fact sufficient unto ourselves. It is all freedom and no finitude. Psychologists Jean Twenge and Keith Campbell argue that in a consumerist culture, more and more people fail to emerge from this adolescent

[108] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 20.
[109] Daniel K. Lapsley and Kenneth Rice, "The 'New Look' at the Imaginary Audience and Personal Fable: Toward a Model of Adolescent Ego Development," in *Self, Ego, and Identity: Integrative Approaches*, ed. Daniel K. Lapsley and F. Clark Power (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1988), 119–25.

narcissism, because the culture discourages us from emerging out of it.[110] It is this dynamic that I cited in the previous chapter in Benjamin Barber's concern over the way consumer culture infantilizes us, creating "kidults."[111] The problem, then, is not simply that this infantilization is somehow unseemly; it is that it inhibits the development of an acceptance of finitude as an essential part of the human condition. Consumer culture works against poverty of spirit.

As for the shape that society moving towards liberation takes, then, it is a society that promotes the common good, cares especially for the poor and vulnerable, and catalyzes the flourishing of human persons who are creators as well as consumers, who grow in relationship and in community, and who are able to find joy in the paradoxes of freedom and finitude. Kavanaugh's language of a culture with a "personal form" is helpful. Also helpful is the vision of the late liberation theologian Ignacio Ellacuria. He contrasted the "society of wealth" that exists with the "society of poverty" that should replace it.[112] I choose here, though, to use the language of a *culture of humanizing plenitude*.

It must be humanizing because the development of the human person in fullness is the goal. I use the term plenitude, perhaps redundantly, to emphasize the fullness of that flourishing. I do not want to present my own vision as based in a "subtraction story," one that is simply about taking away what causes personal, communal, and global ill-being. Certainly, I could use other terminology, such as

[110] Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement* (New York: Free Press, 2010).
[111] Barber, *Con$umed*.
[112] Jon Sobrino, *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008).

abundance.[113] However, in using plenitude, I also recognize my indebtedness to the work of sociologist Juliet Schor in her call for an economy of plenitude.[114] Like Schor, I see the possibility not simply of removing obstacles to flourishing from the culture, but also of adding to the conditions that foster flourishing.

Structures, Imagination, and the Levers of Cultural Change

A note is in order about the details of the alternative to consumerism that the world challenges the Church to offer. Moreover, I want to consider the details of what religious educators should offer as an alternative and how they can go about offering that alternative. Certainly, structures, practices, and ideas are all wrapped together in the culture of consumption. For instance, global trade policies promote the "race to the bottom" that victimizes the poorest with sweatshop labor conditions and environmental degradation. In the United States, the coupling of healthcare benefits with full-time employment tends to accelerate the pace on the "work and spend" treadmill. However, my theological critique has not specified the structures -- institutions and rules -- that are particularly problematic. Instead, I have focused on the ideologies and values that underpin the structures, and have nodded towards the practices that characterize the culture.

[113] See, for instance, John McKnight and Peter Block, *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods* (Chicago, IL: American Planning Association; Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2010), http://site.ebrary.com/lib/bostoncollege/docDetail.action?docID=10400822. The language of abundance is also quite appropriate and I use it almost interchangeably with plenitude and flourishing. It is simply as a matter of naming the cultural goal that I use plenitude.
[114] Schor, *Plenitude*. As Schor writes of a culture of what I call a culture of humanizing plenitude, "True wealth can be attained by mobilizing and transforming the economies of time, creativity, community, and consumption." Hers also is not a subtraction story. Ibid., 99.

I do so for two significant reasons. The first is that the specific structures in question can and will change, and differ across both time and contexts. Secondly, I am certainly not writing as an economist, nor as a policymaker. As noted above, most Catholic Social Teaching on the economy deals in what are sometimes called "middle axioms," providing some pointers on how in this context we can "love God and neighbor," but not drilling down into proposing or supporting specific policies. I stand in that tradition.

Moreover, shifts in policy and other structural changes are often the result of public pressure when mindsets change, when a critical mass of people sees the contingency of a system and pushes for its recreation, or people in a critical set of relationships establish alternative institutions and practices that become templates for a new normal. Environmental scientist Dana Meadows calls changing cultural mindsets and transcending paradigms the two most important leverage points for social change.[115] The Church as teacher does well to be about cultural change through changing mindsets and transcending old paradigms. As womanist theologian Katie Cannon points out, changing paradigmatic mindsets lays the groundwork for the structural revolutions that make old norms dysfunctional. Of course, the dysfunction of the old norms fertilizes the imagination that gives rise to new norms, new paradigms.[116]

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[115] Donella H. Meadows, "Places to Intervene in a System: In Increasing Order of Effectiveness," *Whole Earth*, no. 91 (1997): 78.
[116] Katie G. Cannon, "Racism and Economics," in *Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader*, ed. Katie G. Cannon, Emilie Maureen Townes, and Angela D. Sims, Library of Theological Ethics (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011).

The current culture of consumption results in significant personal, social, and ecological damage. It tends to detract from the building of the common good, and tends to inhibit the flourishing of human persons, especially those who are already poor and vulnerable. On the personal level, in this culture the self who is formed is a truncated self, especially for adolescents and young adults, whose primary work is, arguably, the development of a whole and integral self. Given the hegemony that this culture has over the social imaginary, it is especially crucial that we teach for the transcendence of the mindsets and paradigms of consumerism. Late adolescents and young adults are particularly well-placed to be engaged in the sort of re-imagining that such transcendence entails. In the next chapter, I now look to the prophetic role in educating for a new imagination. Jesus, in his ministry with his disciples, embodies and enacts the imagination of the prophets.

Chapter 3

Rethinking What the Bike is For: The Prophetic Imagination

The culture of consumption as described in Chapter One causes significant personal, social, and global harm. Measured against the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, that culture particularly fails to build the common good, undermines solidarity, and exploits rather than supports the most vulnerable. Judged by the standards of Christian personalism, it is a culture that in many ways inhibits rather than encourages the full flourishing of the human person -- a person who is relational, who is not only a consumer but also a creative producer, and who grapples with finitude.

Despite these judgments on the inadequacy of the current culture of consumption, it is a culture that is slow to change largely because it is so difficult to understand that the culture could be different. By and large, the ability creatively to imagine a different reality has been squeezed out of us. It is hard to imagine a different way of being. What is missing is the opportunity to critique the prevailing assumptions wholesale and to offer and act upon a vision of different assumptions. Cultural critics with dramatically different voices can nonetheless agree that this stultification of the imagination is problematic. It was a situation akin, says historian Howard Zinn, to a flawed multiple-choice exam. Neither "a" nor "b" is quite correct, but there is no "c," "d," "e," or "f."[1] Meanwhile, cultural critic Allan Bloom argues in his controversial *The Closing of the American Mind* that tyranny is successful when it

[1] Howard Zinn, *Passionate Declarations: Essays on War and Justice* (San Francisco: Harper Perennial, 2003), 1–8.

removes the awareness of other possibilities.[2] Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann considers it to be part of the prophetic task to enable this awareness of other possibilities. He calls for us to foster what he calls the prophetic imagination.

Brueggemann claims that Jesus drew on the Mosaic alternative community to fire his own prophetic imagination.[3] Beyond that vision, though, I insist in this chapter that Jesus not only had a prophetic imagination. He taught for a prophetic imagination. He did so in conveying his vision of the Reign of God in his parables and other words, of course, but even more so he did so in the empowering of his community in the practices of healing, reconciliation, table fellowship, and gratitude. Theologian Terrence Tilley calls Jesus's community the "Jesus-movement," but here I prefer to use the term "disciples."[4] Conceiving of Jesus and his disciples as a community of practice that enacts the prophetic imagination points to the possibility, unfolded in later chapters, that religious educators and others engaged in communities of practice can engender communities that both socialize learners into a prophetic imagination and also foster the kinds of thinking and being that allow for further, creative prophetic imagining.

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[2] Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 249. By no means must the reader accept the substance of Bloom's critique of American popular and academic culture to aver with him that, indeed, there is the potential for tyrannical control of a population that has no ability to consider any alternative. In fact, the point is bolstered in its support by two thinkers with such different orientations as Bloom and Zinn.

[3] Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).

[4] Terrence W. Tilley, *The Disciples' Jesus: Christology as Reconciling Practice* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008). "Disciples" should not be construed too narrowly. It includes not only followers of Jesus during his active ministry but also in its aftermath, in what can indeed be called the "Jesus movement" within first-century Judaism, or even the "early Church." Using the term "disciples" also makes more natural the impulse to consider how discipleship in the Church today does and can function, how communities of practice in today's Church can be sites for the learning and action that foster prophetic imagination.

The term "imagination" has a rich history and an array of meanings in philosophical discourse. Philosopher Richard Kearney sums up two key aspects of the various understandings of the human imagination in Western thought: it as a faculty that allows the human mind to make representations of reality as it already is; and it is a creative faculty that produces original ideas.[5] Just as Kearney does not attempt to separate these uses of the term in his sweeping review of imagination in Western thought, nor do we need to separate them. I use "imagination" similarly to the way Brueggemann uses it. I use imagination here to denote the way one sees and understands the world, and others, both in terms of what is and what can or ought to be. What is imaginable is not only what is empirical -- it includes ideas, meanings, and deep structures. Imagination in this sense is both personal and social. Philosopher Charles Taylor gets at this notion when he calls the "average" person's way of seeing and interpreting the world the "social imaginary."[6] The social imaginary is likely to change only when confronted with the prophetic imagination.

In this sense of the term, imagination does not carry the connotation of fantasy. Certainly, the way people conceive of the world may correlate more or less accurately to the reality; it may be more of less helpful in guiding actions. But the imagination, or what is imagined, also has its own thingness about it. Accurate or not, helpful or not, it has its own reality.

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[5] Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 15.

[6] Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, Public Planet Books (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), http://www.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip046/2003014769.html. See also Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 2007, 146, 159–211. Here Taylor describes what he considers to be the dominant shifts in the social imaginary in the world of modernity.

By way of example, consider the differences an understanding of human origins can make in interpreting and ordering the world. In what Taylor characterizes as a premodern mindset, origin myths are illustrative of the imagination.[7] Most origin myths in the ancient Near East involved gods creating humans for the purpose of serving the gods. Humankind is at the service of the gods, perhaps the plaything of the gods, and natural events are easily construed as reflecting divine pleasure or displeasure with that service. Norms of behavior for best appeasing the gods follow. By contrast, in a modern world shaped by Darwinian understandings of human origins, the world is the arena of the battle for genetic survival. The characteristics and behaviors of humans, as other species, are viewed in terms of how adaptive they are to the propagation of the species, or of that particular gene pool. If survival of the gene pool is itself deemed to be normative, then behavior will be prescribed and judged on that basis. What we imagine the world to be, how we imagine it to work, and what we imagine it to mean determines what is deemed possible and what is desirable. It is this notion of what is possible and desirable that drives Brueggemann's emphasis on the prophetic imagination.

Prophetic Imagination

There are many aspects to the phenomenon of prophecy in general, and prophecy in Israel in particular. Brueggemann, however, identifies the prophetic

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[7] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 2007. The modern/premodern distinction is only partly historical. It is also an analytical distinction that Taylor makes. A pre-modern mindset can still exist in what is predominantly a modern world. Similarly, a modern mindset may characterize the social imaginary in what others see as a postmodern world. Taylor does not intend the labels of the mindsets to be evaluative. They are descriptive. A modern mindset is not necessarily "better" than a premodern mindset. I approach the labels with the same descriptive intent.

imagination as central to the ministry of Israel's prophets.[8] It is an envisioning and enacting of an alternative world to the one that already exists. Taking Moses as the prophetic paradigm, Brueggemann places the alternative consciousness and, just as importantly, the alternative community formed among the Hebrews in juxtaposition with the "royal consciousness" of Pharaoh's empire. Brueggemann focuses on prophetic speech as generating alternatives to the structures and ideologies that are generally taken for granted in social consciousness. Because those structures and ideologies are so often simply the cultural air that we breathe, envisioning an alternative is an act of creative imagination. This imaginative vision must look beyond what is typically viewed as "reasonable" and ordinary. Often, the alternative vision conflicts with the taken-for-granted worldview. What is crucial for Brueggemann, though, is that the taken-for-granted social imaginary does not simply happen; this worldview is generally perpetuated by a hegemonic authority, and so the prophetic imagination involves a critique of that hegemonic authority.[9]

Moses is not a prophet alone in the wilderness speaking truth to royal power. He is a representative voice for a significant constituency. Old Testament scholar Robert Wilson finds the popular perception of the prophet as a solitary figure of disruption to be misleading and inaccurate. While the dynamics of the relationship between prophet and community may be complex, the prophet does indeed have a community from which he emerges and that shapes his message as well as his

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[8] Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination, 2nd Edition*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).
[9] Ibid., x–xi.

presentation.[10] Brueggemann sees that situation -- the prophet as a voice for a constituent community -- as the norm for Israel's prophets.[11] Hence, prophecy is evoked by but also evokes social action and critique by a subcommunity. In order to generate prophecy, this subcommunity must have available to it a narrative to link its tradition with its present. It also requires an acknowledgement of real pain, a pain that is unacceptable, as well as an active practice of hope that the present order is not the fullness of reality.[12]

The task of a prophetic ministry, then, is about both a vision and a community. The prophetic ministry is essential in the context of a culture that, Brueggemann insists, constantly seeks to co-opt or domesticate the way the community communicates and lives out that vision, actualizing a picture of what can be. "The task of prophetic ministry," he argues, "is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us."[13]

For Brueggemann, this prophetic task has two aspects. First, there is the deconstructive task, the criticism and dismantling of the dominant consciousness, the consciousness that legitimizes the present order. Secondly, there is the energizing of persons and communities to move towards the promise of a different time, a different reality, to "live in fervent anticipation of what God has promised and will surely give."[14] This second aspect of the prophetic task, the annunciation,

[10] Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).
[11] Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, ix–x.
[12] Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination, 2nd Edition,* xvi-xvii.
[13] Ibid., 3.
[14] Ibid., 3–4.

can more carefully be teased into two distinguishable but not practically separable tasks: enlivening in persons and communities a vision of a different and better world, and inspiring them to act for the realization of that envisioned world. It is a task of sustaining hope. I should note that here I part from Brueggemann in the sense that he sees the creation of the countercultural community as the goal itself for Moses and the other prophets of the Old Testament. He does not consider that Moses engaged in what we would identify as "social action."[15] However, action and consciousness are not truly separable, but are mutually influential, if not explicitly in the Old Testament then at least empirically, a point to be revisited later.

Brueggemann describes this deconstructive aspect of the prophetic task in the ministry of Moses. Moses's denunciation, his deconstruction of Pharaoh's regime, begins with his voicing the genuine grievances of the Hebrews, the pain of the oppression they suffer. It continues, through the Plagues, with the demonstration of the regime's ultimate impotence: Pharaoh and his magicians cannot do what Yahweh can do. Royal power is delegitimized. An understanding of the world that seems to support assumptions about Pharaoh's power and right to dominate is exposed as groundless.[16]

Moses is not the only prophet, nor are the Egyptians the only target of prophetic critique. Brueggemann sees the need for the same prophetic imagination to critique the Solomonic system of forced labor, accumulated wealth, and the presumed divine sanction of the hegemony of Solomon's rule. Brueggemann sees other prophets from the Hebrew Scriptures, particularly First Isaiah and Jeremiah,

[15] Ibid., 21.
[16] Ibid., 1–14.

joining this language of lament with the de-legimitization of the dominant regime.[17] For Brueggemann, the muted but distinctly anti-royal strand that runs through the Deuteronomistic History is to be highlighted;[18] the glories of Israel's brief imperial dominance under Solomon came at the cost of heavy tribute and taxation, an expensive building program, and destructive warfare.[19]

If the deconstructive element of prophecy is to be relevant in Christian education today, it must identify and confront the contemporary parallel to the "royal consciousness." The dominant royal consciousness against which Moses cultivated an alternative was one that normalized economic exploitation blessed by a triumphalist and domesticated religion. Adherence to the dominant consumer culture described in the previous chapters closely resembles the royal consciousness that Brueggemann describes. A consumer culture that subscribes to the totalizing philosophy of economism, the divisive affluence that privileges privatized wealth over the common good, and allegiance to the spiritual pretensions of the brand at the expense of human flourishing is ripe for prophetic deconstruction.

Deconstruction alone is not sufficient for the prophetic task. What Brueggemann calls the "energizing" element of the prophetic imagination emerges not from lament and de-legitimization but in the proclamation of "amazement" at the new possibilities. Moses sought to replace the economics of divisive affluence

[17] Ibid., 39–57.
[18] The Deuteronomistic History refers to Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, and the books of Samuel and Kings. Scholars see in these books strong evidence of a common redaction. The Deuteronomist's allegiance to the House of David has not erased undertones of dissatisfaction with monarchy, including critiques of David and his son and successor Solomon, already clearly present in the redacted material.
[19] Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 21–37.

with equality; the politics of oppression with justice; and a religion that domesticated the divine with one that recognized God's freedom and sovereignty. For instance, in the building of the Mosaic community, Brueggemann points to the Song of Miriam, recounting the history of Yahweh's deeds and promising his continuing reign, as emblematic of the orientation to enthusiastic participation in a newly imagined reality.[20]

This movement in the prophetic task rests on symbols of hope to break through the despair and lament. This hope is best found, among the Hebrew prophets, in Second Isaiah, but Brueggemann points out elements of hope even in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Giving voice to the people's real yearnings is the beginning, but tapping into symbols of newness and nourishment is necessary for making the transition from the expression of yearnings to hope for their fulfillment.[21]

Brueggemann's description of this prophetic task engages especially well with Old Testament scholar Joseph Blenkinsopp's analysis of the ministries of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah.[22] Blenkinsopp argues that the prophets can best be described as "dissident intellectuals" who "collaborated at some level of conscious intent in the emergence of a coherent vision of a moral universe over against current assumptions" supported by those in positions of power. As intellectuals, then, they functioned as "creators of symbols and models by which the society understands itself and sustains its sense of identity and morale." Blenkinsopp sees

[20] Ibid., 14–19.
[21] Ibid., 59–79.
[22] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet: Religious and Intellectual Leadership in Ancient Israel*, Library of Ancient Israel (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 115–65.

this role of the intellectual as an essential part of the dynamic of radical social change.[23] The prophetic task is creative.

Brueggemann sees in the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth this same dual dynamic of prophetic imagination -- criticism of the dominant order and engendering energizing hope for a new and radically different order. In his ministry and in his teaching, Jesus denounced the order of the day, but also announced, with the Reign of God, a new (or, rather, a return to an old) vision of sovereignty and order.[24] Brueggemann's account of both the judgment and promise of Jesus's ministry deserves supplementation in three ways. First, a thicker description of some of the deconstructive and critical elements of the ministry of Jesus is instructive if we are to understand its context and, conversely, its potential relevance in contexts such as our own. In particular, we see Jesus privileging the experience and the knowing of those outside of the centers of power. Second, and similarly, we ought to see Jesus's ministry as not only conveying a vision for the future. We must see how his ministry of the Reign of God involved instantiating practices of hope in the future that he was also envisioning. Finally, we ought to consider how Jesus, in the practice of this prophetic aspect of his ministry, has lessons for us about a pedagogy of prophetic imagination. Jesus did not simply proclaim hope; he empowered his community of disciples in their own experiences

[23] Ibid., 144.
[24] Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 81–114. For a richer description of the prophetic aspects of Jesus's ministry I will draw especially on New Testament scholar Richard Horsley. See, for instance, Richard A. Horsley, *The Prophet Jesus and the Renewal of Israel: Moving Beyond a Diversionary Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2012).

to discover and to spread hope in newness. Jesus's disciples learned who they were in their practices as a community of disciples.

Jesus as a Prophet Deconstructing the Given Order

One of the fruits of the renewal of the "quest for the historical Jesus" since the middle of the twentieth century has been a retrieval of the Jewishness of Jesus, and particularly his social location as a Jewish laborer in the Galilee, an outpost of the first-century Roman Empire.[25] Part of what has emerged, then, are a number of attempts to identify just what "kind" of first-century Palestinian Jew Jesus was. Scholars have asked how he fit among the categories of social and religious figures that would have been recognizable in that time and place, a task that also involves New Testament scholars defining and constructing such types. For instance, E.P. Sanders puts Jesus into the category of apocalyptic prophet -- a failed apocalyptic prophet, a role recognizable to his contemporaries.[26] John Dominic Crossan casts

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[25] N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God ; v. 2 (London: SPCK, 1996). I do not intend here a history, analysis, or evaluation of the various movements in the quest for the historical Jesus, such as Wright provides in the first part of this work. I do, however, draw on his overview and his critiques of various positions as something of a criterion of embarrassment: in the areas where Wright agrees with those whom elsewhere he criticizes most sharply, a scholarly consensus likely lies.

[26] E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985). Schweitzer also characterizes Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet. Apocalypticism has been a theme running throughout the two centuries of this quest for the historical Jesus, which much debate about what apocalypticism is, whether or in what forms it existed in first-century Palestinian Judaism, and what Jesus's relationship to those strains of apocalypticism was. These questions are hardly completely settled, and scholars such as Bart Ehrman and Dale Allison have in recent years revived the apocalyptic Jesus. See Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*, 1st HarperCollins paperback ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2013). Also Dale C. Allison, Jr, *The Historical Christ and the Theological Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009). Horsley considers the question of the nature of Jesus's apocalypticism to be a "diversionary debate." With Horsley I focus here on Jesus as a prophet concerned with, among other things, the current social order. Horsley, *The Prophet Jesus and the Renewal of Israel*.

Jesus as the Mediterranean Jewish version of a Cynic philosopher.[27] Morton Smith puts Jesus's thaumaturgy at the center of his identity, placing him in the category of a charismatic healer.[28]

These typologies of first-century Jewish roles are useful in helping us to conjecture the ways in which Jesus might have understood his own role or the meaning of certain words and deeds, or to understand how he would likely have been understood by his contemporaries. However, arguments over just what Jesus was in terms of historically-recognizable roles can only take us so far; it fails to account for what made Jesus unique, unique to the point that his followers proclaimed him Son of God. John Meier usefully argues that Jesus had characteristics of a number many such roles (rabbi, healer, social reformer, sage, prophet), but he did not fit any single role perfectly.[29]

Richard Horsley, a New Testament scholar and historian, and Wright are among those who look at the sound points of agreement among major scholars and agree with Brueggemann that the ministry of Jesus involves a strong element of the prophetic.[30] The ministry of Jesus certainly involved the deconstructive task of the

[27] John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).
[28] Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977).
[29] John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus: The Roots of the Problem and the Person*, 1st edition, vol. 1, 5 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1991). Meier continues this emphasis throughout the five-volume series.
[30] Major scholars whose portrayals of Jesus would not emphasize the term "prophet" are nonetheless often in accord with the historical outlines of Jesus's campaign that Brueggemann, Horsley, and Wright characterize as "prophetic." For instance, while Crossan prominently emphasizes the sapiential element of Jesus as a teacher, he also describes Jesus's Reign of God proclamations as opposing the operation of the Roman Empire in ways that Horsley and Brueggemann certainly recognize as prophetic. Gerhard Lohfink also points to Jesus's identifying and healing the sickness in society and bringing to his disciples "a new thing" in the Reign of God. The pattern of denunciation and annunciation is followed. Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus of Nazareth : What He Wanted, Who He Was*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 230–44. The points of disagreement in some sense are less about who Jesus was than they are

prophet, denouncing the order of the day. Horsley notes that in the United States in particular, with our ambiguous notions of the separation of church and state, we are tempted to read a de-politicized Jesus into the Gospels.[31] Such a reading is, of course, not true to the historical Jesus of Nazareth, depending as it does on a false dichotomy between the secular and the sacred that was not possible in the first-century mind. Moreover, it ignores the political, economic, and religious subjugation of first-century Palestine, a subjugation that should permeate the way we read the Gospels.

Most of the history of Israel involves the threat or actuality of domination by foreign empires. By the first century CE, the imperial force was Roman. Palestine was a restive and troublesome edge of the Roman Empire, preferably, from the Roman perspective, ruled as much as possible by Jewish client-kings. Palestine's Jews expressed discontent over imperial rule, zealously asserting independence from foreign emperors and gods. Often, the political, social, economic, and religious dimensions of this subjugation -- and protest against it -- converged.

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about what prophecy entails. Taking from above the characterization of prophecy as including, among other things, the task of denouncing the failures of the current regime and announcing and envisioning a new earth under God's reign, Jesus's ministry is aptly called prophetic. Note that this characterization need not exclude other claims about Jesus's ministry and identity. To say that his ministry involved this prophetic element is not to contend that he did not teach wisdom, heal, or debate the Law. Of course, all of the above is not to say that all characterizations of the various roles of Jesus are equally legitimate; Reza Aslan's characterization of Jesus as a Zealot is both inconsonant with his behavior and historically problematic, for instance. Reza Aslan, *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 2013). Nor is it to assert that the particulars of the content of his teachings and behavior do not make a theological or ethical difference. Again, to use the example of Aslan, accepting some of his claims about Jesus's attitude towards violence in the promotion of the restoration of Israel dramatically impacts what it means to follow Christ concretely today. Note also that while I would connect grander theological claims about Jesus with the specifics of his ministry, the two are not identical. For instance, one might recognize Jesus as a prophet without calling his life and death in some way salvific. Conversely, there are a number of ways to claim soteriological significance for Jesus without simple accord on the specifics of his program or his self-understanding.

[31] Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder*, First Edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 1–14.

Economically, Roman taxation took a heavy toll on the people of Palestine. Of particular concern to Jesus would likely have been the situation in his home region of the Galilee. There is fairly broad agreement that peasant Galilee was not just poor, but was subject to "decremental deprivation." That is, expectations were not rising, but the peasants' abilities to meet the expectations were decreasing.[32] Roman taxation put peasants who were barely operating at the margins of subsistence into debt out of which they could not pay their way. The result was an increasing dependence on loans, dangerous reliance on exportable single crops, and, all too often, defaults that led to a loss of land. Dispossession was endemic in Jesus's Galilee. As with hard times everywhere, it was the wealthy who could make the loans and possess land when the loans went into default. The land became concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer owners; the rich-poor gap grew.[33] The ready supply of day laborers in the parables of Jesus (Mt 20:1-20) reflects the reality of the increasingly landless population and the growing underclass.[34]

On top of the Roman rule and taxation came the economic demands of the lavish building programs of their client-king Herod the Great, and then his less-effective successors. The debt and hunger in Galilee as well as in Judea were further exacerbated. Religiously, Herod's hand-picked (and Roman vetted) high priests also continued the Temple tribute system. It continued to be costly, and the legitimacy of the high priestly rulers was often a point of contention.[35] Horsley suggests that the

[32] Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 218–24.
[33] José Antonio Pagola, *Jesus: An Historical Approximation*, trans. Margaret Wilde (Miami, FL: Convivium Press, 2009). The Basque New Testament scholar relies on Horsley for much of this analysis.
[34] Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*, 1–15.
[35] Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*, 31–34. The Temple high priests had not only religious but also political responsibilities. They commanded the Temple guard, for instance, which acted as a local police force.

distress resulting from the triple burden of tribute, taxation, and Temple tithing was not only economic; it was also social. Village community bonds were weakened when families on the edge of survival felt forced to look out only for themselves, scared that in their own poverty they could not afford to reach out and support others. Traditional bonds and ways of life were threatened, and many would have understood the threats to be a result of Roman imperial rule and associated the order with the "kings and powerful."[36] If Palestine was a politically restive place, with social banditry and popular messianic movements, it was so for good reason.[37]

At issue was not simply the material means to survive and thrive, but a whole way of imagining what the world was, whose world it was, and what it was for. The Gospels, especially the Synoptic Gospels, contain multiple examples of Jesus undermining the claims of the old regime, both how it acted and how it imagined the world to be. Jesus delegitimized the Roman Empire and its collaborators, in many ways that would have been recognizable to a constituency predisposed for it.[38]

Historian John Dominic Crossan draws on the insight of anthropologist Mary Douglas to read the healing of the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1-20) as a tale of Jesus's rejection of the regime of imperial domination of his people. When the story is read not as an account of the event of an exorcism but as a representation of the disciples' experience of Jesus's ministry, its anti-imperial message is clear. Douglas

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[36] Horsley, *The Prophet Jesus and the Renewal of Israel*, 62.
[37] Ibid., 79–94.
[38] Ched Myers most explicitly reads the Gospel of Mark in particular with this political lens. Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, 20th anniversary edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008). At the risk of being accused of cherry-picking pieces of various Gospel narratives to fit my own orientation, I nonetheless, with Horsley, read across the Gospels through this lens of the prophetic imagination. Whether Luke or Matthew seeks to present the political dimensions is not the point. Horsley and others read past the evangelist's narrative in reconstructing the ministry of Jesus.

proposes that the physical body is a microcosm of the social body, so demonic possession of the person represents a sense of demonic control and invasion in society. Palestine was *possessed* by Roman demons. In case the symbolism has eluded us, the demon is many and is named Legion, the Roman military unity. No Jew hearing the story could have missed the importance of the Legion being cast into a herd of *swine*, which of course would have no proper place in *kosher* Judaism. More, the herd of demons is then cast back into the sea, from whence the Romans had arrived.[39]

Another example of Jesus's delegitimizing the powers-that-were comes from Jesus's answer to the question about whether or not Jews ought to pay taxes to the emperor (Mark 12:13-17). Again, in the modern era, the instruction to "Give to Caesar that which belongs to Caesar, but to God that which belongs to God" *sounds* supportive of the separation of church and state. To first-century ears, however, the story sounds different. Jesus could not safely had said either "yes" or "no" to the question. If "yes," he would have been branded by his Jewish audience as a quietist or collaborator, willing to accept Roman dominion. A "no," though, would correctly have been heard by Roman authorities as an instigation to rebellion, and Jesus would likely have faced a quick arrest and ignominious execution. However, any good Jew in the crowd would have known what belongs to God, and so what should be rendered unto God: *everything*. Caesar was not God.[40] God could not be controlled or domesticated.

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[39] Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 320–23. See also Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*, 31–34.
[40] Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*, 306–17.

The final acts of Jesus's ministry can be seen as the strongest denunciation of the ruling regime. Historians are largely in accord that what got Jesus executed, finally, was his disruption in the Temple.[41] Although the Gospel accounts vary, it appears not to have been a spontaneous act of rage but a planned demonstration. In the Synoptic Gospels, this demonstration occurred during the week of Passover, when crowds of Jews thronged Jerusalem for the holiday celebrating the Hebrews' liberation from servitude in Egypt. The tension between the celebration of liberation and the reality of Roman subjugation heightened the theo-political drama of the action. When combined with the testimony that Jesus had made proclamations about the destruction of the Temple, this demonstration was an act of delegitimization of the Temple authorities, who were seen as clients of the Roman overlords.[42]

These critiques, and especially the pronouncements and demonstrations against the Temple during the highly-charged Passover festival, set the scene for the ultimate rejection of imperial power, the politics of oppression and exclusion, and the economics of inequality: Jesus's crucifixion. Given the care with which Jesus had avoided entrapment in questions about taxation, he could not have failed to understand what his protest actions would bring him. In the moment of his dread at Gethsemane, awaiting his arrest, when he conceded to God, "Not what I want but what you want," (Matthew 26:40). Jesus rejected not that he was going to die, but that the mentality, the system, and the people that would execute him had any *real* power over him. Even their torture and execution of Jesus were unable to overcome

[41] Haight, *Jesus, Symbol of God*, 107. Haight summarizes the consensus opinion.
[42] Horsley, *The Prophet Jesus and the Renewal of Israel*, 138–45.

him. He could stand silent in the face of Roman authority, refusing to answer the questions of Pontius Pilate (Matthew 27:14), because he refused to recognize the legitimacy of Pilate's authority.

Part of this critique of the dominant consciousness came from Jesus himself, but it also rested on Jesus's empowering the voices of the marginalized, according respect to their experiences and their knowledge. Critique of the system required a perspective from outside the system. Jesus expressed compassion for the plight of the poor, but also voiced outrage over an interpretation of the Torah and a Temple system that increased that poverty (Luke 11:45-54, see also Mark 7:11-12). Even granting that there is dispute over just who was being criticized by Jesus and which elements were added later by the Evangelists, it is quite likely that Jesus's relatively "free" attitude towards the Law and his critique of the Temple system stemmed from a recognition that they did not represent the interests of the people of the Galilean countryside or other marginalized persons. The problem is not simply that some people wielded power over others. It is also that the networks of centralized power, in the Temple system, the Herodians,[43] and the Romans, created what French philosopher Michel Foucault would call the "apparatuses of knowledge." [44]

[43] "The Herodians" were those persons associated with the family of Herod the Great and his sons, the various tetrarchs of the Roman provinces of Palestine.

[44] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge : Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. and trans. Colin Gordon, 1st American ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 83–106. Foucault emphasizes that just as accepted ideologies tend to reinforce power structures, so to do some structures have an outsized say in what qualifies as knowledge. While his analysis looks to examples from medicine and academic philosophy, his point stands also in application to economic and political knowledge. Defining what counts as knowledge is a bulwark of power. For Foucault, the serious attention paid to the emergence of "local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges" (83) not only allows for a broader understanding of the way power works, but also facilitates criticism of the dominant narratives and assumptions. Such a critique, of course, is part of what I here call the prophetic imagination.

What counted as real knowledge, then, was defined by those at the centers of power, and tended to ignore the conflict and struggle over that power.

Jesus certainly felt the weight of that marginalization of local experience and local knowledge when he was rejected at Nazareth precisely because the people all knew him, and so believed he could not possibly have had great wisdom (Matthew 13:54-8). Jesus, however, values and elevates the knowledge of the marginalized. The parables, for instance, speak not primarily to the experience of court, Temple, and scribal authority, but to the agrarian reality that would have been the experience of most of Jesus's audience. Pedagogically, his use of agrarian language and metaphors does not simply make the lessons more comprehensible to that audience; it also emphasizes that the knowledge and experience of the agrarian people *matters*. It *counts* as real knowledge, and is a source of real wisdom. Moreover, Jesus notes repeatedly that it is not the scholars or even the prophets who have the knowledge of the Reign of God. To his disciples he notes, "Amen, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it" (Matthew 13:17). The disciples' experience counts, their knowledge is legitimate, and it is for them a source of power.[45] It is also thereby an opportunity for them to judge the current regime by something other than its own standards, to critique its failings and construct a vision for a new way of being.

[45] Foucault rejects a model of power that is simply hierarchical and structural. Instead, he sees power taking multiple forms and circulating within complex networks of relationships. Knowledge, or the recognized legitimacy of knowledge, is one form of power. This recognition of the authority of agrarian experience fits into the category of what Foucault calls "an insurrection of subjugated knowledges." Ibid., 81.

Jesus as a Prophet Inspiring a Community Of Disciples

In both his teachings and his actions, Jesus described and enacted an alternative to the dominant regime, not simply its practices but the consciousness that it engendered. Scholars with very different starting points on the historicity of the canonical Gospels, on what "kind of figure" Jesus was, on the divine status of Jesus, and on the extent of his apocalyptic orientation overwhelmingly agree that the focus of Jesus's ministry was the Reign of God, what German New Testament scholar Gerhard Lohfink summarizes as "a society in which God's kingship would be visible."[46] The Reign would be made visible "in the midst" of a people,[47] a renewed Israel.[48] While there does seem to be a future element to the fullness of the Reign, there is certainly also an immanence, an "already." It would be in this context that the life of the Reign of God would also be "abundant life for everyone." For Jesus, the will of God, as revealed in his personal experience and in Israel's tradition, was for a world in which flourishing ran both deep and wide. Seeing the suffering in Roman-occupied Galilee, Jesus would of course have had to denounce that world and to propose a world that looked different, where people practiced differently, where people thought differently, valued differently -- where they valued what God values.

While contemporary rhetoric often emphasizes action that will "build" the Reign of God, Jesus seems to have had in mind that the Reign of God was both a gift of God and a certainty in which to hope. For Spanish theologian Antonio Jose Pagola, the demand on Israel was that committing to the reality of the Reign of God

[46] Lohfink, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 25.
[47] Ibid., 50–52.
[48] Horsley, *The Prophet Jesus and the Renewal of Israel*, 72.

demanded a change in behavior to be in consonance with the Reign that Jesus preached and enacted.[49] The "content" of this Reign is what is so demanding. I add, though, that the content of the Reign, and the ethical demands it makes, is also about imagination. The Reign of God both demands and facilitates a new imagination -- a new understanding of what the world is and what it can be. God's sovereignty and human flourishing replace old priorities.

I focus here on two foundational themes of Jesus's vision of a renewed Israel in the Reign of God, and then four types of actions characteristic of Jesus's Reign of God ministry. When it comes to the vision, Jesus's parables are particularly evocative, even if they are also elusive. Because exegetes believe that we are able to get quite close to the original structure of the parables, theologian Roger Haight calls them a "privileged *entrée*" into Jesus's view of God.[50]

[49] Pagola, *Jesus: An Historical Approximation*, 93–120.
[50] Haight, *Jesus, Symbol of God*, 101. New Testament scholar Amy-Jill Levine warns that even if the structure of the stories are close to what Jesus spoke, the contexts of their recitation are not carried into the Gospel record. She cautions that the Evangelists, particularly Luke, have distorted the parables with glosses and with their own interpretations, often at the expense of the intended obscurity. Amy-Jill Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus : The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi* (New York: HarperOne, an imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers, 2014). In opposition to the scholarly consensus that the parables are close to the words and style of the historical Jesus, John Meier contends that they were not a characteristic of his teaching, and that the "scholarly consensus" is simply a result of nobody bothering to challenge decades-old claims by Joachim Jeremias. John P Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus: Probing the Authenticity of the Parables*, vol. 5, 5 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015). I note this dissenting position, but am not persuaded by it. Instead, I find Wright's suggestion to be more plausible: the parables that were remembered and eventually recorded were most likely those that Jesus repeated frequently in the course of his itinerant ministry. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 170–71.

The Reign of God In Jesus's Imagination

A central theme of Jesus's understanding of the Reign of God is that of God's mercy.[51] Indeed, Pagola speculates that Jesus's own experience of God as savior and friend (as well as father and true king) meant that Jesus "was beginning to see it all in the context of God's mercy."[52] The parable of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:1-7) is paired with the parable of the Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10) to portray a God willing to drop everything for the sake of retrieving the lost. The Two Debtors (Mathew 18:21-25) also emphasize the magnanimity of God's forgiveness and the demand that we imitate Him. The Laborers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16), even those who worked only the last part of the day, receive the full daily wage, the wage upon which they and their families undoubtedly depend in those hard economic times. Perhaps most well-known to us today, the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-31) is welcomed back not with bitterness over what he has squandered but with unbridled joy at his return. Forgiveness and mercy are to be central to the new order, to God's reign.

Inherent in this theme of mercy is belief in the assurance of God's promise, the parabolic message that the Reign of God is growing to fruition and will bring flourishing and fulfillment. Jeremias entitles this foundational belief the "Great Assurance."[53] The parable of the Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31-32) underscores the wild, uncontrollable growth of God's Reign. The parable of the Yeast (Matthew 13:33) reveals the gratuitous, almost hidden and inexplicable, nature of that growth.

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[51] Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. S. H. Hooke, 3rd revised ed. (London, SCM Press, 1972), 124–46.
[52] Pagola, *Jesus: An Historical Approximation*, 91.
[53] Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 124–46.

If even the Unjust Judge yields to the persistent widow's demands for justice (Luke 18:1-8), how much more, then, will the loving God provide for God's people? Similarly, if none of Jesus's hearers could conceive of denying a friend bread in the middle of the night (Luke 11:5-8), how much more will the eternally vigilant God provide for their needs? God's providence and sufficiency are part of the new order of God's Reign.

A second theme of Jesus's proclamation of the Reign of God is that of reconciliation -- not only through God's mercy, but within the community of Israel. The parable of the Prodigal Son, mentioned above, challenges all hearers to open their hearts and minds to reconciliation of relationships among fathers, sons, and brothers (Luke 15:11-31). The mysterious parable of the Dishonest Manager (Luke 16:1-8) who ingratiated himself with his master's creditors by writing off their debts may be read as an instance of unconventional and undeserved reconciliation.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Matthew portrays Jesus counseling reconciliation with "brothers" as a prerequisite to Temple sacrifice, and settling an argument with an opponent as preferable to taking it to court (Matthew 5:23-26). Most notably, Jesus's counsel to "love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return" frames these reconciling acts in the context of the Reign of God "who is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked" (Luke 6:35-36). In Horsley's understanding, these counsels are about local reconciliation, about settling differences withing the local community so as to be able to unite in a renewed Israel in the face of Roman colonization.[54]

[54] Horsley, *The Prophet Jesus and the Renewal of Israel*, 67–149.

The Reign of God In Jesus's Practices

For Jesus, the Reign of God was inaugurated in practices and also demanded practices. He lived into and lived out the Reign with his ministry. There is relatively solid agreement among historians and exegetes as to the basic outlines of Jesus's active ministry. These actions are closely connected to the vision of God's Reign as illustrated in Jesus's parables and his aphorisms, his vision of a renewal of Israel through God's mercy and communal reconciliation. Among these actions are included healing of various types, an emphasis on practices of forgiveness, the radically egalitarian table fellowship that Crossan refers to as *open commensality*,[55] and practices of generous sharing of limited resources. Here I examine each of these four practices briefly.

Historians and Scripture scholars do not doubt that Jesus at least had the reputation of a healer. Even his opponents conceded as much (Matthew 12:24). Anthropologists distinguish between a healing and a cure. A cure brings an end to a disease (or demonic possession). A healing can be more subtle, and also more holistic. Those in need of healing in the Gospels -- lepers, paralytics, the woman with the hemorrhage (Mark 5:25-34) are, by their afflictions, outcasts in society. Their afflictions are not only physical but also social and ritual. Touching them, including them, restores them to the community. Whatever did or did not happen physically

[55] Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*.

in the miracles of Jesus, these stories of healing tell powerful tales of social restoration and inclusion that reconciled the outcasts with the community.[56]

This understanding of healing is comprehensible within our own experience today. Crossan points to the movie *Philadelphia*. Tom Hanks' character, stricken with AIDS at a time when it was a disease surrounded by general fear and moral condemnation, suffers social and economic exclusion in addition to the medical disease. As the movie progresses, Crossan sees the character's restoration to community involvement and acceptance as a healing, even though no physical cure has been effected.[57]

Secondly, as Jesus's parables characterize a God of mercy, so do his actions inaugurate a reconciling Reign of God where forgiveness and mercy are present. Against those who would marginalize the forgiveness aspect of Jesus's ministry, Horsley points to Jesus's pronunciation of forgiveness of sins himself (Mark 2:1-12 and Luke 7:36-50) as well as the prominence of God's forgiveness in the parables and in the petition in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:12 and Luke 11:4). Moreover, in a society that saw sickness and suffering as caused by sin, Jesus's ministry of healing and his practice of forgiveness cannot truly be separated.[58]

A third central feature of Jesus's ministry was his often-controversial practice of table fellowship, what Crossan calls *open commensality*. Jesus was criticized for the inclusiveness of his eating practices, eating and associating with a variety of undesirable or at least profane characters. There was a radically egalitarian edge to

[56] Pagola, *Jesus: An Historical Approximation*, 155–76.
[57] John Dominic Crossan, *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now*, 1st Paperback (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2008), 118–21.
[58] Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*, 182–83.

this table fellowship – anyone, it seemed, was included![59] Whether what was at issue was that Jesus's dinner companions were "sinners" and therefore to be excluded is not always clear. What is clear, though, is that Jesus engaged in the highly charged and symbolically significant act of sharing meals with people who were marginalized in society. Crossan argues that this inclusiveness indicates that Jesus saw the Reign of God to be "a kingdom of nuisances and nobodies."[60] That critics of Jesus are given voice in the Gospels, that this potentially-embarrassing charge against him was not ignored or glossed over by the Evangelists, makes it highly likely that it was indeed genuinely an aspect of the ministry of Jesus.

Fourthly, Jesus engaged in, and counseled to others, a radical generosity. To some extent, this ability to be generous is grounded in trust in God's providence. One sees elements of this orientation towards radical trust in God's providence in the Sermon on the Mount, which I quote extensively here from Matthew:

> Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more important than they? Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life-span? Why are you anxious about clothes? Learn from the way the wild flowers grow. They do not work or spin. But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was clothed like one of them. If God so clothes the grass of the field, which grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith? So do not worry and say, 'What are we to eat?' or 'What are we to wear?' All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides. Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself. Sufficient for a day is its own evil (Matthew 6:25-34).

[59] Tilley, *The Disciples' Jesus*, 175–87.
[60] Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*.

Too often, this collection of sayings is treated as if it consisted of acontextual, sapiential aphorisms from a single sermon by Jesus, as Matthew and Luke present the Q material.[61] Taking into account the circumstances of Jesus's own life and the actions characteristic of his Reign of God ministry,[62] they take on an additional timbre. Jesus's ministry was marked by itinerancy and, presumably, some level of material insecurity.[63] When traveling, Jesus seems to have depended to some extent on the hospitality of friends or even strangers, noting to one would-be disciple that "Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Luke 9:58). Granted, this itinerancy does not seem to have involved an absolute impecuniarity nor a daily dependence. After all, Judas is introduced as the keeper of the common purse (John 12:6), and whether that is historically factual or not, that Jesus and his disciples had some shared funds seems highly likely. In fact, Luke also names Galilean women who traveled with Jesus and the Twelve "who provided for them out of their resources" (8:3b).

This trust in God's providence underpins Horsley's assertion that Jesus had a program for village renewal based on generosity to neighbors. He notes that, given the triple burden of tribute, taxation, and Temple, and the reality of poverty and dispossession in the villages of the Galilee, neighborly bonds could easily have been sundered. A peasant living just above the margin of dispossession would be

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[61] "Q" is a hypothetical source of the sayings of Jesus. The material shared by Matthew and Luke that is not found in Mark, on whom they are believed to be dependent, is presumed to have come from Q, to which Luke and Matthew both had access. For a summary of the two-source theory as an explanation for the differences and similarities among the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, see Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 99–125.

[62] To refer to Jesus's "Reign of God ministry" is to recognize that the proclamation and inauguration of the Reign of God was the central focus of Jesus's ministry.

[63] See for instance, Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 170–71.

reluctant to lend money to the neighbor trying to scrape together enough to hold onto his land; the first peasant has no margin for error in the event that his debtor cannot repay him. The neighbor, then, fails to secure the loan he needs to keep his property, and falls into landlessness. The command to "lend expecting nothing back" (Luke 6:35b) primes the pump for a flow of generosity in the villages. Lending -- or giving -- funds or goods to those in difficulty is easier when you feel assured that others will lend to you if you need it. With such Keynesian pump priming, what little wealth there is in the village can circulate in ways that can help the community get through hard times together rather than turn on each other in defensiveness.[64]

Such an understanding of the multiplying effect of generosity grounds a popular and particularly moving interpretation of the feeding miracles of Jesus, such as the Feeding of the Five Thousand (Mark 6:31-44). His disciples express concern that the crowd needs food, but then balk at Jesus's command to "give them some food yourselves." Some interpretations of this passage propose that when Jesus's disciples moved past their concerns about the scarcity of their own provisions and shared what they had, others in the crowd were moved to do the same. It turned out that there was enough for everybody, but if everyone who had a little bit had hoarded that bit for themselves, many would have gone hungry. Pope Francis is among those who have applied the passage in this way. "This is the miracle: rather

[64] Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*.

than a multiplication it is a sharing, inspired by faith and prayer. Everyone eats and some is left over: it is the sign of Jesus, the Bread of God for humanity."[65]

Scripture scholars Daniel J. Harrington and John R. Donahue reject what they call the "nice thought" interpretation of this passage in Christian preaching -- the notion that people were so moved by Jesus's teaching that they shared with each other. They instead point to the feeding as a meal foreshadowing the eschatological banquet.[66] I contend that this rejection overlooks three factors. First, rather than simply Jesus's words, it was the action of Jesus and the disciples, in their own sharing of what they had, that moved others to share. Second, such an interpretation in no way conflicts with any eschatological and Eucharistic foreshadowing. Finally, this interpretation is strengthened when placed in the context of Jesus's ministry as described by Horsley, a ministry in which sharing among neighbors helps to free the abundant goodness that God provides. While historians are unlikely to say with certainly what "really happened" in the events told as the miracles of Jesus, this "sharing" explanation is as plausible as any historically and, regardless of its historicity, true to the ministry of Jesus and his disciples. For that reason, its use as a goad to sharing is a legitimate actualization of the passage.

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[65] Pope Francis, “Angelus” (Vatican Press, June 2, 2013), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2013/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20130602.html.

[66] Daniel J. Harrington and John R. Donahue, *The Gospel of Mark*, vol. 2, Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 203–11.

Discipleship in the Reign of God

These actions, in concert with Jesus's teachings, are not disparate strands of Jesus's practice. They are part and parcel of a plan and a movement for the renewal of Israel. Egalitarian social relationships were to renew local communities. Instead of hierarchical social and familial relationships, Jesus practiced and taught a radical equality. He rejected political domination and subservience not only in his community of disciples, but also in the community more generally.[67]

The mutual forgiveness and reconciliation that were part of this practice served not only as avenues of personal holiness. They renewed communities that were, in this imperial situation, beset by hard times. The enhanced cooperation of these communities would allow them together to withstand the misfortunes and injustices of political and economic domination, while division would make losers out of almost all. Forgiveness of debts was not just a metaphor for the forgiveness of sins; it was also quite literal, in the tradition of the Jubilee, and maintained egalitarian and cooperative relations in the villages of the Galilee that were so hard hit by the Roman occupation and were the center of most of Jesus's ministry.[68]

If there was something not so much new as radically conservative in Jesus, then we must ask what made him different, why he came to be recognized as Christ, why Christians proclaim his resurrection from the dead. In answer, Tilley draws on but modifies the ancient Christological insight that Jesus is the personification of God's Kingdom, *autobasileia*. "Jesus's empowering practices realize the reign of God. Thus, he is *autobasileia*, not alone *but in and through his relationships with others*

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[67] Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*, 209-245.
[68] Ibid., 247–248.

who live in and live out God's reign. They together form the Jesus-movement. In this key, Jesus's remembered practices as carried on by his disciples are where the reign of God is."[69]

This last point bears emphasis: the Reign of God was made present in the community in which Jesus's disciples learned ways of being, doing, and seeing. Whether and how well the community of disciples practiced God's reign was crucial to Christological claims later made by the Church. By extension, then, through the centuries, the communities in which Christian practices and worldviews are enacted and fostered are potential loci for the continued proclamation of God's reign.

Tilley's thesis has much in common with Crossan's observation that part of what distinguished Jesus's ministry from that of, say, John the Baptist, was that Jesus did not establish some sort of monopoly on the Reign of God. Jesus had, quips, Crossan, a "franchise." While others were recognized as healers, they stayed in place and allowed brokers to bring people to them. Jesus healed freely and without mediation. More importantly, Jesus invited, even commanded, others to do what he himself was doing – heal the sick, feed the hungry, make the lame walk and the blind see.[70]

The disciples' imitation of Jesus drew them into his experience and thereby invited them into his prophetic imagination. In commissioning his disciples to exorcise, heal, and preach, Jesus instructed them to "take nothing for the journey, neither walking stick, nor sack, nor food, nor money" (Luke 9:3, also 10:4). They were to practice reliance on the generosity of God and neighbor, a reliance that

[69] Tilley, *The Disciples' Jesus*, 1. Emphasis mine.
[70] Crossan, *God and Empire*, 117–18.

could draw them into understanding Jesus's own experience of reliance on the generosity of God and neighbor. From the inside, so to speak, they could experience the reconciling effects of their actions.

Knowing Jesus and his prophetic imagination comes not simply in watching him or reading about him. As Jesuit theologian Jon Sobrino puts it, following Jesus is a source of understanding Jesus. "The following of Jesus consists, in the first place, in remaking his life and praxis, and this remaking can bring about 'an inner knowledge'. . . ."[71] In both his proclamation of the Kingdom of God and his denunciation of the "anti-Kingdom," the false and dominant regime, Jesus is known and understood in the imitation. His prophetic imagination, then, is understood also in imitation.

Jesus himself seems to have been aware of the importance of this dynamic of understanding in action. Christology for Tilley begins in the "active imagination of the disciples." This imagination requires walking in God's ways and carrying out together the reconciling practices of God's Kingdom. What is essential is that Jesus empowered the disciples to do so, empowered their active imaginations.[72] This disciplined imagination is learned. It comes from getting things right in practice.[73]

Jesus not only empowered but also commanded the disciples to do what he did. In all of the Synoptics he commissions the Twelve to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal (Matthew 10:5-15 and parallels). Luke adds even more dramatically the Mission of the Seventy-two (10:1-20). This is not a hierarchy – this

[71] Jon Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator: A View from the Victims*, trans. Paul Burns (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 323.
[72] Tilley, *The Disciples' Jesus*, 123.
[73] Ibid., 92–93.

is a movement growing like a mustard plant. When the commissioned disciples return, they report, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us because of your name” (Luke 10:18).

Jesus’s pedagogy is effective in empowering his disciples to envision and enact an alternative reality. He instructs with his words. He demonstrates with his actions. He encourages his disciples to perform. I note something of a minor point of disagreement with Brueggemann, then, who insists that we must imagine the alternative to the dominant consciousness before we can implement a new reality.[74] Instead, there is a constant dialectic between the imagining and the doing. Many people have not imagined a world in which they were politically active until they found themselves at a protest march. And then in the exposure to others at the march, to the chants, signs, and slogans, they were drawn into a larger alternative vision and a new imagination of what the world is and can be. This new imagination helped to feed subsequent actions. To some extent, the disciples are inspired to act by the envisioned alternative reality, but it seems that the reverse is also true; in their actions, they are able to see and envision a new reality and to imagine a new way of being in the world. Terrence Tilley, drawing on Pascal, sees virtuous practice leading not only to character but also to belief.[75] New possibilities are opened to the disciplined imagination.

[74] Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 39–40.
[75] Terrence W. Tilley, *The Wisdom of Religious Commitment* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1995), 1–28.

Discipleship in the Church: Following Christ in Practice and Imagination

Theologians Anthony Gittins and Terrence Tilley, in framing discipleship, help us to understand the role of discipleship in cultivating the prophetic imagination, to entering into the practical imagination of Christ,[76] a way of being and a way of seeing what the world is and can be. Discipleship, while it starts with following Christ and thereby being initiated into his imagination, also inspires an adherence to that imagination and its ethical imperatives. Gittins summarizes the dynamic of discipleship thus:

> Discipleship requires the recruitment and formation of believers who will continue the work of Jesus wherever they may be and wherever they are led . . . . The fruits of authentic discipleship will be manifest in the continuous commitment of those who have first encountered Jesus and then been sent by him in mission.[77]

As Tilley describes it, disciples come to know Christ in the reconciling practices of his own Reign of God ministry -- in healing, in table fellowship, in merciful forgiveness, and in acts of radical generosity. Scripture, then, is a place of encountering Jesus[78] but also a "script" for discipleship. Jesus is understood in his creative imitation. Writes Tilley, "Discipleship is a matter of imagination, of creatively extending the patterns set in the Jesus-movement into new times and places."[79]

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[76] Tilley, *The Disciples' Jesus*, 112. See also Anthony J. Gittins, *A Presence That Disturbs : A Call to Radical Discipleship* (Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph, 2002), 43–68.
[77] Anthony J. Gittins, *Called to Be Sent : Co-Missioned as Disciples Today* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 2008), 1.
[78] Anthony J. Gittins, *Encountering Jesus: How People Come to Faith and Discover Discipleship* (Liguori, MO: Liguori, 2002).
[79] Tilley, *The Disciples' Jesus*, 25.

Consumer Culture in Need of Prophetic Imagination

The preceding chapters essentially characterize contemporary consumer culture as dominated by a normative devotion to competition, consumption, and short-term self-interest. This consumer culture restricts our imagination to something akin to a "royal consciousness." This culture is perpetuated despites its harmful personal, social, and ecological effects. It is difficult for us, in practice and in imagination, to transcend or transform the culture. We are trapped in the royal consciousness unless and until an act of prophetic imagination allows us to believe and to enact an alternative reality.

A system that subjugates the common good to the profit of some -- more to the point, a system that normalizes such a subjugation -- is a close correlate to the royal consciousness described by Brueggemann. An economy that increases the marginalization of those who are economically and psychologically most vulnerable is not far from Pharaoh's exploitative economy. A culture that imagines the human person to be what and how she consumes, that ascribes ultimate value to the branded identity of the individual, that culture seeks to domesticate the divine while it controls the human. Such a culture cannot but live in the same emptiness as Pharaoh's royal culture. The victims of such a culture beg for liberation from it. This liberation requires the prophetic imagination, an imagination that can be fostered by a life of discipleship in Christ. The characteristics of the Reign of God in Christ's prophetic imagination offer paths to this liberation.

As argued above in the first chapter, anxiety is both a cause and consequence of consumerism. Concern over having enough, concern over being enough, drives

consumption; the consumption fails to resolve the insecurities that drive it. An anxious consumer society could benefit from the Great Assurance, both in terms of personal and material adequacy. Imagining that we indeed are enough reduces the anxiety that drives some consumption. This reduced anxiety also decreases interpersonal competition, making it easier to bring others into our circles as collaborators and not competitors. It allows for practices of healing and inclusion. This imagination is disciplined by deeds of healing and inclusion in imitation of the life of Christ.

Consumer culture has also made communities more vulnerable, as goods are increasingly privatized. As Jesus sought the renewal of the community of Israel through the generous sharing of resources in hard times, so too can a recommitment to sharing resources for the common good be a force for reinvigoration in society. Imagining that we have enough, or trusting that we will have enough, makes generous sharing of resources possible. Public goods can expand. Predatory marketing practices and invasive data mining are no longer thought to be essential for economic thriving but instead become less important than protecting consumers' development and well-being. Again, such an imagination is fostered in the imitation of Christ's generous sharing and forgiveness.

The key issue for religious educators, then, is to develop the communities in which this imagination is tutored and in which these practices are enacted. It is perhaps most useful to consider how this formation takes place in communities of practice, which is the topic of the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Learning to Ride: Identity and Imagination in Communities of Practice

Bikes for Change (BfC)[1] *is a community-based organization in a northeastern city. Its mission statement proclaims that it sees the bicycle as "a vehicle for social change." While the organization was founded to ship bicycles to war-torn Nicaragua in the 1980s as an alternative to the US government's supplying weapons and training to the Nicaraguan military, the scope of its programs has expanded since then. On this day, their workshop space is crowded with a dozen teens nearing the completion of the six-week "Earn-a-Bike" course. They have spent three hours a day in the program, learning about safe cycling and bike mechanics, but also some lessons about community development and power. At the end of the six weeks, each participant brings home a bike that he or she has, with staff help, refurbished.*

Seventeen-year-old Fadia, who went through the program herself and now works part-time as an instructor with younger teens in the Earn-a-Bike program, stands at one end of the workspace beneath a hand-lettered poster that reads, "Bikes for Change works to maintain an inclusive and non-violent safe space. This means that we are committed to confronting and stopping oppressive and violent behavior and language." Fadia is struggling to keep a small adolescent boy from wandering off in the middle of his repairs.

Nearby, a tall fourteen-year-old boy slaps at his bike and looks around in evident frustration. He had been getting help from a staff member earlier in the session, but was alone at the moment. Fadia asks what is wrong. "I need to fix this

[1] Both the name of the organization and the names of any persons mentioned have been changed.

crankarm." When Fadia says she can help if he will wait a minute, the boy instead says, "I need someone strong. When is Deron coming back?"

Fadia's response is quick. "That's sexist. When you say that you want him to help you because he's a man so he's stronger, that's like saying he's a man so he's stronger so he must be better."

This rich scene illustrates the potential for what Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger call "situated learning" through "legitimate peripheral participation" in a "community of practice."[2] While this scene took place in a secular setting, theirs is a model of learning particularly suited for learning in Christian faith. It parallels the way in which Jesus's earliest disciples learned to be the Jesus-movement. They developed as a movement through their participation in the community that formed around and imitated the practice of Jesus. Learning in a community of practice (CoP) happens to a great extent through negotiation of identity in the context of social practice, and in the process shapes both the personal and collective imaginations. We see, also, that learning in the CoP can be structured with intentionality, and that it has the potential to have an effect on practice and imagination far beyond the boundaries of that single CoP itself.

In bringing these concepts from the fields of management studies and education into religious education, religious educator Jane Regan sheds light on how discipleship works, both for Jesus's original circle and in the Church today. She sees in communities of practice not simply a descriptive model for how situated learning occurs, but also a prescriptive model for renewing congregational life in religious

[2] Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning : Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge England ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

education. Regan distills from Wenger[3] a useful definition of a community of practice as a "sustained gathering of people whose practices are marked by mutual engagement around a shared enterprise with a common repertoire." She adds, though, that not all such gatherings are communities of practice; part of what makes such a gathering a community of practice is that it is also characterized by a particular type of learning, where " the collective learning involved in thriving as a community leads to practices that enhance the members' identities and further the group's goals."[4]

Given the origin of the concept in the field of business management, it is easy to consider its applicability to a division of a company, or to a project team in a workplace. Often, where people are placed into a group, management has the goal of forming them into an efficient and effective community of practice that passes on learning while incorporating new members. Regan thinks more broadly about CoPs, including those that are more voluntary, such as in religious organizations. Communities of practice, she contends, should not just be places of learning in business or schools. She brings CoPs into the realm of religious education, arguing that religious educators should intentionally create and shape CoPs as loci of faith formation.[5] Extending her logic, here I argue that communities of practice have the potential to be effective places of learning for prophetic imagination because they are places where identity, imagination, and practice integrate.

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[3] Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, 1st pbk. ed. (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
[4] Jane E. Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Transforming the Parish through Communities of Practice* (New York: Paulist Press, 2016), 30.
[5] Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*.

Bikes for Change -- A Community of Practice

In exploring this notion of communities of practice and the role they play in shaping imagination, I turn for illustration to Bikes for Change (BfC), where I conducted a qualitative research study. Bikes for Change is a community-based organization in a northeastern city of the United States. Their programs include working with local youth to repair bicycles and to encourage habitual safe cycling. Some graduates of the program continue their affiliation with the organization and become instructors in the program. There is also an international element of the program, partnering with organizations in developing nations to provide bicycles for a variety of uses. BfC is located in an area of the city that exhibits diversity of race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. Its youth programs are especially designed to be accessible to youth of families with limited incomes; the program fees are fairly minimal, and even those are charged on a sliding scale.

BfC is an organization enfolded in the fabric of the local community. It is headquartered in an old brewery that houses a number of small businesses and local non-profit organizations. Its avowed mission is for social change, not simply fixing bicycles. In terms of my specific focus on consumerism, there is an effort at BfC to promote consumption in ways that differ from the mainstream culture, focusing on sustainability and re-use.

BfC accepts donations of bicycles and parts. Most donations are of incomplete or broken bicycles. Some bicycles are sent to partner organizations in developing countries; others are kept for the youth programs, and a few given to the

organization's nearby full-service shop to be reconditioned and sold. Volunteers sort through the donations weekly. Additionally, most staff and many volunteers cycle as their primary mode of transportation.

BfC has a small full-time, part-time, and volunteer staff at its "hub," its headquarters. Some of the staff members are focused on the international programs, five on the youth programs, and one explicitly as a community organizer. Approximately eight teen-aged youth instructors work part-time in the youth programs and in the volunteer training program, teaching bike mechanics and organizing daily activities. Most of these youth instructors participated in one of the programs themselves, with a couple of others having been provided through a city youth employment initiative.

It is crucial, though, that BfC, as a community of practice, seeks to fulfill its mission to "make the bicycle a vehicle for social change" in multiple ways. Its values and goals go well beyond teaching bicycle mechanics to youth, as the mission to make the bicycle a "vehicle for social change" would seem to indicate. Some of the events that occurred there over the time period of the study included "Know Your Rights" workshops, several local bike rides featuring interpretive commentary on community infrastructure, an "Intro to Male Supremacy" workshop, and the release of a series of web videos called "Shifting Power."

For a qualitative study at BfC, I undertook both interviews and observation. I conducted semi-structured interviews with four young adult employees of BfC, all of whom had themselves gone through the program as youth, become youth instructors, and then went on to at least one other role in the organization. They

ranged in age from nineteen to twenty-four. One interviewee is a woman, three men. Three of the interviewees are African-American, and one is Dominican-American.

I also observed and took notes on two sessions of the Earn-a-Bike (EAB) program. The program runs for three hours on weekdays, from 4:00-7:00 PM, but there is also set-up and evaluation, and so my observation began thirty minutes before and ended thirty minutes after the session. On both of those occasions, I was a participant-observer. Over the course of three six-week sessions of the Earn-a-Bike program, I also volunteered once a week and made informal observations.

Observation included not only behaviors but also artifacts. The physical space of the hub -- the workshop space, the classroom, the wall signage, the bicycles themselves -- were all part of what I observed in an effort to make sense of the culture of BfC. Besides shelves of bike parts and tools, the walls of the workshop space are covered in posters and signs. One reads, "No Joke Zone: Not all jokes are funny." A contract signed by youth participants in the Earn-a-Bike program lists the rules agreed upon for that session, including "No Bullying," "Respect," and "Be Nice" among the precepts. Next to it a small poster defines "equality" as "sameness" and "equity" as "fairness." Equity must precede equality, it states, because equity is about "access to the same opportunities."

A note about reflexivity is in order here. Adult instructors participate in a nine-session training process before volunteering, so I did not enter the organization's culture "cold." By the time I conducted the interviews, I had been volunteering for three six-week sessions of the youth program, spread over the better part of a year. My role as a volunteer included participating in and

supervising activities and helping youth with bike repairs. Because of this participation, some of what might have been strange had already become familiar to me. Certainly, as qualitative research theorist Corrine Glesne points out, my level of immersion as a participant-observer was not simply based on my own preferences, but was negotiated tacitly with BfC and with the student participants.[6] I was there every week. They asked for help every week. I consider it, besides being something that I enjoy doing, part of the price of access.

As a participant-observer, I should state a bias towards a generally positive appreciation for BfC, its mission and values as I understand them. I had already had some interactions with students, volunteers, and staff. While I would not say that I had a particularly close relationship with any, I had a generally comfortable relationship with most, and certainly no notable prior bad experiences with any. I was positively predisposed to the program and its participants.

As a volunteer, I did not have the institutional knowledge and, in some cases, technical expertise of the staff, including the youth instructors. As an adult and former high school teacher, I felt some resistance to ceding control to those significantly younger than I. I do not consider it a huge barrier, and cannot know if or to what extent it affected the data, but it probably affected the way I intervened in the course of events and interacted with students and staff.

Race, gender, age, geography, educational, and socioeconomic status matter. All four of my interviewees are non-white and come from backgrounds of low socioeconomic status (SES). Three live in the housing projects where they grew up.

[6] Corrine Glesne, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers : An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1999).

The students in the program comprised a racially diverse group. Although I cannot know their SES with certainty, it seems likely, given the organization's mission and their use of sliding payment scales, that at least some of the students, youth instructors, and staff are of lower SES. All live within the city limits. I am a white, middle-aged male, academically educated, raised in a well-off suburb, and spend little of my time far from the halls of the academy. These differences inevitably affect what I see and, perhaps more importantly, what I miss. I did not always bridge that gap well. For instance, there was one point when I was walking two of the students to the subway after class, and I realized that I was simply not getting huge chunks of the communication they were having on the walk. I wish I had asked them to help me understand it, and I suspect they would have, but it also would have given the interaction a very unnatural feeling. On a few other occasions, students spoke Spanish with youth instructors, well beyond the range of my limited conversational ability. In other words, I am aware of not being able to grasp everything that was going on.

Learning in Communities of Practice -- Identity at the Center

Lave and Wenger observe that, whatever has or has not been learned in a classroom, in the business world, a significant component of learning comes on the job, often informally. They are not simply nor even primarily looking at the learning of facts or skills. The contextual and social learning that takes place, which they call "situated learning," is as much about learning a way of being as it is about learning skills or facts. They draw on the apprenticeship model to illuminate their own

model. An apprentice to a tailor learns how to become a tailor not only by doing -- with some supervision -- the tasks of a tailor, but by being with master tailors, by absorbing and imitating ways of practicing and ways of being. The apprentice does not simply learn the skills of a tailor; she learns to be a tailor.[7] Identity, being (or, better, becoming) a certain person in the community imbues the whole learning process.

Centering on "identity" requires that we put some descriptive parameters on the term, a concept with a multiplicitous history of usage and definitions.[8] Here I use "identity" very much in consonance with the everyday sense of the term, meaning "one's sense of who they are."[9] Drawing on aspects of the various broad understandings of the subject,[10] I add nuance to this definition by supplementing it to say, "not only in themselves but also in relationship to others and the world." I highlight then three aspects of identity. First, there is a dimension of agency to it. The person is involved in constructing his or her own identity. Second, identity is

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[7] Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 61–87.

[8] For an overview of many of the various uses of "identity," particularly as it has been used in developmental psychology since Erik Erikson's work in the middle of the twentieth century, see Susan R. Jones and Elisa S. Abes, *Identity Development of College Students: Advancing Frameworks of Multiple Dimensions of Identity* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2013), 19–46. Jones and Abes summarize major categories of thinking about identity -- psychological, sociological, and psychosocial -- as well as the assumptions underpinning each. Their survey points to the inadequacy of any single theory. This variety, I contend, rather than rendering identity useless, points to its centrality as both an anthropological and existential concern.

[9] Identity in this sense may more precisely be called "self-identity," which is the term that British sociologist Anthony Giddens uses. See Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*.

[10] Jones and Abes point to the work of cultural scholar Stuart Hall, who describes three broad categories of conceptions of the self, more or less correlated with broad philosophical eras of recent centuries: the Enlightenment subject, the sociological subject, and the postmodern subject. Stuart Hall, "The Question of Cultural Identity," in *Modernity and Its Futures*, ed. Stuart Hall, David Held, and Anthony G. McGrew, Understanding Modern Societies ; Bk. 4 (Cambridge: Polity Press in association with the Open University, 1992), 273–315. For the Enlightenment subject, there is a true, "core" self to be discovered. The sociological subject is produced through interaction with culture and the social world. In postmodern thought, identity is fluid, unstable, and constructed both socially and personally. Hall's description of the postmodern subject relies particularly on Kenneth J. Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

also constructed in dialogue with others. Third, identity is not static but is always in process.

In current parlance, the human project is often construed as finding or constructing an "authentic" identity.[11] Perhaps the most prevalent conception of identity in the social imaginary is that this identity is something stable. British sociologist Anthony Giddens calls identity the ability to "keep a particular narrative [about oneself] going."[12] If this narrative is a stable one, then Erik Erikson's contention that finding this identity is the primary task of adolescence makes sense.[13] James Marcia, drawing on Erikson's emphasis on identity in psychosocial development, uses the language of identity being "achieved," further connoting stability.[14] While Wenger does not imagine identity to be so permanent and stable, the sense of agency that Erikson and Marcia imply in the quest for identity is very much in keeping with Wenger's use of the term.

Giddens's description of identity as being located in a subjective narrative requires some level of reflectivity by the subject. What is useful about this description is its understanding of identity development as, potentially, an ongoing project. What is limiting about Giddens's description is its narrowness, depending as it does on a conscious level of self-reflection and a discursive coherence to the identity narrative. The self-reflection that goes into identity is not always -- arguably

[11]See, for instance, Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*.
[12] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 54.
[13] Erik H Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cyle: Selected Papers*, Psychological Issues ; v. 1, No. 1, Monograph 1 (New York: International Universities Press, 1959).
[14] James E. Marcia, “Development and Validation of Ego-Identity Status,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 3, no. 5 (1966): 551–558, doi:10.1037/h0023281. It is important to note that identity is not, in Marcia's scheme, "achieved" once and for all, nor is failure to "achieve" identity a permanent condition.

in some cases is almost never -- as explicit as it is inchoate. It includes a felt sense of identity, sorted out and discovered more in practice than in conscious reflection. While identity can be narrated, it is, more fully, lived.[15]

This subjective agency may seem to imply contemplation by an isolated, monadic self. Giddens's concern, empirically, is that in today's world so many of us have prioritized the self-reflexivity in the identity project that we have become overwhelmingly narcissistic.[16] "Authenticity" runs up against its limits if identity is completely unstable and constructed. It is a personal construction project, but is one without any sort of moral resources. The self becomes its own authority. Giddens believes that identity authenticity is inherently such a project.[17] It is in this very circularity that Giddens finds the "fundamental psychic problem in the circumstances" of what he calls "late modernity," which others might call "postmodernity."[18] An identity closed on the self is the source, he contends, of the feeling that life has nothing worthwhile to offer.

Note that what Giddens observes anecdotally is what has been more systematically quantified in the data gathered in chapter one of this dissertation. The dissatisfaction and ennui that he points to is, at least in part, causally correlated with consumerist culture. The worst of consumerist culture promotes an

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[15] This understanding of identity in the felt as well as the reflective experience of the subject coincides more adequately with the work of developmental psychologists in the field of student affairs. For instance, Arthur Chickering and Linda Reisser offer a sweeping view of identity development along multiple "vectors" in the context of higher education. Arthur W. Chickering and Linda Reisser, *Education and Identity*, 2nd ed., Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993).

[16] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 169–80. Giddens is hardly alone in raising concerns about widespread narcissism. He draws on the work of Christopher Lasch, who identified a "culture of narcissism." Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, Norton paperback 1991 ed.. (New York: Norton, 1991). See also Twenge and Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic*.

[17] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 9.

[18] Ibid.

individualism that closes in on itself. In a culture where humanity is commodified, so too then is identity commodified, and so the horizons of meaning grow increasingly limited. In such a culture, all that remains is the project of self-construction -- or at least self-representation. When we are left to construct an identity by aligning ourselves with brands or even through a pastiche of personal style, it is hard not to feel that we fall short of our potential selves. The irony, then, is that the excesses of the quest for building an authentic self so often leave us feeling disconnected from our humanness.

I argue that it is in fact this meaninglessness and disconnection that fuel the language and ethics of authenticity. Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor disagrees with Giddens's sweeping critique of the quest for authenticity, even if he agrees that a perversion of the quest does end up where Giddens finds it. He wants to rescue the notion of authentic identity, and at the same time rescue society from the malaise of meaninglessness.[19] In following Taylor, I draw out two particular elements of identity whose importance he recognizes. I contend that they are essential to an adequate understanding of (and practical living of) authentic identity because they derive from his anthropological assumptions that I share, and that accord with the theological anthropology proposed in the second chapter of this dissertation: human relationality, and a context of transcendent meaning.

An implication for Taylor, then, is that any attempt to build an authentic identity that is centered on a monadic, self-determining individual is bound to fail. It is a perversion of authentic identity. A self that matters is not merely "chosen."

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[19] Such is the thesis of Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*.

Because the human person is inherently relational, the demands of relationship play a role in the definition of an identity, and an identity that is fulfilling and "authentic" must transcend self-determining individualism.

It is not only relationality that is essential to the human person and therefore to identity. For Taylor, there is a world of value beyond the self-determining human person. History, society, nature -- these realms point to what is transcendent. A person created in and for this world cannot find fulfillment without that transcendence. In Taylor's words, "authenticity is not the enemy of demands that emanate from beyond the self; it supposes such demands."[20] Narcissism is thus a perversion of the ethics of authenticity, but not a necessary one. Development of identity that resonates authentically requires exploring commitments beyond the self narrowly conceived. "I can define myself," he says, "only against the background of things that matter."[21]

Wenger, in accord with the sociological understanding of identity, emphasizes the social character of learning and identity development. We become who we are, in part, at least, as others make us. We negotiate identity with the surrounding others.[22] As Taylor puts it, I do not merely "express myself" with my sartorial style or choice of concerts to attend; I communicate to others. There is an audience who reacts. Their reaction co-determines the meaning of my action,[23] and therefore who I am and who I understand myself to be. I negotiate rather than create my identity. Taylor brings together the ideas that identity development is

[20] Ibid., 40–41.
[21] Ibid., 41.
[22] Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 149–55.
[23] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 2007, 481.

both relational and ongoing. In his words, "the making and sustaining of our identity . . . remains dialogical throughout our lives."[24]

I note here both similarities to and differences from virtue ethics. In classical virtue ethics, through Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, "the action redounds to the agent." We become what we do. In the situated learning theory of Lave and Wenger, it is in social practice that one learns to become a "kind of person."[25] They go beyond the individualistic overtones of much virtue ethics, seeing learning as occurring in the person's practice in the world. It is both social and personal. As such, it always involves a construction of identity -- but a construction that does not take place solely within the learner. In a real sense, then, identity is negotiated in practice and in the world.[26] Identity is where the social and the individual self meet, and thus are mutually constitutive.[27] It is the locus of selfhood, but also a locus of social power.

This brings us to look more closely at the interrelationships among learning, identity, and imagination in communities of practice. Regan characterizes the learning that happens in a CoP as collective, and describes it at its best as mutually formative and mutually beneficial for the members and the community. She says that "the collective learning involved in thriving as a community leads to practices that enhance the members' identities and further the group's goals."[28] It is in both practice and belonging that members' negotiate their identities, and it is in the

[24] Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 35.
[25] Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 53.
[26] Ibid., 52–57.
[27] Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 145–46.
[28] Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*, 30.

practices of those members that the CoP is expressed, its values are made visible. With Regan, I adopt here from Lave and Wenger's social theory of learning.

The learning process in this apprenticeship model takes place in what Lave and Wenger call "legitimate peripheral participation." Members of the CoP who are newer, in the "apprentice" role, are able to participate in the life of the community, but not as central[29] figures yet. They are involved in the CoP's practices, even if their influence on the community is not yet strong enough to give it direction. Lave and Wenger describe a paradigmatic arc of participation in a community of practice, from peripherality into fuller participation, and then moving through towards greater peripherality again.[30]

The abstract shared engagement is actualized and given form in practices, processes, and objects. Hence, the commitments, values, and worldview of the CoP are *reified*. This process of *reification* focuses the meaning of this shared engagement among this CoP.[31] For instance, in the vignette that opened the chapter, the poster on the wall was a reification of the values at BfC. A regular practice of confronting violent or oppressive language would also be a reification of the shared commitment. It stands as a tool to achieve that shared engagement and accountability, but also a symbol of the accountability to which the CoP lays claim.

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[29] Lave and Wenger deliberately avoid the term "central," instead putting participation on a continuum of peripherality, from more peripheral to more full. I find value, though, in considering that some participation is not simply "more full" but also "more central" to the arrangement of power in a CoP. Equally active participants are not necessarily equally influential in the community, and so the notion of centrality captures this political dimension. It is not a distinction I press in this work, but may have value for considering legitimate peripheral participation in CoPs in other works or contexts.
[30] Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 29–43.
[31] Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 57–71. In other contexts, *reification* is a term laden with layers of meaning and the subject of much debate. I use the term without the connotations and weight is has accrued in other fields, and instead use it simply as Winger does. Reification refers to the giving of form to the abstract shared engagements of the CoP.

That Fadia's practice matched the values on the poster serves as an indicator that she had indeed internalized a commitment to that value, that learning had been effective. The fact that her actions took place right under the poster also makes their combination that much more powerful in shaping the practices and imagination of any witnesses.

Of course, such reifications may be more or less useful tools, and as symbols they may be more or less revelatory of the true values of the CoP. Business consultants Jim Collins and Jerry Porras extol the importance of companies' accurately identifying and living into their missions and visions.[32] Although their work focuses on the culture of whole companies rather than smaller CoPs within or without such corporations, the parallel with Wenger's concerns about the power of reifications is striking. A mission statement that does not genuinely name the mission of the company, that is just window dressing, is a dead symbol that confuses rather than inspires a company's identity. It is like a reification of practice that does not accurately reflect the "way of being" in a community of practice.

This dynamic of reifications that work at cross-purposes, unsurprisingly, weakens the learning of the values and vision that are most desired. The practices of fuller participants that are at odds with stated values or rules are incorporated into the practices of more peripheral participants, who thereby also identify themselves in less-than-full alignment with the professed value. For instance, at BfC, a

[32]Jim Collins and Jerry I. Porras, *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*, 3rd ed. (New York: HarperBusiness, 1994). While I criticize the text for its totalizing explanation of business success and its equating of "visionary" with "currently highly profitable," the difficulties endemic in environments where reifications that are incongruous with the values that actually perdure are nonetheless striking and ring true. Consider a local recreational youth soccer league. If the league's mission states that it values "universal participation" but in reality coaches keep unskilled players off the field, there are bound to be confused children, upset parents, and unsatisfied coaches.

commitment to safe cycling -- participants must wear helmets on group rides, and tricks are prohibited on the streets in those rides -- is at odds with accepted practice in the workshop area, where staff regularly clamber up storage racks amid haphazardly strewn bike frames. It is no surprise, then, that despite signage that might indicate otherwise, none of my respondents identified "safety" as a primary value at BfC. Youth leaving the hub often remove helmets on the way out the door, pop wheelies in the busy parking lot, and ride off into the dark without bike lights. Their ambivalence towards the safest cycling practices mirrors the mixed messages in the practices and reifications of the CoP. If safety is to become a top priority, it will have to be reflected not only in the stated rules and goals of BfC but also in the behaviors of its fullest participants, both on and off the bike.

Three Elements -- Engagement, Imagination, and Alignment

Lave and Wenger suggest that learning in a CoP should be designed around engagement, imagination, and alignment. These three elements are mutually-influential factors in the learning that takes place in a CoP. All three are infused with the development of both personal and communal identity in practice. While they are not exactly stages in fuller participation in a CoP, there is a way in which engagement acts as an entré into the imagination of the CoP, which invites alignment. The process does not simply move in one direction, however. Instead, there is an iterative process, whereby alignment fosters further practical engagement and deeper imagining.

Engagement

Regan notes that a not every collection of people, even one with a common task, is a community of practice. To be truly a community, a CoP has a "shared enterprise" around which its members are "mutually engaged." This enterprise defines the focus of the work of the community and its members. It is deeper, she argues, than the group's simply having a goal. Because the enterprise is shared, "each member is accountable toward the shared enterprise and, through that, to the group."[33] The accountability is part of the shared engagement.

This sense of accountability came up frequently in my observations and interviews at BfC. Deron, who has participated in the program as a youth, an instructor, and now as program coordinator, spoke to the importance of being held accountable for learning and performing tasks. Respect for him includes accountability for both students and staff.

> Like, if they see you not working to your potential, they'll be like, 'Yo, you gotta get this done because that's not you, you're not lazy, you're here to help people.' And if they see a problem they'll . . . let you know what the problem is and how to change it so you don't get in trouble or anything like that.

I observed Deron take this approach with one student who wandered away from the bike repair he was supposed to be doing. After this admonishment, the student responded by recruiting a friend to help him get the repair done, fulfilling the task Deron had set for him. Each session concluded with an evaluation among staff and volunteers, with all able to give "kudos" for someone's good work and "deltas" for things they want to see changed.

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[33] Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*, 33.

My point in mentioning these evaluation meetings is not necessarily to extol their effectiveness, nor to imply that all staff and volunteers were in lockstep agreement as to what should be done, how, or by whom. It is simply to highlight that they were a manifestation of the mutuality of engagement and accountability that characterize the shared enterprise of this community of practice. Wenger would call these meetings a reification of the abstract shared engagement, a process that gives form to the experience (in this case of shared engagement). The process of reification focuses the meaning of this shared engagement among this CoP.[34] It stands as a tool to achieve that shared engagement and accountability, but also a symbol of the accountability to which the CoP lays claim as a core value.

In educating for the prophetic imagination, for alternative practices, or for anything countercultural, engagement does not simply happen by fiat. It must be attractive. At BfC, the promise of earning a bike is what originally engages many youth. Moreover, as they spend time volunteering in other programs in the organization, they earn additional credits towards bike parts as well as repair help. While these external motivators are not usually what makes involvement last, they can start the process of engagement. For a project like shifting away from an automobile-centered lifestyle or for any sort of counter-consumerist movement, starting and sustaining engagement is crucial.

Beyond those material rewards, the invitation and support of more central participants stood out as the single biggest factor engaging new participants in the community. Sheila has been involved at BfC for nearly a decade now, as a program

[34] Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 57–71.

participant, youth employee, board member, and now staff member. Her first contact with BfC included a friendly invitation from the founder to start volunteering, and her trajectory of participation included mentoring from members who invited her into various new roles. She says,

> People who put in the time and the work are recognized, and people want to put them in a position for leadership, and that what was happening when I was volunteering on the weekends, and going to different events, and people recognized the effort that I was putting in and they would say, "Hey, would you like to do this?"

On the flip side, she is occasionally frustrated and alienated when she fears that, as a young, black woman, her voice is sometimes marginalized. Engagement with the CoP is more difficult to sustain for those who feel this marginalization. Whether the shared enterprise is fixing bicycles, recycling, or reducing consumption in other ways, this sense of exclusion limits engagement and therefore the effectiveness of the enterprise.

Malik, another staff member, reflected on his time as a participant in the youth program thus: "I learned how people really try to help you out and how people cared about the way you learned. . . . And it was just a lot of respect for those who were willing to learn, and how people continued to try pushing you to get more better." Deron mentioned several times how the instructors were "cool" and would teach him extra things when he came early, so he felt invited in.

Additionally, in my observation at the program, I was struck by how meaningful attention and invitations from staff seemed to be to the young participants. Over the period of my observation, several of the members of the program went on to be hired as youth instructors. It was especially as youth

instructors that attention from the full-time staff seemed to make a difference. Youth who were frequently invited to try tasks or given a lesson to teach were more engaged in the community and more active in seeking out further involvement. Of course, the arrow goes both ways; youth who actively seek out further involvement are more frequently invited to try new tasks like teaching a lesson or participating in planning.

While the importance of engagement in the shared enterprise is hard to dispute, that engagement is also subject to the vagaries of many forces. When it comes to engagement, Lave and Wenger's description of the arc of legitimate peripheral participation is too schematized, growing as it does out of studies of organizations in which people are already somewhat committed for some time. In the workplaces they investigate, CoPs already exist, forming "naturally." Their concern, then, is to manage the learning that happens in these CoPs.[35] For instance, they discuss quartermasters in the US Navy,[36] and while such a position does involve some turnover, it is a turnover fairly carefully managed by the institution. Wenger's archetypal CoP is a claims processing department at a health insurance firm.[37] In such a situation, while in theory anyone who is a member of that CoP is there voluntarily, in fact there are presumably some barriers to exit from the CoP. In anything but a job market that is highly favorable to labor, many employees are reluctant to hop in and out of decent employment. Once employed, the members of the community are thrust into positions, and have only some control over their arc.

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[35] Etienne Wenger, Richard McDermott, and William M. Snyder, *Cultivating Communities of Practice*, 1st ed. (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002).
[36] Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 73–76.
[37] Wenger, *Communities of Practice*.

Granted, the idealized track of participation that Lave and Wenger trace is easily imagined, and empirically it is approximated frequently. For instance, in my study of Bikes for Change (BfC), I interviewed four late adolescents or young adults who were employees of the program. Each of them described a process of entering BfC first simply to earn a free bicycle, but of gradually working into a variety of roles and increasingly voice in and responsibility for the organization. Their involvement traced arcs of legitimate peripheral participation that seem to fit the idealized scheme of Lave and Wenger.

However, in describing this trajectory of participation, Lave and Wenger do not adequately account for two factors that create variability in participation, especially in highly voluntary CoPs[38] with low barriers to entry and exit. In the area of religious education, for instance, especially among adults, the formation of CoPs is less "natural" than intentional. While at the office I may be part of the claims processing team because I am assigned there, if I do not want to join my church's small-group reflection program or my congregation's liturgy committee, I simply do

[38] I distinguish here between voluntary participation in/identification with a CoP and voluntary membership in an organization or group. The organization may not necessarily be coterminous with the CoP, but one's role in the organization may facilitate membership in the CoP. For instance, imagine a professional baseball team. Given the terms of their contracts, unless they are to retire from the sport, the players are members of the team by fiat. While there may be ways in which the whole team itself constitutes a CoP, consider instead the pitchers as a subset within the team. Their workout regimens and mental preparation are quite distinct from those of the position players. All of the pitchers on the team, with guidance from the managerial staff, will have certain practices in common if they want to stay on the team. Beyond those commonalities, though, a community of practice may arise within that group, pitchers who work out together, who go over scouting reports together, and who develop their own repertoire of shared practices and history. Some pitchers will participate in this particular CoP, others will not, so their participation is certainly voluntary. However, other pitchers on the team are in a position whereby they have to choose to participate or not (or, conversely, the participating pitchers have to choose whom else to welcome to the group). Membership in the "pitchers" group is not entirely voluntary. That membership conditions access to the CoP. Moreover, people who are not pitchers on the team are unlikely to have access to the CoP even if they want it. Players on other teams do not have the geographical access; outfielders have different schedules and different concerns. Not just anybody can join the CoP. There are limits to its voluntary characteristics in that way. Also, the other pitchers, by virtue of being pitchers on the team, which is not voluntary, are forced to make decisions to participate in ways that others are not.

not join. This difference leaves some gaps between Lave and Wenger's concerns and mine. This voluntary factor in education through religious communities is magnified in a secular age. Charles Taylor argues that the defining feature of secularity is that belief is one option among many, and no longer the default option.[39] As a corollary, religious belonging is also one option among many. There is, for better and for worse, no captive audience.

The first limitation to Lave and Wenger's theory when it comes to highly voluntary organizations is that they do not really investigate what brings the many people at the periphery into fuller participation -- or what keeps them more peripheral or leaving the CoP altogether. For instance, they describe apprenticeship in Alcoholics Anonymous, and the picture is powerfully cogent for those who enter the program deeply over time.[40] It does not, however, touch upon the people who go to a couple of meetings and do not return -- whether sober or not.

To this first point, that the idealized arc of participation is a model with limited empirical support: for every participant in BfC's signature youth Earn-a-Bike program who went on to engage more deeply in the CoP, there are a dozen who did not. The youth who drop in for once a week for free bike work and conversation sometimes show regularly for a short time and then disappear, while others never develop a regular habit of attendance at all. Most maintain a very peripheral presence at best. Because most venues for educating for a countercultural, prophetic imagination are highly voluntary, who stays and why they stay are of particular importance.

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[39] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 2007.
[40] Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 79–84.

Lave and Wenger offer a theoretical category that helps to make sense of these dynamics, but only to a point. They distinguish between "peripherality" and "marginality." Those who are marginalized are excluded from modes and levels of knowledge, practice, and power. For the butchers that Lave and Wenger studied, apprentices were really not engaged in the community of butchers by ever-increasing participation in the practices of the masters.[41] Their training systematically prevented them from learning aspects of the trade and practices of the masters. Their participation was not legitimized, and so rather than tracing an arc of legitimate peripheral participation, many were stuck on the outer edge of the periphery -- marginalized. For Wenger, marginalization is a form of non-participation that is forced more than freely chosen.[42]

In a highly voluntary CoP, it is easy for new members who perceive themselves to be marginalized simply to drop out. My niece joined her high school robotics club, excited to learn about programming and engineering and to be part of a team. She felt, however, that her ideas were dismissed with prejudice by older males on the team who were fuller participants. Feeling blocked from fuller participation, she did not return to the club and instead sought out a club at a neighboring school. Educators who hope to teach in the context of communities of practice must attend carefully to the dynamics of staying involved and dropping out. Because the prophetic imagination involves a way of being and acting that explicitly opposes aspects of the dominant culture, such as consumerism, it is difficult to

[41] Ibid., 76–79.
[42] Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 165–69.

develop and sustain without a supportive community of practice. Hard as it is to flourish in spite of a consumer culture, it is even more challenging to do so alone.

Moreover, the contours of this shared enterprise may evolve along with the group; both the group and the enterprise are dynamic. Regan offers a particularly relatable example: a book club has been meeting to discuss what they have been reading together. Along the way, hosts begin providing desserts, and over time the desserts become the true shared enterprise. The book club evolves into a dessert club. In the process, there is likely some turnover in the club's membership, as some members who participated for the book discussion drop out, uninterested in dessert preparation or socializing, while other members join when invited to participate in the monthly dessert extravaganza.[43]

Such changes are evolutionary rather than revolutionary in a CoP, generally, because, as Wenger puts it, the shared engagement and sustained mutual relationships make the community's practices a "continuation of an ongoing process."[44] A common repertoire of shared stories and styles of discourse characterize the group's interactions. While such a repertoire is bound to change and develop, as is the group membership, there is always an element of continuity with the history of the community as well.

This category of marginalization can partially account for dropouts from CoPs, and offers important lessons, as I will discuss below. However, when I consider the adolescents at BfC who did not move to fuller participation in the organization, systematic marginalization seems a poor explanation for most. Some

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[43] Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*, 33–34.
[44] Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 125–26.

may simply not be "joiners." Some may only want to get their bicycles working so as to ride to work or to enjoy time with friends, but have no real affinity with other aspects of the organization's goals. Many may simply have other things that interest them more, or may not have a regular enough schedule to allow them to attend the program consistently enough to draw them into fuller participation.

Besides the fact that many potential participants never really get engaged because they remain marginalized in a CoP, a second factor that Lave and Wenger do not adequately consider is that, especially in CoPs with low barriers to entry and exit, many dynamics can interrupt the smooth arc of peripherality. People move away, lose free time when children arrive, get ill and then may or may not recover, add a second job, or have a falling out with someone else in the CoP that keeps them away. Sometimes these changes are sudden; the smooth arc from peripherality to deeper involvement and back out may empirically be the exception rather than the norm in many CoPs. For instance, even among the four subjects that I interviewed at BfC, one had been away from the organization for a year when she moved out of state for college; another was preparing, fairly suddenly, to move with his family to a city in the same metropolitan area, but not conveniently located to the BfC hub of operations, and was not sure how it would affect his participation.

Imagination

All of this interplay among practice, identity, and meaning emerges in the imagination of the participant/learner. Wenger describes imagination similarly to the way I am using it here -- how we see the world and ourselves in it. He describes

the function of imagination as "creating images of the world and seeing connection through time and space by extrapolating from our own experience."[45] That experience includes, crucially, practice -- and the meanings we make of that practice.

Practice as reification has the power to evoke values and vision in an emotionally and cognitively stimulating way. For instance, BfC's mission includes making the bicycle "a vehicle for social change, " including making cycling a safer and more widely accepted means of urban transportation. When taking program participants on group rides, BfC requires each rider to wear a helmet; staff and volunteers are instructed to "cork" traffic at intersections, claiming for the group of cyclists the right to take a lane of traffic safely. These reified practices codify the value of safely assertive cycling as a social goal(even if, as mentioned above, staff members do not always perfectly embody the ethos of safety in other ways). Three of my four interview subjects voiced concerns about infrastructure that made cycling unsafe for them, and two recounted accidents with traffic. They spoke about wanting a traffic layout that encouraged and promoted safe cycling. Their imagination of an alternative to what exists was influenced by their practice in the community.

This imagination may be more or less consciously drawn from participation in the CoP. While Daniel disavows having political knowledge, for example, he peppered our interview with references to how his conversations with people at BfC have brought him to think about gentrification. Malik also spoke about gentrification as an issue in the surrounding neighborhood, with new developments and higher

[45] Ibid., 173.

rent squeezing low-income residents out. Their imaginations correlate well with the ideology "in the air" at BfC as described above. Similarly, Deron's charge that managerial and political neglect of his neighborhood leave youth with too few parks and too much time to do "crazy stuff" resonates with the worldview that can be felt as much as understood in the environs of BfC. Sheila's perception that those who have power use it for self-aggrandizement and not for the common good seems reflective of an imagination of the world familiar to the environs of BfC.

It is important to note that while participation in the CoP of BfC has been influential in the imagination of these subjects, it is just one of many factors; their imaginations about the world and their place in it still vary considerably. The multiplicity of their experiences, including participation in other CoPs, shapes those imaginations. Whereas Deron, Daniel, and Sheila all describe themselves as having little or no political and economic power compared to politicians and big corporations, Malik's discourse frequently turned to his social advocacy around housing, police harassment, and community infrastructure. On one day when I visited, Malik, just nineteen, led dozens of people in a street march that shut down traffic for several minutes in protest of a proposed condominium development's lack of plans for affordable housing. All four of the young employees I interviewed evince some commonalities in their visions of how the world works, in ways that I contend are shaped by, or at least commensurate with, the discourse, practices, and

reifications at BfC. On the other hand, the particular level and shapes of their own self-efficacy in that world are also quite personal.[46]

Wenger considers imagination to be a "mode" of belonging. More properly, we may consider imagination to be shaped by and to include belonging. Imagination is shaped by what we see (and *vice versa*), and what we see is partly a function of where and with whom we stand. The Spanish theologian Ignacio Ellacuria advocated doing theology "from the foot of the cross" in order to reflect upon and act within the reality of suffering in the world. The vantage point of his eventual home in El Salvador, among the victims of that suffering, for him, made all the difference in a shift to a theology of liberation.[47] Who we are, what we see, with whom we stand, and what we do are all intertwined.

Alignment and Imagination Inseparable

Participation in a CoP prompts negotiation of identity both in terms of how we view the world (imagination) and what Wenger calls *alignment*. For Wenger, alignment is about "to whom or what we submit."[48] Also, as they are so deeply

[46] Malik was also the only one of the four explicitly to discuss the treatment of black youth by police, noting that he and his friends are frequently stopped when out riding and accused of having a bike they could not afford. Since three interviewees mentioned riding around with friends and all four are racial minorities, and since BfC has hosted "Know Your Rights" trainings at its facility, I was struck by the absence of racial issues coming up in the discussion, even as socioeconomic status did come up frequently. I cannot imagine that race does not loom large in the imagination of my subjects, and strongly suspect that my position as a white man made the subject difficult to broach authentically and comfortably in an interview.
[47] Kevin F. Burke, *The Ground Beneath the Cross: The Theology of Ignacio Ellacuría* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2000).
[48] Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 192. I maintain his use of the term "alignment," but I prefer to add nuance to his definition because of the connotations of "submission." While certainly alignment with a community, values, or leader may indeed involve submission, it may also be characterized as finding a fit, or, like with identity more broadly, negotiating a fit. Especially in considering CoPs with low barriers to exit or entry, or even a relatively open society more broadly, alignment connotes more of an element of

grounded in identity, imagination and alignment appear to work in concert. This sense of alignment with a CoP as part of an identity and as formative of imagination came through in the narratives of several of my interview subjects as crucial. Generally reticent and laconic, when asked why he continued to volunteer and then work at BfC after he had met his original goal of earning a bike, Deron immediately exclaimed, "I really, like, really, I really like this place a lot." He described the ethos of the instructors as appealing to him; a sense of alignment and emotional affiliation came for him early.

Alignment and practices that shape the imagination tend to develop not in series but in tandem. Counter-consumerist imagination and alignment with a counter-consumerist CoP are difficult to separate. For Deron, that sense of alignment between himself and BfC, that sense of his identity as partly formed by and practiced through this CoP, deepened as he adopted practices and attitudes. Perhaps nothing symbolizes this fusion better than his comments about his bike helmet. "[B]efore I was working here, I wouldn't wear helmets, but when I came here, they'd make us wear helmets, so I got into a groove where I started carrying my helmet around with me in my bag, even when I didn't have a bike, it was crazy. It's just, it feels right on your head." While the helmet may have felt foreign at first,

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freedom than does submission alone. The language of subject-object theory is helpful to explaining my reservations. "Submission" for some carries a sense of being forced into submission, or of being subject to the power of that to whom or what we submit. It need not carry that meaning, but in a culture in which the term is used to denote ceding to superior power in mixed martial arts competition, it often does. What I want to convey is that submission may also be made willingly; our submission is object to us. This sense of willing compliance corresponds well to "alignment." For an overview of subject-object theory, see Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, *Immunity to Change: How to Overcome It and Unlock the Potential in Yourself and Your Organization* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2009), 22. I treat the theory also in Chapter Five. For Kegan and Lahey, developing greater cognitive complexity entails making object to ourselves that to which we were once subject. Alignment involves committing to the shared enterprise more than submitting to the authority of the group.

wearing it became naturalized for Deron (if not always for everyone). It is not a far stretch to think that Deron similarly became comfortably aligned with BfC's professed emphasis on cycling safety. In a sense, we might call the helmet rule a reification of a community value on safety.

Wenger's language of submission is not inaccurate -- Deron's begrudging submission to the helmet rule gave way to a willing compliance to the practice and the values behind it. However, the dynamic is better characterized as Deron's habitual practice as representative of his volitional embrace of safety for cyclists as a way to live out his affinity with embracing the value of lives and people often discarded in society. He embraced safe cycling because he already had, and continued to develop, a sense that his life, and the lives of the under-resourced, often black and brown youth that populate the programs at BfC, matter.

Daniel's process of alignment with BfC's values and practices was different from Deron's. What touched Daniel was his own participation in a summer program at BfC that took account of his learning disabilities, allowing him to take instruction in a style more suited to his style of learning. The beginning of an alignment was already there. The next summer, he worked as an instructor in that program, and he found that teaching students with disabilities appealed to him. "Seeing kids like that learn, and being able to do it, is very impressive. And it shows how . . . much potential they have." Daniel's own experience of learning at BfC drew him to stay on as an instructor. His continued experience of teaching in the program helped to develop a love of learning and a respect of people's potential that was already

present in him, and now part of his identity is in teaching. He has continued in practice to grow into alignment with BfC.

Sheila had yet a different experience of alignment. She was more insistent that the alignment she experienced with BfC was less a case of her "submission," and not even an evolutionary process, than it was a discovery of a match with values she already had.[49] Of the values and identity at BfC, she said, "It was already a part of me, it's just that it was reinforced being in an environment where my values were aligned, basically. So I think that's why I stuck with BfC, because it felt right. Like, natural." For religious educators or for anyone seeking to educate for prophetic imagination through CoPs, it is important to note that the paths to alignment are highly individualized. Learners must similarly be treated as individual persons.

Continuity and Discontinuity in CoPs and in the Surrounding Environment

On the side of the learner/participant in a CoP, learning comes in an ever-developing negotiation of identity, and meaning. Of course, the learning is not only on the side of the person in the CoP; there is a collective element to the learning. Regan includes this learning in her very definition of a CoP: "the collective learning involved in thriving as a community leads to practices that enhance the members' identity and furthers the group goals." The group's goals, practices, and focus of engagement are likely to change over time. Broadly speaking, this change takes place in three ways, all of which are likely to be at work simultaneously. One element of change is that while new members are socialized into the CoP, that

[49] We could say, "values to which she had already submitted," and it would be accurate. What is important is preserving the sense of chosen commitment rather than forced compliance.

socialization is not total; they do not give up their pasts, their other interests, their outside perspectives. As their participation grows, and especially if they replace older members in positions of influence, emphases are bound to shift in something of an organic evolution. There is a reciprocity at work here. As the newcomer learns to become a member of the CoP through practice, so too do members sustain, deepen, and change the values, goals, and emphases of the community, whether consciously or not.[50] The common repertoire of practices through which the group engages shifts; events from the collective memory fade and are replaced by newer ones. The CoP learns, and in Regan's ideal, learns in ways that enhance the group's goals.[51]

This evolutionary change does not only happen because of the incorporation of new members. The second element of change comes in the way the continued learning of ongoing members also brings some discontinuity to the CoP. Part of what accounts for the variation in learning among members of the CoP, and also that CoPs themselves are perpetually in development and renewal, is that, in the general scheme of a free society, nobody is simply and totally a member of one community of practice. The person is a member of various CoPs, and may participate in them to

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[50] Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*, 40–45.

[51] For Wenger, the CoP has something of a drive towards its own maintenance, like the self-sustenance that is characteristic of many bureaucracies. Regan shifts the focus to emphasize the importance of the need for constant renewal of the CoP in this way, but always with the group's goals as the criterion for assessing that change. While I do not agree that cultural reproduction is an automatic -- nor necessarily desirable -- directive for all CoPs, Regan's emphasis here is grounded in the prescriptive nature of her treatment. She is not simply describing how CoPs act; she is describing how CoPs ought to be constituted in parish life for the purpose of evangelization. Evangelization for her is thus the real criterion by which CoPs are to be judged, and around which their goals should be based. If they meet that criterion, then their enhancement is to be fostered. In this chapter, I describe CoPs. In the ensuing chapters, when I advocate the use of CoPs in a pedagogy that promotes prophetic imagination in the midst of a consumer society, then I share Regan's prescriptive goal. CoPs that meet the criterion of promoting the meaning and identity that foster personal and communal flourishing are the goal and, presuming that they meet this goal, are to be sustained and deepened with some degree of continuity.

varying degrees at varying times. Sheila has participated in BfC for years, in varying roles. In that time, she has also been a member of her family of origin, a student at various institutions, an athlete on a wrestling team, and, for a time, a resident in a house where the group of roommates sought to live in intentional community. Her learning in the CoP is conditioned by her multimembership.

The ecological model of developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner offers a useful schema to understand learning and development going on in CoPs.[52] He sees the learning/developing person in the center of an ecology, affected by the personal, social, and cultural factors with which she interacts, at varying levels of proximity. While his model also accounts for broader social factors as well the passage of time, here I am concerned especially with the systems that Bronfenbrenner sees as most proximal to the person. Bronfenbrenner identifies the "microsystem" as entailing the persons, groups, and institutions with which the person is in direct contact -- family, classes, friend groups, clubs, and so on. The CoPs in which she participates would certainly fit into this category.[53]

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[52] Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1981). Bronfenbrenner refines his understanding of the ecological system in Urie Bronfenbrenner, "The Ecology and Cognitive Development: Research Models and Fugitive Findings," in *Development in Context: Acting and Thinking in Specific Environments*, The Jean Piaget Symposium Series (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1993), 3–44.

[53] In order to create a handy glossary reference in this note, I take from Bronfenbrenner abbreviated definitions of the systems that make up the ecology of the developing person. His more extensive definitions thicken his understanding of the complexities of each system in the developmental process. A *microsystem* is "a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations in a given face-to-face setting." A *mesosystem* "comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person." More distally, the *exosystem* "comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings, at least one of which does not contain the developing person, but in which events occur that indirectly influence processes within the immediate setting in which the developing person lives." Finally, most broadly, the *macrosystem* is the whole of the cultural context, "the overarching pattern of micro- meso- and exosystems characteristic of a given culture, subculture, or other extended social structure." See Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development*.

What Bronfenbrenner also emphasizes, however, is that the CoPs (and others) in the person's microsystem may themselves be in relationship to one another. The sphere of these interactions constitutes what he calls the "mesosystem." Daniel's entry into the BfC program came at the urging of a schoolteacher of his who had previously been involved as a teacher in the program. Sheila's family's financial circumstances required that she find transportation to get to work, which brought her to BfC. Malik's participation in BfC has brought him into contact with many different agencies in the city, and he has participated in some of those as well. His negotiation of his identity involves his reconciliation of the practicing self he is across boundaries.[54]

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of development can be used to illustrate how the socialization that happens in a CoP is usually not going to be a totalizing socialization.[55] On the outer edges of the map is the "macrosystem," those broad cultural factors that are most distal from the subjects but constitute the context in which all of their experiences take place. For both Sheila and Malik, this macrosystem is the same, with national conversations and attitudes around race, religion, gender, and environmental sustainability setting an ideological context in which they live their lives. Nor can we ignore macroeconomic factors like the widening wealth gap, the shift from a manufacturing to a service economy, or the

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[54] Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 158–63.

[55] Sheila and Malik did not draw their own maps; I have drawn them myself, and so my own interpretations of their ecology may be different from their interpretations. Moreover, these ecological maps are not complete. There are other elements, in each "system," that could have been included. The point here is to illustrate how the differences in the ecologies of these two core participants in BfC are likely to foster different experiences, outlooks, and priorities that they bring into BfC. Note also that these maps represent only a snapshot at a single moment in time. What Bronfenbrenner calls the "chronosystem," the changes in this ecology over time, is of course crucial in the development of the elements of identity that the person brings to the CoP. The variability in these snapshots is magnified manifold, then, across the chronosystem.

globalization of trade. Even if this macrosystem is the same for each of them, their developmental experiences are shaped differently by it. As a Muslim, Malik is keenly attuned to the rhetoric of the "War on Terror" in a way that Sheila does not need to be. As a woman, Sheila is particularly cognizant of dynamics of power around gender roles.

As Malik and Sheila live in adjoining but different neighborhoods in the city, their "exosystems" -- the fields where processes that occur shape the proximal environments in which they each develop -- share many similarities but have some differences. For Sheila, neighborhood gentrification frames her experience, while Malik's neighborhood has higher concentrations of poverty, less racial diversity, and higher rates of violent crime. These differences in context influence the development of the identities and imaginations that each has brought to BfC.

It is in their mesosystems that the differences between Malik and Sheila become more pronounced, focused as they are on the granular differences in their personal experiences. While both participate in BfC, Sheila lives with her boyfriend and other roommates, and has few family members in the immediate area. Malik lives with his two parents and several siblings. He attends a local state university where he participates in several clubs and is also involved in another youth activist organization. Since different persons with such different experiences come together in the same CoP, that the CoP would be the locus of contention over practices, meanings, and goals is very much to be expected.

Figure 1. A Snapshot of Sheila's Ecological Map

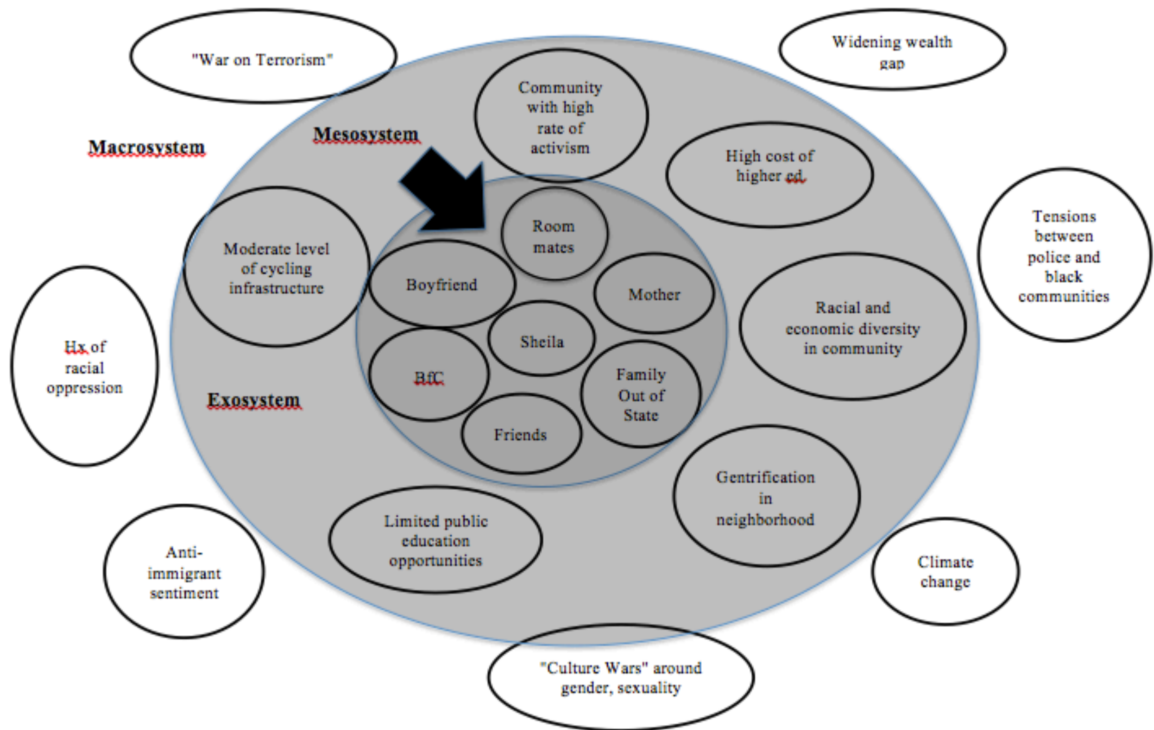
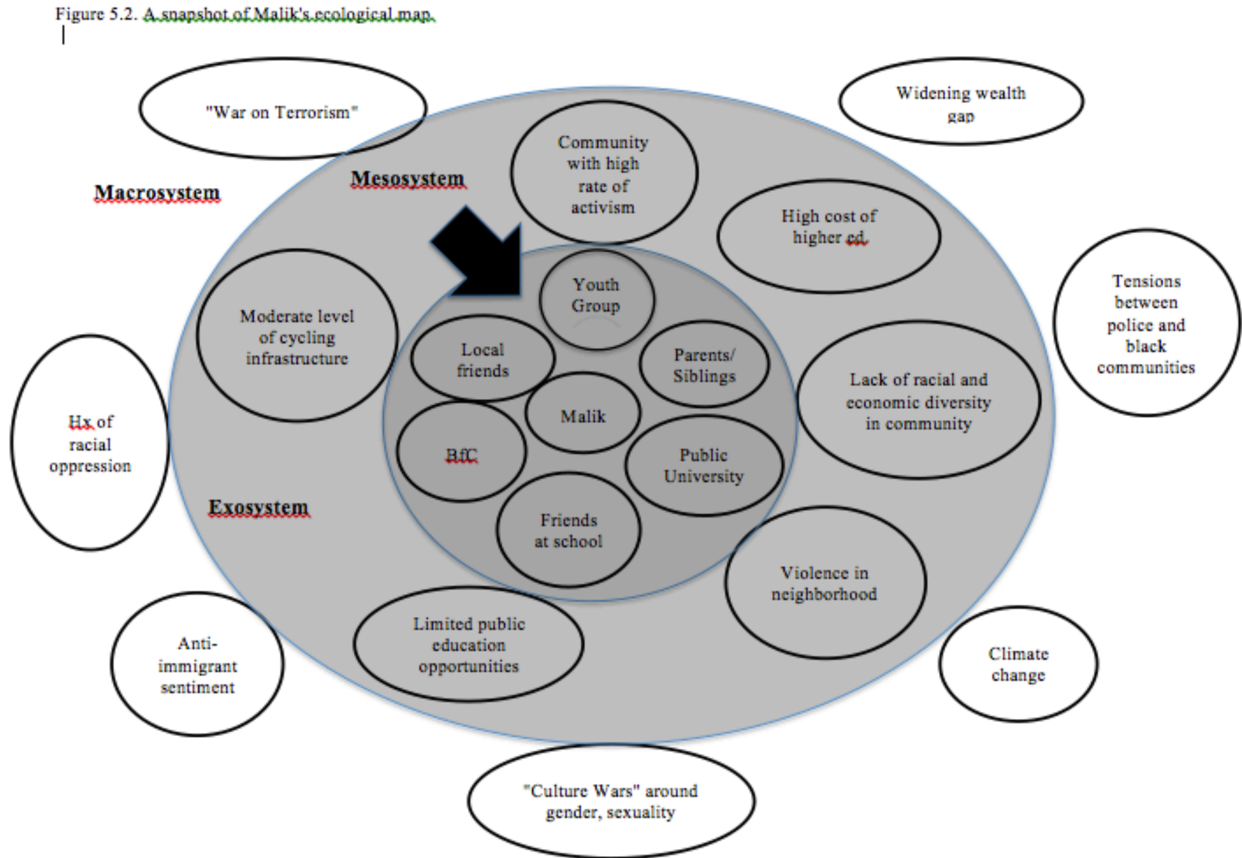


Figure 2: A Snapshot of Malik's Ecological Map



A third element of change in CoPs comes through reflective discontinuity. Sometimes the changes in a CoP are subtle, organic, and unconscious, as with the book club Regan mentions that evolves into a dessert club. However, a CoP may take a more conscious approach to the development of its goals and to the practices that support their fulfillment. Noticing a growing trend towards putting more time into desserts and less into discussing books, the members of the CoP may take time to reflect on their practices and to decide if they want to shift the goals of the club towards desserts or if they want to bring the practices of the club back in line with books. In such a case, they are aware of and exercise their agency.

When CoPs have goals that are shaped and guided by an overarching mission, reflection on those goals and the practices that support them is essential to the viability of the CoP. For instance, Regan sees adult Christian faith as an "evangelizing" faith.[56] She quotes Pope Paul VI's characterization of evangelization as "bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new."[57] Regan sums up an evangelizing faith as "rooted in our relationship with Jesus, nurtured within the Christian community, [and] ultimately in service to the world."[58] Communities of practice in the parish setting, if they are to be effective vehicles of religious education, should then compare their goals and practices to the standard of evangelization. Are those goals rooted in a relationship with Jesus, nurtured by the Christian community, and in service to the world? In the case of educating for the prophetic imagination in the midst of a consumer culture, the goals, practices, and pedagogy at work in a community of practice should be judged in light of the prophetic imagination of Jesus and his disciples. The Christian anthropology and social vision of solidarity, the common good, and an option for the poor, as discussed in Chapter Two, serve as touchstones of the prophetic imagination as it has been fruitfully thematized in recent times.

[56] Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*, 9–26.
[57] Pope Paul VI, "Evangelii Nuntiandi: Evangelization in the Modern World," in *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*, ed. David J O'Brien and Thomas A Shannon (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 18.
[58] Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*, 25.

Prophetic Imagination In and Beyond Communities of Practice

Were communities of practice simply isolated, self-contained entities, then the imagination operative in any particular community of practice, particularly an imagination that constituted a prophetic alternative to the dominant regime, would hardly matter. It would be the imagination of a sect, and unless that sect grew in size, the imagination would also remain small. However, CoPs not only can be loci for the practice of prophetic imagination, but they may also catalyze the spread of the prophetic imagination. I make three points. First, the notion of prophetic imagination must be reconciled with the sort of socialization that seems to be the crux of what is happening in most learning in CoPs. On the one hand, in the previous chapter I described the prophetic imagination as something that requires questioning the cultural given, denouncing and deconstructing it. On the other, learning by apprenticeship, becoming a tailor by being with and engaging with other tailors, hardly seems conducive to fostering transgressive ideas and practices. What can make it so, though, is if the CoP itself already has, collectively, the prophetic imagination. Recall that Brueggemann saw the prophets not as lone voices in the wilderness, but as representatives of communities, leading with a vision of what should be, but with a vision that they shared with those communities. If that collective imagination includes a critique of the mainstream culture as well as an alternative vision for how the world can be, a vision made manifest or at least pointed to in the practices of the community, then that community may be seen to have the prophetic imagination. One may be then tutored in, or socialized into, this CoP, and with it grasp that prophetic imagination.

Robert Kegan's understanding of orders of consciousness described earlier is helpful here. Kegan distinguishes stages in consciousness, or "ways of knowing." These orders of consciousness are not strictly cognitive, and instead these "ways of knowing" take enough into account that they accord quite well with "ways of being." His third order of consciousness involves understanding what the group knows, knowing as the group knows. It is akin to a process of socialization, and in fact it is essential. A community functions well if most people in the community are functioning at this third order of consciousness.[59] However, for the community to transcend the dominant culture's ideology, someone, somewhere along the line, needs to be able to think and act in ways that relativize the given cultural surround. They must be able to see it as constructed, and therefore both subject to evaluation or judgment and open to change. Moreover, they must understand themselves not simply as subject to that social surround, but as someone who co-constructs an identity in negotiation with the world. These traits -- a will to co-construction of one's own world and one's own identity -- characterize what in Kegan's typology is a fourth-order consciousness, the work of what he calls a "self-authoring mind."[60]

It is not only that a CoP with a collectively prophetic imagination needs to have in its history an impulse to transcend the imagination of the dominant regime of the time; if it is to remain prophetic, it must be able to continue to develop its

[59] For instance, see Kegan, *In over Our Heads*, 15–33.

[60] Kegan and Lahey, *Immunity to Change*, 51–54. Such ideas characterize the prescriptive work many developmental psychologists and activist pedagogues alike. Marcia Baxter-Magolda, for instance, points to self-authorship as the essential developmental task of early adulthood, for the sake of both the person and society. See Marcia B. Baxter Magolda and Sharon Daloz Parks, *Authoring Your Life : Developing an Internal Voice to Navigate Life's Challenges*, 1st ed.. (Sterling, VA: Stylus Pub, 2009). Critical pedagogues since Paulo Freire have advocated that education should reveal culture as socially constructed and should foster the learner's agency. See Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness.*, [1st American ed.]. (New York, Seabury Press, 1973).

imagination in ways that challenge and offer alternatives to the dominant consciousness, which is, of course, also always evolving. Religious educator Susan Singer's study of a progressively-minded Christian congregation is helpful in this matter.[61] The congregation's dedication to ministry with persons with HIV/AIDS from the early days of the disease's appearance and its extraordinarily open eucharistic policy certainly place the congregation in the position of an alternative to the mainstream Christian culture, both in its practices and its imagination.[62] She found that leaders of the community displayed the characteristics of self-authorship and an orientation to co-constructing the world, akin to the fourth-order consciousness in Kegan's typology. They are the types of people able to push prophetic imagination further.

Meanwhile, the bulk of the members of the congregation displayed the orientation towards understanding and meeting social norms more descriptive of Kegan's third-order of consciousness. In other words, they had been socialized well, but were not themselves prophetic leaders. They were, however, socialized into a community with a prophetic imagination, with a vision and practices alternative to the mainstream consciousness. Prophetic communities can thrive with leaders who push against the norms of the social imaginary (and, I would argue, the norms of the

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[61] Susan J. Singer, "'Under Construction:' Educational Strategies for Forming Adult Christian Religious Identity in the Context of Postmodern Pluralism" (Ph.D., Boston College, 2007), http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bc.edu/pqdtglobal/docview/304896893/abstract/1562A4CD00254D8CPQ/2.

[62] I prescind from an evaluation of whether their particular theologies and are to be judged as falling in the tradition of the Hebrew prophets and/or of the prophetic/Reign of God ministry of Jesus. Whether they are prophetic in that sense, what matters here is that they fit the prophetic dynamic of denouncing present cultural practice and fostering in practice a community with an alternative imagination.

prophetic community itself) as long as, as a community of practice, they socialize the bulk of the community into that collective prophetic imagination.

My second point about CoPs as loci of the prophetic imagination is that while the learning that occurs in a prophetic community of practice will for most be focused on their apprenticeship into the practices, imagination, and identity of the community, there should also be attention paid to the renewal that allows the community to be continuously prophetic, even as culture changes. Two routes to meet this concern stand out, and they are not mutually exclusive. The first is that, within the community of practice, education that fosters development into fourth-order consciousness must be included. The second is that through interaction with other communities of practice, through the multimembership of its participants, the prophetic CoP grapples with new ideas and practices. If such discontinuous thinking is to have a chance to provoke continued development and collective learning, then the healthy prophetic CoP must not marginalize newcomers with divergent ideas. The prophetic, self-authoring leaders must recognize the legitimacy of the peripheral participation, and most also facilitate trajectories that move newcomers from the periphery closer to the center. Sometimes facilitating such trajectories means that current leaders must move from central participation back to the periphery themselves. If, as mentioned above, continuity and discontinuity in a CoP can be consciously, reflectively fostered, then opportunities for reflection on the goals and practices must be effective and intentional.

Thirdly, just as the multimembership of its participants brings discontinuity to the CoP, so too are persons who are participants in multiple CoPs potential

carriers of the imagination of the CoP to the world beyond. It is often these people who are what Wenger calls "brokers," bringing practices, ideas, and objects across boundaries from one CoP to another.[63] The role of brokers points to an element of CoPs that has crucial ramifications for prophetic imagination. Just as the multimembership of participants promotes the development of the CoP and the renewal of its own imagination, so too does it allow for the spread of the practices and vision of a prophetic CoP into the ecology more broadly. A prophetic CoP that allows or encourages brokers to reach across boundaries and take ideas out over time has the potential to have an impact on a world much broader than its own community.

Malik talks about spreading the message of BfC at school and on the streets. For a time he also directed a youth-staffed "mobile bike shop" that would patrol the nearby bike path on weekends. At the same time, he is constantly interacting with people from other organizations, coordinating social actions of various kinds. He and other staff attended a "youth bicycle summit" where they met and exchanged ideas with young activists from all over the country. Deron notes that his mechanical skills allow him to help passersby in his daily travels, and that he also points them to the BfC workshop for things he cannot do on the road. Both are brokers in their willingness to engage people outside of BfC in the practices and imagination of BfC.

A CoP with the prophetic imagination that it believes worthy of spreading will do well to coach its members to bring that prophetic imagination, its ideals and practices, into other aspects of their lives, into other CoPs in which they participate.

[63] Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 109–10.

It may be that some people, like Malik, are natural salesmen. Others, though, may be untapped resources as brokers of the prophetic imagination. Think of the "non-joiners" who are resistant to fuller, more central participation in the CoP. They may be the very people who can most easily travel among CoPs, but also the least likely to become active apostles of the alternative vision unless they are taught and prodded to do so.

Educating in CoPs for Cultural Change

This understanding of the permeable nature of the boundaries between CoPs and the ever-emergent practices and imaginations that characterize those CoPs is a helpful analog to my underlying orientation towards culture as described in the first chapter. Clifford Geertz's well-known understanding of culture as a "system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men [*sic*] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life"[64] is a useful starting point for thinking about cultural transformation. However, such a monolithic view of culture is not entirely adequate. Culture is, as argued above, more plastic, more fractured, and more contentious than all of that.[65] Hence, what is described thickly and interpreted robustly is not simply culture, but precisely those fractures and points of contention and change in culture. Culture is both an outward expression of our collective values and a shaper of those values. As individuals we can look to transcend what is not life-giving in the culture.

[64] Geertz, "The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays," 89.
[65] For an argument that culture is less a static source of unity than it is an agreed-upon arena of conflict over meaning and practice, see Tanner, *Theories of Culture*.

Communally, we must seek to transform the culture into one that truly fosters liberation.

This orientation is a helpful one if what we are studying is what is believed and practiced, and how those beliefs and practices are taught, learned, and changed in the context of a community of practice that is its own norms of culture, within a larger society that has its own, even more fractious, culture. It is for this reason that a mission to educate disciples who can thrive despite -- and work to change -- a dominant culture of consumption can begin with educating in communities of prophetic practice and imagination.

The Jesus Movement as a Community of Practice

In drawing on the notion of communities of practice to illuminate educating in faith, Regan has not gone far afield. In fact, the learning that takes place in communities of practice can fairly be called a type of discipleship in ways that shed light on Jesus and his community of followers. Discipleship today derives from the traditions of the Church community, and is both continuous with and discontinuous with those traditions.[66]

Using the language that Lave and Wenger use to characterize CoPs, Jesus and his disciples were engaged in an enterprise of proclaiming the Reign of God. Notice that the enterprise seems to have been clearer for Jesus than for the disciples. Notice also that disciples had different levels and trajectories of engagement in that enterprise. The Twelve were closest, most intimately involved, as likely were Mary

[66] Tilley, *The Wisdom of Religious Commitment*, 29.

Magdalene and others. We read that thousands followed Jesus to seek healing and hear his wisdom, and some of them became engaged in the ministry, while many others were beneficiaries, hearers, or merely curious passers-by. It is easy to imagine Jesus inviting one after another to follow him, while Peter and Andrew skeptically wondered who would stay with the group for a few days if at all, and who might actually become companions for the long term. There were many different degrees and trajectories of participation or non-participation.

The "common repertoire" of Jesus and his disciples as a community of practice consists most significantly in the healing, table fellowship, and forgiveness that were the hallmarks of Jesus's practice, as described in the previous chapter. Gittins also adds prayer as another activity in which they seem to have engaged in common,[67] undoubtedly drawing on the rich heritage of Jewish tradition and adding their own accents and emphases. Parabolic stories, particular rituals of eating, and habits of sharing funds and expenses were also part of the repertoire shared by Jesus and his disciples.

We see the first disciples negotiating their identities in the practices of Jesus Reign of God ministry -- identities that developed in a time of apprenticeship. Peter is a paradigmatic example. Before engaging in the community of practice of Jesus's disciples, Peter could only tell Jesus, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8). As the trajectory of his participation in Jesus's campaign develops, he develops as confidant, spokesperson, denier, lover, and leader. How else his identity developed -- in his own eyes, in the eyes of others, in the practices in which he

[67] Gittins, *Encountering Jesus*.

engaged and his way of relating to those practices -- we can speculate, but we know that develop it must have. Not only did Peter promote Jesus's ministry or proclaiming and inaugurating the Reign of God, but also in his participation in it, in his doing, his learning, and his imagining, he became who he was.

The Community of Practice in Religious Education Today

Regan looks to the CoPs that already exist in parish life as potential loci for evangelization. It is not only intentional reflection groups that can be fora for religious education; the parish finance committee can also become a community of practice that centers on religious formation. Like Lave and Wenger, Regan wants to capitalize on the CoPs that already exist naturally. Beyond that goal, though, I want religious educators to consider how to create or expand CoPs that might not otherwise have developed and to foster in them a prophetic imagination that challenges the shortcomings of the dominant culture of consumption. Although Bikes for Change is a secular organization, as a community of practice that is characterized by an imagination that provides an alternative to the culture of consumption, it offers potential for insight into religious education for prophetic imagination in consumer culture.

Chapter 5: Learning to Read the Map Like a Cyclist:

Pedagogy for Cultivating the Prophetic Imagination Within CoPs

The first chapter of this dissertation describes the contours of consumer culture and points to its cultural hegemony. In the second chapter, I judge consumer culture to be inadequate because it fails to support the common good, exacerbates the susceptibilities of those who are most vulnerable, and generally fails to promote widespread human flourishing. In Chapter Three, I draw on Walter Brueggemann's concept of the prophetic imagination to propose that the Church's role in cultural transformation ought to involve a re-shaping of imagination. The fourth chapter cites communities of practices as venues of situated learning. In this chapter, I turn to look at how to foster the prophetic imagination through communities of practice.

At issue is how to cultivate communities of practice whose members identify with, align with, and enter into the imagination of a *vision*[1] of possibility grounded in a prophetic alternative to the given order. Beyond simply educating for a prophetic imagination within a community of practice, though, I am concerned with both the continued development of the imagination within the CoP and the propagation of that imagination outside of a single CoP. I point to two practices that put the real-world growth and development of the CoP in dialogue with the prophetic imagination in which it must stay grounded. I also propose three ways that communities of practice can be vehicles for the spread of their prophetic imagination outside of their own boundaries.

[1] "Vision" and "imagination" are distinct but related. Vision points to the future possibilities entailed in the imagination of what is and can be.

It is in the interplay of practices and reflection in communities of practice that an alternative culture can truly be imagined; for most of us, it is lived into as it is imagined. Psychologist Robert Kegan and educator Lisa Laskow Lahey put it thus: "The ancient question, 'Do changes of mind lead to changes of behavior or do changes in behavior lead to changes of mind?' is, in our view, a poorly constructed inquiry. The relationship is far more dialectical."[2]

By their nature, communities of practice ought to be evolving organisms. They respond to changing conditions and refresh themselves with participants' arcing in and out of various levels and types of participation. If CoPs are to foster the prophetic imagination, the standard against which their values, practices, and vision should be normed is the Reign of God. In particular, here I emphasize what we could best call the prophetic imagination of Jesus and (eventually) his disciples, as described in Chapter Three. While the exact details of Jesus's vision of the Reign of God are open to dispute, the following description of some of its key contours, as described in Chapter Two, have broad scholarly support. Hence, I propose that a CoP that educates with and for Jesus's prophetic imagination should emphasize the following seven principles that guide practice:

1. Name, analyze, and denounce what in the current cultural, social, political, economic, and institutional structures is inadequate for the flourishing of human persons.
2. Persevere in an abiding faith in God's providence.

[2] Kegan and Lahey, *Immunity to Change*, 140.

3. Willingly share scarce resources, not only material but also social, for the purposes of creating the conditions for broad inclusion.
4. Attend to the voices, experiences, and needs of the marginalized.
5. Uphold an ethic of integrity in the service of personal and social reconciliation.
6. Announce the Good News of this Reign of God not only in deed but also in word.
7. Invite others to participate in these practices and this orientation to life.

As examined in the previous chapter, communities of practice are "sustained gatherings of people whose practices are marked by mutual engagement around a shared enterprise with a common repertoire" and characterized by collective learning that happens, ideally, as members' identities are shaped in the process of advancing the group's goals.[3] As detailed in the previous chapter, Lave and Wenger suggest that the learning that happens can be designed around the mutual interaction among engagement, imagination, and alignment.[4] Engagement with the practices of the community, entering into its imagination and worldview, and adopting the values and stances of the CoP are powerfully formative of identity. With the above seven principles as the horizon against which CoPs are to be cultivated for the fostering of the prophetic imagination, I turn more specifically to the ways identity as persons/communities with a prophetic orientation can be tended to through *engagement in, imagination through, and alignment with a CoP.*

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[3] Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*, 30.
[4] Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*.

Engagement

Engagement involves, ideally, attraction, invitation, mentoring, and shared experience. Without some level of engagement in the CoP, the process of socialization into the community and its imagination will not occur. If nobody is attracted to become and stay involved, the CoP will not last, never mind having a significant effect. In their exploration of best practices for effective CoPs, Wenger and his colleagues Richard McDermott and William Snyder state, "Because communities of practice are voluntary, what makes them successful over time is their ability to generate enough excitement, relevance, and value to attract and engage members."[5]

There must be, then, both initially and in the longer term, something of value for participants in the CoP. As with Bikes for Change, the initial draw may not be what sustains engagement. Youth may be attracted by the promise of a free bike; parents may be attracted by the knowledge that their children are in a safe place and supervised after school when participating in the program. Nonetheless, even if the initial draw to a CoP is not in immediate alignment with its practices, vision, and values, the practices and benefits of the initial engagement must be consistent with the prophetic imagination. For instance, attracting people to a community organization with desserts and an hour of free childcare is unlikely to be antithetical to the mission and vision of the CoP. However, offering sugary desserts with lots of

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[5] Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, *Cultivating Communities of Practice*, 50. Although Wenger's earlier work on situated learning entailed a somewhat broader vision of communities of practice than he and his colleagues have in mind in this work, the point they make here still stands. In this work, Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder more or less confine themselves to how corporations can and should establish and then catalyze the work of CoPs under their auspices. This narrower vision of CoPs ignores the way they are often less formalized in structure and practice in the real world -- and not necessarily under any sort of corporate auspices.

artificial ingredients to engage people in a community that claims to be invested in healthy, natural nutrition would be problematic.

One particularly crucial aspect of design in CoPs if they are to foster the prophetic imagination is to allow for -- indeed, to invite -- different types and levels of participation, participation that evolves over the arc of a membership. Wenger and his associates offer the especially apt metaphor that successful CoPs "build benches" for those who seem to be on the sidelines. Rather than trying to force these people into the game, this practice allows them to watch and then enter at their own level and pace.[6]

Allowing for, indeed, designing for, incrementalism is sensible, especially when the practices and imagination of the CoP are truly countercultural -- which is how many will experience a CoP grounded in the prophetic imagination. Mere knowledge is rarely enough to change behavior, and without changes in practice, deep-seated changes in imagination are hard to come by. Part of what is needed is simply regular exposure to the new practices and ideas.[7]

[6] Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, *Cultivating Communities of Practice*.
[7] See Rebeca F. Rivera, “Living Our Values, Living Our Hope: Building Sustainable Lifestyles in Seattle Intentional Communities” (Ph.D., University of Washington, 2012), 162–74, http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bc.edu/pqdtft/docview/1151137612/abstract/59A1F79EF66423FPQ/9?accountid=9673. She makes this point in her empirical study of intentional communities. It may seem obvious, but should not be taken for granted, that such regular exposure is necessary in normalizing the ideas and practices that are countercultural. The prophetic imagination inherently runs counter to the dominant cultural regime.

Alignment

This discussion of engagement in the CoP brings up the dual tasks of educating for the prophetic imagination in CoPs: socializing people into alignment with its values, practices, and vision, and then also catalyzing for some the transformation into creative agents of those values and practices. Most people will be socialized into the values and practices of the community, which is the focus of this section on alignment. I return later to the transformative task of catalyzing self-authorship when I examine how the CoP's imagination can evolve prophetically. If we are to return to the schema of Kegan and Lahey, most people will be brought into the prophetic imagination by adapting to the norms of the prophetic community.[8] Socialization into the values and imagination of the CoP is its primary task.

For sociologist Kristina Nelani Kahl, in her study of "simple livers," many received information about ways to live simply through the organization and their community of practice, but most of their orientation to such a lifestyle, she found, was grounded in their families of origin, in their upbringing.[9] This does not mean, of course, that socialization cannot happen later -- although it is likely more effective with younger people than with adults. Anthropologist Rebeca F. Rivera highlights the centrality of socialization to a successful CoP with her study of intentional communities devoted to "sustainable living." In her study, lifestyle changes truly "stuck" in these communities. What seemed to distinguish the successful

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[8] Kegan and Lahey, *Immunity to Change*, 17. The socialized mind is what Kegan in earlier work equates to a "third-order way of knowing." See Kegan, *In over Our Heads*.

[9] Kristina Noelani Kahl, "The Crisis of Social Change for Simple Livers: How a Faith-Based Organization and Its Members Affect the Voluntary Simplicity Movement" (Ph.D., University of Colorado at Boulder, 2013), 52–76, http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bc.edu/pqdtft/docview/1491383618/abstract/F2A84717852C45D6PQ/34?accountid=9673.

communities from the unsuccessful ones was that those that succeeded had a critical mass of adults committed to the values and practices of voluntary simplicity. With time and exposure, others who encountered this critical mass were more likely to adopt the changes themselves.[10] Alignment came with repeated practice.

Rivera describes this process by adapting French sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu's understanding of *cultural capital*. For Bourdieu, cultural capital is closely attached to levels of formal education. Those with high levels of cultural capital tend also to develop a certain *habitus*, a naturalized way of being, that reinforces the socioeconomic divisions that already exist. For instance, for Bourdieu, being accepted into a certain level of society may involve not only purchasing the right music, but also being able to talk about it with a certain natural fluency.[11]

This understanding of *habitus* need not be restricted to Bourdieu's emphasis on class distinctions. Especially in a society with fragmentation of groups, interests, and skills, *habitus* can serve as an indicator of belonging in all sorts of subcultures. Anyone who has worked with (or parented) youth can relate to attempting to use

[10] Rivera, "Living Our Values, Living Our Hope," 17. As evidence of widespread adoption of lifestyle changes, Rivera cites an eighty percent reduction in water use, gasoline use, and energy consumption in the CoPs in question. It must be admitted that this statistic does not necessarily account for the consumption habits of people who did not stay involved in these CoPs. We do not know from her research if their habits were affected in the short or long term by their sojourns in the community. A possible confounding factor, then, is that those who successfully adopted the changes in lifestyle were those who were already predisposed to this lifestyle, who had already been socialized into it to some extent in earlier life. She measured the aggregate change, not necessarily the longitudinal change of individuals. Anecdotally, however, her study does suggest that real changes in practice occur over the long term for individuals who participate in the CoP.

[11] See Bourdieu, *Distinction*. See also Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Bourdieu's use of the term *habitus* has affinities with its use in classical and neoclassical sources. In Christian history, virtue ethics draws heavily on the thirteenth-century theological giant Thomas Aquinas, for whom the *habitus* of repeated action becomes part of the actor's way of being, as disposition. While the stakes for Bourdieu may be lower, the notion of repeated action as having the power to become "second nature" is similar. From a pedagogical perspective, also, these two approaches share the notion that habit developed while young is likely to be more easily naturalized than that acquired at an older age. For a brief explanation of Thomas Aquinas' use of *habitus*, see Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (London: V. Gollancz, 1957), 156–58.

contemporary slang, only to use it just incorrectly enough to be marked as an obvious outsider. The way I talk about beer, clip into a pair of bike pedals, or carry myself when wearing a sport coat can all mark me as a "real" member of a group or not.

When Rivera uses Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, she uses it, appropriately, with a broader understanding than he does of what ought to be included, in such a way that *habitus* is even more closely tied to knowledge. For her, cultural capital is about the naturalness of a skill.[12] I go a step further. Cultural capital includes all kinds of practical knowledge and skills that are valued in a particular culture or sub-culture. My niece's facility with Star Wars trivia may not have the value of cultural capital in some circles, but has tremendous currency in others. My cousin's abiding interest in, and facility with, composting soil is a skill itself, but also the naturalness with which he deploys it marks his place in a culture and in a community of practice. This process of acquiring not only practices and skills but also a facility and "naturalness" with these skills is the very process of inculturation into a community of practice.

In Chapter Four, I note the central role that mentors play in engaging new members of a CoP. No factor is more important to engaging participants in the life of the community than are the relationships among community members.[13] As we saw with BfC, it was an attraction to established members that helped new members engage more deeply in the work of the community. These mentors, as they invite and tutor new participants into the identity and imagination of the CoP, can do so

[12] Rivera, "Living Our Values, Living Our Hope," 162–70.
[13] Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, *Cultivating Communities of Practice*, 58–59.

effectively only if they are also, with due regard for human fallibility, exemplars of such values and vision. To the extent that the process of socialization into and alignment with the values and vision of the CoP is connected to the attractiveness of significant figures in the community, to that same extent then must those figures truly be practitioners of the CoP's values and carriers of its vision. Part of trying to spread the Reign of God is trying to live the Reign of God. When nineteen-year-old Malik recounts the influence of BfC's staff members in his life, part what he describes is their taking the time to help him with the schoolwork with which he was struggling. What mattered most in his absorption of the ethic of BfC was that the central participants he encountered were persons of generosity and caring who valued him as a whole person.

Imagination

Note that the educational value of this engagement in BfC was enhanced by the central participants' active outreach to and mentoring of new members. This mentoring was especially crucial in helping the newer members not only move into more central levels and modes of participation but also in expanding their understandings of what the CoP was about beyond bicycles and into the social and political values affiliated with sustainability and community empowerment. Daniel, a nineteen-year-old Dominican man we met in the previous chapter, spoke to the way this dynamic occurred in the expansion of his own imagination through contact with mentors at BfC:

> I'm pretty sure if it wasn't for this organization I wouldn't know what's happening in the community, and like, learn about gentrification and stuff.

> This organization spans out and talks to people, meet other organizations, meet new people, and just, like, I'd never done that with my life. I was always just isolated in my projects, never wanted to do anything besides hang out with my own friends. But this place has helped me network, outreach to people and learn new things.

For some, especially younger, members of the CoP, socialization into the community's practices and ways of thinking and being are sufficient. However, when what is required is not so much socialization as re-socialization, or even transformation, the call to engagement must broaden. It must include helping the learner not only to understand new things but also to understand in new ways. Part of the reason that mere knowledge does not promote, generally, lasting behavioral change is that some deep-seated needs have in the past been fulfilled by the old behavior. As long as we conceive of the old and new behaviors in conflict over the fulfilling of different needs, it is, say Kegan and Lahey when quoting a client, as if we have "one foot on the gas and one on the brake."[14] It is as CoP members are invited into deeper and deeper participation that they identify more and more deeply as the kinds of people who think and act with the CoP. However, when members are caught between competing values, with one foot on the gas and one on the brake, the move from conflicting practices to some sense of consistency in practice and identity requires a change in imagination. Here we must think beyond education as socialization into the prophetic imagination and instead open to the idea of education as facilitating the transformation into ways of knowing that allow for the authoring of prophetic imagination. This self-authoring is especially important for those who will be active leaders in the CoP.

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[14] Kegan and Lahey, *Immunity to Change*, 39.

Kegan and Lahey recommend consciously identifying the competing interests that interfere with the adoption of new practices, which is often at the heart of resistance to the prophetic imagination. It is in this identification that the conflict can be reframed. Many of their examples come from their work as management consultants, but can apply to any CoP. For instance, one CEO stated a desire to devote more of his time and energy to "big picture" thinking, but his need to feel necessary in every facet of the operation kept him busy with the day-to-day reporting of his managers. Only when he identified that this need on his part was preventing him from reaching his larger goal was he able to put his competing needs into relationship with each other and prioritize them in a way that made him more effective.[15]

Kegan and Lahey designate the third-order "socialized mind" as shaped by the expectations of the environment; the fourth-order "self-authoring mind" as able to critique the social expectations and free itself, somewhat, from its dependence on them; and the fifth-order "self-transforming mind" as able to identify, reflect on, and critique even the sources and limits of its own sense of personal authority. Aside from socialization into the values and practices of the CoP, then, a truly prophetic community is going to need to provide for the potential for transformation, for persons in the community to develop what Kegan and Lahey call a self-authoring mind, who see themselves not merely as participants in the community's culture

[15] Kegan and Lahey, *Immunity to Change*, 31-39.

and its values but also as co-creators of it and of their own identities as participants.[16]

When it comes to the prophetic imagination, a similar dynamic can be essential to overcoming resistance to it. Take, for example, the quality of communal reconciliation noted in Chapter Three as an element of Jesus's prophetic imagination. As individuals, we are all undoubtedly familiar with the way a desire to forgive cannot be made effective unless and until we have recognized a competing desire to nurse the sense of being wronged and execute justifiable revenge. It is only when we realize, not just intellectually but with our whole beings, that what we desire is a chance at peace, at meaning, or at a better future that we can truly move to forgive. It is only then that forgiveness ceases to become a zero-sum conflict between our competing desires and instead becomes the fruit of our being able to see our goals as creators of our reality beyond the grasp of the desire that limits us.

What is transformative in this example can be expressed in the concept of subject/object relations introduced earlier. At first, we are subject to the competing desires. We do not have a desire for revenge so much as it has us, clenches us somewhat in its thrall. It is only when we can identify that desire, recognize its grip on us, and recognize the way that grip limits us that we can work to hold that desire at a distance. Instead of being consumed by it, we can recognize, observe it, but also hold it as object to us. We can choose what to do with it and how to think about it. I

[16] Kegan and Lahey, *Immunity to Change*, 16–20. I add the caveat that lived reality of persons with these three "orders of mind" is more complex than a simply typology would indicate. We are never in one single order of mind all of the time in all aspects of our lives. We are constantly in transition, and may think differently in different contexts. The orders themselves, also, while they are useful descriptively and, say Kegan and Lahey, describe characteristics where people developmentally often reach a sort of a plateau, are not completely distinct and mutually exclusive realities.

propose, then, that often overcoming the immunity to change involves making the competing need object to us rather than being subject to it.[17]

Jesus, grounded in his understanding of God's Reign, sees reconciliation as a communal project, as described above in Chapter Three. A shift in our way of thinking can help us move into that communal mindset and into Jesus's prophetic imagination. For instance, consider a response to something like the raft of housing foreclosures that might sweep through a neighborhood when a real estate market bubble bursts or labor markets change for the worse.[18] When people are grasped by a desire to accumulate, and perhaps by a sense of fairness as procedural, then a hope that people can keep their homes runs up against a desire to feel that the rules are fair. The desire to see a whole community housed may conflict with a notion that people should be rewarded for working hard and making smart decisions. The desire to accumulate, fueled as it often is by a fear of losing one's own financial security, results in a belief that subjects of foreclosure ought to pay the price for their overspending and, for those who happen to be in a position to enter the housing market or expand their real estate holdings as foreclosures drive prices down, that they should get a piece of the dream.

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[17] For a brief and similar description of subject-object relations, see Ibid., 22. They put it thus: "The complexity of a mindset is a function of the way it distinguishes the thoughts and feelings we have (i.e., can look at, can take as *object*) from the thoughts and feelings that "have us" (i.e., we are run by them, are *subject* to them).

[18] I choose this example because it echoes the economic reality of first-century Galilee, as described in Chapter Three. Many peasants slipped from subsistence into annual debt and eventually into landlessness, while those with the economic means were able then to accumulate land. The rich-poor gap widened. Jesus's exhortations to lend expecting nothing in return were, argues Richard Horsley, about helping the fabric of the community remain intact during hard times rather than tearing it apart into swatches of rich and poor, winners and losers. Jesus essentially saw a foreclosure crisis. See Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*, 1st Fortress Press ed (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1993), especially pages 246-255.

However, the goals of community strength and long-term flourishing may overcome the dualistic way of thinking that blocks the creativity of the prophetic imagination. Housing need no longer be a zero-sum game, where someone must lose for another to win. It is only when we can move beyond our desires for procedural fairness and self-congratulation/justification that we can envision a system where greater economic equity with minimum standards of housing for all might be what we really want. When we are no longer subject to our desires and fears, but instead can hold them as object, that we can move beyond them.

Keeping the Imagination Prophetic

Because CoPs change and evolve, starting with the prophetic imagination does not mean that the prophetic imagination will be sustained. As members' participation waxes and wanes, as new leaders emerge, and as the circumstances of the context in which the CoP operates change, new practices and new mindsets must emerge. These new practices do not automatically reflect and sustain the prophetic imagination; this imagination must continually be cultivated intentionally.

I propose two interrelated elements that sustain and develop the prophetic imagination of a CoP. First, members, especially leaders, must engage in regular reflection on the mission, values, practices, and vision of the CoP as it continues to emerge. In particular, this reflection must place the CoP's practices in mutually critical correlation with Jesus's prophetic imagination as reflective of his

understanding of God's Reign.[19] The evolution of a prophetically-imaginative CoP is accountable to this standard, this norm. Secondly, and related, the CoP's values and imagination must continually and consciously be symbolized in the practices and artifacts that reify them.

One good example of the conscious and intentional need to keep an imagination prophetic occurred during my observation at BfC. The gentrification of the area in which the organization is located has forced increasing numbers of the youth in the program to move out of the neighborhood with their families. Leadership of BfC engaged in reflection on whether this development meant that they ought to become leaders in direct action aimed at promoting affordable housing in the neighborhood. In their case, they measured this shift in practice against their mission to make the bicycle a "vehicle of social change." They revisited both their mission and their focal practices. The point here is not whether they shifted their practices in this direction -- in fact, that shift continues to be a major point of contention among staff and board members. The point is that they engaged in this reflection as a regular part of their life as a CoP, continually re-evaluating what it meant to be who they are. A CoP with a prophetic imagination needs some people, especially its leaders, to be ready, willing, and able to engage in this sort of

[19] A note on method is in order here. The notion not only that practice should derive from theory but that in fact theory and practice can and must influence one another, must be mutually critically correlative, is essentially to the theological methodology named by systematician David Tracy. David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988). Other thinkers have changed Tracy's starting point, prioritizing reflective practice and practical reflection -- praxis -- and insisting that they precede theory in this correlation. For the use of such method in religious education, Thomas Groome's Shared Christian Praxis is the prime example. See Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Praxis* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991). For a parallel approach to practical theology, see Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

evaluation, with the Reign of God as the ruler by which their practices and values should be measured.

Organizational leaders, as we saw above in Susan Singer's research into a progressively-oriented West Coast congregation, are those who must be able to see themselves as authors not only of their own values but also as co-creators of the organizations they lead and the cultures in which they act.[20] So, such CoPs must, first, provide an environment in which emerging leaders can be "coached" into this self-authoring mindset, so that they can understand their own needs and desires as contingent, as object to them. Analogously, then, as organizational leaders, they must be able to see the surrounding culture and even the specific practices as contingent. Individually and collectively, leaders of a prophetically-imaginative CoP must be brought into critical, conscious reflection on the community, culture, and themselves.

Adult educator Edward Taylor and archivist Marilyn McKinley Parrish offer another particularly salient example of this practice of reflection and self-reflection as crucial to the prophetic identity of both persons and community: that of the Catholic Worker movement.[21] They first propose that the Catholic Worker

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[20] Singer, ""Under Construction."

[21] Marilyn McKinley Parrish and Edward W. Taylor, "Seeking Authenticity: Women and Learning in the Catholic Worker Movement," *Adult Education Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (May 2007): 221–47. The Catholic Worker movement spans dozens of loosely-affiliated, at least ideologically affiliated, organizations. Its origins, and perhaps still its center of mass, trace to the New York Catholic Worker, founded in the early 1930s by Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day. It is a particularly salient example for three reasons. First, the Catholic Worker ideology is grounded in the deep personalism of Peter Maurin, a personalism that accords well with the Christian personalist anthropology that I espouse in this work. Secondly both the ideology and typical practices of Catholic Worker groups involve opposition to consumerism. Finally, the Catholic Worker movement, in its spreading within and among groups, in many ways fits the model of the spreading of a prophetic imagination through communities of practice. While there are many works on both the Catholic Worker and its founders, a particularly fine history of the movement's early years is Mel Piehl, *Breaking Bread: The Catholic Worker and the Origin of Christian Radicalism in America* (Philadelphia:

movement consisted of a newspaper, but quickly modify that statement. Instead, they identify the movement in the practices, values, and imagination of its members. In particular, they studied women in the movement in its first two decades. With the Catholic Worker's writings, "clarification of thought" meetings, and their own personal reflection, these women came to develop a faith that was chosen, of which they were co-constructors. Moreover, many of these women took over leadership roles in various aspects of the movement or elsewhere in their communities. The mutuality of their development with the development of the movement itself was summed up by one woman, who commented simply, "I don't know if it shaped me or I shaped it. I think we were both shaped."[22]

The second crucial element in sustaining and cultivating the prophetic imagination of a CoP and its members comes down to the conscious evolution of the reification of its values.[23] Do the new practices promote reconciliation? Do the posters on the walls reflect and promote the voices of the marginalized? Do the accepted norms of meetings, formally or informally, belie a basic trust in the adequacy of God's providence in such a way that all are included in the deployment

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Temple University Press, 1982). The other indispensible and underrated resource for understanding the movement's early days and the ideology and practices integral to it is Day, *Loaves and Fishes*.

[22] Parrish and Taylor, "Seeking Authenticity: Women and Learning in the Catholic Worker Movement," 241.

[23] I continue to use "reification" as used by Wenger. Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 57–62. He sees reification as a concretization of values in practices, procedures, and objects. It does not hold for him the connotations of stultification or rigidity that it may hold in other contexts, especially with a Marxist orientation. Reifications may be lively symbols as much as they can be dead ones. Ironically, in some literature, reification carries the meaning of giving reality to something, often for the purpose of selling it. See Timothy Bewes, *Reification, Or, The Anxiety of Late Capitalism* (London ; New York: Verso, 2002). In this sense, reification carries the negative connotations that sometimes attach to "commodification" when what is being sold is really no-thing, or, at best, what the postmodern French sociologist and philosopher Jean Baudrillard calls a simulacra, a copy for which there is no original, when the simulation becomes itself the thing. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994). Wenger does not load the term with these connotations and, following his usage, neither do I.

of power? It is in these reifications that the values and vision of the CoP are communicated not only to participants of varying degrees but also to outside observers. If the prophetic community must announce God's Reign, it must do so by living into it in its private and public practices and living "in" it by putting it on the walls, sometimes literally.

The use of signage, art, architecture, and visible space can be particularly powerful. Years ago, I lived in a Catholic Worker community. At the base of the main stairway was a print of the Fritz Eichenberg woodcut, "Christ of the Breadlines," in which Jesus is depicted among a downtrodden and anonymous group of men in line at a soup kitchen. Because feeding the hungry is a main ministry for many Catholic Worker communities, this woodcut, which first appeared in *The Catholic Worker* in 1950, has achieved something of an iconic status. The image was hard to ignore and, in my personal experience, certainly influential on my imagination.[24]

The communicative power of space also functioned *ad extra*, allowing the Catholic Worker community to make its values and practices visible to the neighborhood. For instance, Catholic Worker communities often work with persons who are marginalized in society because of mental illness, substance addiction, and undocumented immigrant status. When this particular house needed to have a wheelchair ramp built, the central participants in the community decided to add at that time a small porch. After some discussion, they decided to add the ramp and porch not in the rear but in the front of the building. Residents who wanted to could be visible to passersby. The neighbors knew that some persons with obvious mental

[24] Fritz Eichenberg, *Christ of the Breadlines*, Woodcut, 1950.

illnesses were welcomed in the house, part of the CoP's attempt to de-stigmatize mental illness.

Leveraging the CoP for Broader Imaginative Change

This communication of values and vision to outside observers is crucial if the prophetic imagination of a CoP is to gain broader traction so as to be a force for transformation in a culture. However prophetically a CoP may act and imagine, if it is to become more than just a sect or a club, it must look for ways to spread its vision. It is here that I emphasize three elements to which a CoP ought to attend in order to help spread its prophetic imagination beyond the boundaries of its own community: its role in the wider constellation of CoPs, cultivating the value of brokers, and the life-enhancement their own practices and imagination bring to those who adopt or adapt them.

First, in Chapter Four I made the point that CoPs do not exist in isolation, but are part of a broader environment including other CoPs. The way members and leaders of a CoP position themselves in this environment, the way they cultivate relationships, the way they place themselves in and develop constellations of CoPs has much to do with how influential they may become in the spread of their practices and vision. This placement can include cultivating and leveraging geographical as well as ideological relationships. Sociologist Robert Wengronowitz offers a description of Chicago's Experimental Station, a location on the city's South Side that houses a variety of organizations and activities whose leadership designed the space to meet the "social and ecological need" of the regeneration of a public

space.[25] The Experimental Station houses Blackstone Bicycle Works, an organization quite similar to BfC. The location also offers cooking classes, provides space for a seasonal farmers' market, and is a venue for other cultural events. Wengronowitz emphasizes the rich interactions and collaborations among the various CoPs at this venue, an interchange of ideas, practices, people, and values. People who have found a space of belonging and a sense of efficacy in the bike shop, for instance, bring the values and skills they have learned there into creating new events, classes, and sometimes social actions. In such an environment, a CoP can and must cultivate connections with others who share their physical as well as ideological space.

Moreover, to capitalize not only on physical proximity but also on the fluidity with which persons may circulate among CoPs in their own lives, a CoP educating for the spread of the prophetic imagination ought to pay particular attention to the role of brokers. In Chapter Four, I wrote about Malik, whose work with BfC brought him into contact with other organizations. Outgoing by nature,[26] Malik mentioned that he is often promoting the work and vision of BfC at school, in his formal and informal meetings with people from other community-based organizations, and in his social life. As someone whose personal ecology includes involvement in many

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[25] Robert Wengronowitz, "Sustainable Pleasure and Pleasurable Sustainability at Chicago's Experimental Station," in *Sustainable Lifestyles and the Quest for Plenitude Case Studies of the New Economy.*, ed. Juliet B. Schor and Craig J. Thompson (New Haven: Yale Univ Press, 2014), 178.

[26] In Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 2002), Gladwell argues for the decisive different individuals can make in social movements. Some people are, by nature, connectors. Gladwell sees Paul Revere playing this crucial role in the movement that culminated in the American Revolution. If Gladwell is correct about the importance of these connectors, then educating for a prophetic imagination should involve identifying, deploying, and training these connectors. I disagree with Gladwell's implication that certain people are just natural connectors. I contend that people can become connectors, can learn the skills of connection. Based on his later writing, Gladwell himself would presumably agree with the possibility of people developing expertise as connectors through education and practice. See Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success*, Reprint (New York, NY: Back Bay Books, 2011).

venues, Malik has the potential to be an agent for the spread of the imagination of BfC.

The role of brokers is a second element in the spread of the prophetic imagination beyond community boundaries. I speculate that leveraging the role of brokers is effective in spreading a CoP's prophetic imagination in two ways: through active participants whose trajectory of participation takes them into other CoPs, and through reluctant joiners. Malik is a perfect example of the first. As a youth participant in the Earn-a-Bike program, a staff member working with youth in that program, and then as a youth organizer around BfC's political actions, Malik's trajectory of participation traced an arc right through the center of BfC. As he entered college, Malik's participation at BfC became more peripheral, a trend that accelerated when his family had to move to a different community as a result of significant rent increases in his gentrifying neighborhood. Now infrequently present at BfC, as the kind of person who easily becomes deeply involved in CoPs, if Malik brings his values and imagination with him into the new CoPs of which he becomes a part, his participation in those CoPs helps to make that prophetic imagination available to them. Who he has become as an active participant at BfC is, to some extent, the identity he brings to his college photography program and to the community housing organization in his new city of residence. Because his imagination is so integral to his identity, when his identity helps to shape these other CoPs, the prophetic imagination has spread.[27]

[27] Jane Regan notes that it is all too easy to focus on what the newcomer learns when moving into a CoP and thereby to lose a sense of the reciprocity of that learning. The ways in which the newcomer influences the CoP to change is an essential part of the arc of participation and the learning that occurs. See Regan,

The potential role of reluctant joiners as brokers is more speculative on my part. Wenger's work emphasizes participation and membership, and identity is deeply tied to legitimate participation in the group. However, deeply central, visible participation is not the only way for learners to align with the imagination of a CoP. It is important that observers recognize the potential role of non-joiners. For instance, practical theologian Tom Beaudoin writes of Generation X that they tend to be much more reluctant than other generations to affiliate with organizations -- including religious organizations.[28] While in some ways Millennials have continued this trend of reluctance to join formal organizations -- see, for instance, the tremendous number of Millennials who identify themselves as "nones" when it comes to religious affiliation[29] -- there are also ways in which many members of that generation are inveterate joiners. Facebook would not have become what it did without the huge numbers of Millennial youth and young adults who quickly adopted it as a platform for their social interactions.

My point is that within but also across generations, there are people who affiliate more loosely with organizations than others do, even when they identify strongly with the values and vision of that organization. Some people are not "joiners." Not only must we as educators make allowances for this fact, but we ought to see such people as potentially rich assets as brokers. If I am more comfortable at the boundaries of CoPs than at their centers, I am well-placed to broker ideas,

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Where Two or Three Are Gathered, 42–43.Whether and how those changes are adaptive in redefining and furthering the goals of the CoP and its members is a matter of constant concern.

[28] Tom Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith : The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998).

[29] Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, "'Nones' on the Rise" (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, October 9, 2012), http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/.

values, and imagination across those boundaries. What would seem to be crucial, then, for the spread of the prophetic imagination, is that even these peripheral joiners be encouraged to be articulate about the imagination, visible in their practices, and powerful in their alignment with the values of the prophetically-oriented CoP. This sharing may not come naturally for these non-joiners, but if they can be coached into sharing -- especially with those whose arcs of participation take them more rapidly into the center of the CoP -- then these peripheral joiners too can be crucial agents of the spread of the prophetic imagination across and beyond a community of practice. CoPs must attend to this dynamic intentionally, and must consider ways to coach these non-joiners, these boundary-dwellers, to become such agents.[30]

Of course, these boundary-dwellers serve another crucial role, as potential sources of fresh energy and understanding that allows a CoP to avoid staleness. Prophecy that grows stale is, at best, prophecy unheeded. More likely, prophecy grown stale has ceased to be prophetic. The boundary-dwellers are well-placed not only to transmit the prophetic imagination across organizations but also to offer the internal critique of the imagination and practices of their own CoP.

The third, and perhaps most basic, element in the spread of the prophetic imagination has to do with the attractiveness of the whole way of being that such an imagination makes possible. The practices, values, and imagination of a prophetic CoP are likely to spread when they clearly create value for those who adopt them,

[30] See Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, *Cultivating Communities of Practice*, 54–55. They later state, "The perspective of insiders is most powerful when it includes an understanding of outsiders. Social change, whether in an organization of society at large, is often driven by an insider who has acquired perspective on the world outside" (p. 246, fn. 7).

when they are genuinely attractive. Sociologist Kristina Noelani Kahl spent four years studying a faith-based organization that promoted "Voluntary Simplicity,"[31] and what she found ought to give us pause to consider the need for the prophetic imagination to be life-enhancing. The "Simple Livers" she interviewed were articulate about their wanting this lifestyle choice to be a central part of the identity work they were doing.[32] When she quoted their comments about identity, their identity seemed to be tied to two related factors: naming specific practices (which were not necessarily the same practices for each subject), and a motivating sense of guilt that they needed to do "enough" to earn that identity. Kahl refers to the use of guilt as a moral emotion in this sense as "moral battery."[33]

This strategy of guilt-oriented attempts to act ethically is a familiar one. It has its value as a goad. Theologian Roger Bergman writes of his experience accompanying college undergraduates on a trip to the Dominican Republic where they encountered levels and types of poverty unknown to most of them previously. The discomfort of guilt is, he notes, entirely appropriate as a response.[34] It is not, however, a strategy that is likely to result in a critical mass of people engaging in the

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[31] Kahl, “The Crisis of Social Change for Simple Livers.” The term "voluntary simplicity" refers to loose movement and/or loose association of practices that emphasize decreased consumption, environmental and economic sustainability, self-provisioning, and de-cluttering of living space and time. Voluntary simplicity is not the whole of counter-consumerism, and indeed can be coopted by consumer capitalism. Its "voluntary" aspects tend to target its appeal in the middle and upper-middle socioeconomic classes, especially among white women. It is that very limit of its appeal that prompts me to argue below that the voluntary simplicity as it stands is not adequate to fire the prophetic imagination that will support conversion of the culture of consumption. For a fine exhortation to participation in the movement, see Duane Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity: An Ecological Lifestyle That Promotes Personal and Social Renewal* (Toronto; New York: Bantam Books, 1982), which is a seminal text for the movement's modern iteration. Despite the abovementioned limitations and reservations, the voluntary simplicity movement is clearly bound up in a critique of consumerism and its replacement both practically and ideologically. Hence, Kahl's observations and interviews with participants in one particular voluntary simplicity organization is a useful case for highlighting certain aspects of counterconsumerist cultural movements in general.
[32] Kahl, “The Crisis of Social Change for Simple Livers,” 75–15.
[33] Ibid., 98.
[34] Bergman, *Catholic Social Learning*.

long-term practices that will change a constitutive part of their identities. The prophetic imagination, grounded as it ought to be in the Reign of God, must then be "Good News" for those who engage in it. If a CoP is to have an evangelizing effect, its news must be good, its imagination must be liberative, its practices must be valuable and life-sustaining.[35] It is to that liberative and life-sustaining character that I turn in the final chapters.

[35] See Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel: Evangelii Gaudium*. The exhortation is indeed well-titled, as he emphasizes that evangelization is not primarily about proselytizing nor about enforcing a worldview, but about bringing the Good News to life and to lives.

Chapter 6

Taking It to the Streets:

Educating for Humanizing Plenitude in Communities of Practice

In Chapter Four, I describe communities of practices as venues for situated learning. This learning is shaped in participants' engagement in the CoP, their forming an identity in the CoP, and in aligning themselves and their values with those of the CoP. In Chapter Five, I propose that CoPs could be venues for learning that promote the prophetic imagination through those three elements of engagement, identity, and alignment. In this chapter, I emphasize that CoPs can be the venues for educating for the prophetic imagination that promotes the culture I earlier named as an alternative to consumerism, a culture that facilitates human flourishing, the culture of humanizing plenitude.

When it comes particularly to denouncing, re-visioning, and practicing alternatives to the consumerist culture, I propose here educating for that culture of humanizing plenitude. This education is an act of prophetic imagination. There are two key elements to this particular act of prophetic imagination as it can be developed in CoPs. First, CoPs must foster practices and ways of being that allow for the liberation and expression of crucial aspects of human personhood. In other words, the culture of humanizing plenitude must support the fuller flourishing of the human person. Second, the CoPs must be spaces that provide resources to identify and overcome the resistance to change that stultifies the imagination.

Engagement in and alignment with CoPs that foster alternatives to consumer culture allow for a liberation of the imagination

The goal of this social transformation is the full flourishing of the human person, a flourishing that does not happen adequately in the culture of consumption. Recall that I choose to name the proposed alternative a culture of *humanizing plentitude* for two reasons. First, it must be humanizing because the human person's flourishing is itself the goal. The liberation of humankind does not consist in being saved *from* our humanity. Note that this humanization is not individualization; the flourishing of the human person who is social and relational occurs in community. Second, plenitude emphasizes the fullness of the flourishing that is the goal. It also accords well with the language of the Plenitude economy, a term coined by Juliet Schor to designate a new vision of economic flourishing.[1]

Humanizing plenitude, the rich flourishing of the human person, emphasizes the anthropological elements that are highlighted in Chapter Two: the person's identity as a producer and creator; an acceptance of limits and finitude that, paradoxically, releases an experience of abundance; and an enhanced experience of human relationality. Throughout, elements of the prophetic imagination are, or at least ought to be, nurtured. Particularly, the elements of Jesus's prophetic imagination, as highlighted in Chapter Three, are fundamental to the prophetic vision of humanizing plenitude: a willingness to denounce a broken system; an overriding faith in God's providence that leads to a willingness to share scarce

[1] Schor, *Plenitude*.

resources; particular attention to the needs of the marginalized; and an overall ethic of communal healing and reconciliation.

Overcoming the Inertia in the Status Quo

When Robert Kegan and Ann Lahey write about immunity to change, they refer to the experience of our current ways of acting, thinking, and making-meaning, even if they are no longer adequate to navigate the complexity of our world, being grounded in habits of mind and heart that at one point were adaptive, and that filled some perceived need in our lives.[2] On both a personal scale and a cultural scale, we might say that undergoing the shift from a culture of consumption to a culture of humanizing plenitude requires overcoming such an immunity to change. We have worked so hard, often unwittingly, to negotiate an identity within the confines of the culture of consumption that the very practices and ideology that are so personally, socially, and ecologically damaging also serve ego-protecting functions. If we have internalized the values of a market culture that tells us "You do not have enough, therefore you are not enough,"[3] then the prospect of replacing our habits of accumulation is a frightening one; we cannot imagine that choosing not to accumulate will do anything other than leave our precarious selves vulnerable. It is

[2] Kegan and Lahey, *Immunity to Change*.
[3] Block, Brueggemann, and McKnight formulate the mantra of the consumer culture in this way. Peter Block, Walter Brueggemann, and John McKnight, *An Other Kingdom: Departing the Consumer Culture* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2016). Their formulation is not unique, and note that it finds parallels with the diagnoses of thinkers like John Kavanaugh, William Cavanaugh, and Tom Beaudoin, as cited in Chapter One. The argument is also familiar to most people who have engaged on the popular level with reflection on consumer culture.

difficult to accept that living a life of abundance may require that we give up accumulative practices.

This premise of our insufficiency and the misguided promise of our restoration and fulfillment is the dominant element of consumerism. When I was a high school teacher, I found that many students understood this juxtaposition of exploitation of vulnerabilities with promises of infinite fulfillment to underpin the marketing messages that drive consumer culture. One student, a seventeen-year-old senior, commented on a class discussion board, “I am aware of all of these [marketing] strategies, yet I still fall for them. I know I will not be the fastest runner in the world after watching a Nike commercial yet I still want the shoes because the commercial made them look so 'cool.'" Clearly, awareness alone is not enough to induce the behavioral change that even she wants. Her previously learned behaviors make sense in an understanding of the world that prioritizes a certain form of social acceptance and identity, an imagination of the world that presumes that material purchases are part of what brings her toward (and signals) that identity as socially acceptable. Even though she recognizes that the mechanisms of this system limit her flourishing, as long as she imagines the culture in which she is embedded to be subject to that system, she also remains subject to the system.

Overcoming that immunity to change involves an ongoing process of practice, of identity negotiation, and of fostering an alignment with an alternative imagination. The imagination that enables the change in behavior is also the result of the change in behavior; practice and imagination are mutually influential. The imagination that makes possible and results from changed practice is essential in

overcoming the immunity, in making the demands to which we were once subject, object to us. For instance, the student quoted above, who felt manipulated by and yet unable to transcend the marketing messages that socialized her into the culture of consumption, will only be liberated from the system, liberated for human flourishing, if she can imagine either a world in which she does not feel the need to be cool or a world in which her psychic needs for coolness are not dependent on her sneaker purchases. In fact, she can truly be liberated if she believes in a world where coolness is not a scarce resource, in which there is enough of it for everyone to be cool, or to meet whatever identity needs present themselves. As it is, we cannot easily believe that coolness is abundant. As Block and his associates put it in describing their own vision of what I call a culture of humanizing plenitude, "To believe in abundance . . . is a stretch of the imagination."[4]

Part of what makes the imagining of abundance, or plenitude, or any alternative to consumerism so difficult is that, as Block and his associates go on to say, cynicism about the possibility of a fundamental alternative "always comes clothed in 'realism.'"[5] The alternative, the imaginative, takes on, in this mindset, the sense of "fanciful." Our imaginations are constrained by the consumerist culture. Cultural critic Justin Lewis finds these constraints on the imagination especially to be perpetuated by the dominance of advertising, the 360-degree marketing to which we are all exposed. He points out that this marketing not only pitches particular

[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid., 21–22.

products but also carries a particular ideology. Much advertising has the political effect of reinforcing the cultural status quo.[6]

Announcing a Humanizing Plenitude in Practice

Because communities of practice offer environments in which identity is formed and imagination shaped, CoPs offer venues for the developing of a culture of humanizing plenitude, where the practices engaged, the identities negotiated, and the world imagined socialize participants into alternatives to consumerism. There are many practices and variations on such a vision that could be effected -- and that do in fact exist. I do not offer here a single blueprint for all such CoPs. I do propose, however, that such CoPs, in keeping with the vision of the human person explored in Chapter Two, ought to be attentive to fostering the following three characteristics in practice and in understanding of how the world is and can be: persons should engage in production; persons' acceptance of finitude should be cultivated; persons should be brought better to see themselves in relationship with others in the community and the world. In doing so, such communities of practice can plant seeds whose eventual fruits are enhanced personal well-being, communal flourishing, and global solidarity. As persons engage in practices and participate in communities that allow them to negotiate identities and align themselves with values that better fulfill the longings of the human spirit, immunity to change can be overcome.

[6] Justin Lewis, *Beyond Consumer Capitalism: Media and the Limits to Imagination* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2013). Lewis makes this point throughout the book, but most notably in Chapter One.

Person as Creative Producer

The idea that the person should be a creative producer, and be aware of herself as such, is hardly a new one in modern life. Indeed, part of Karl Marx's critique of the Industrial Revolution was that the modern worker was alienated from part of his essence because he was alienated from his labor. The craftsman was replaced by the worker on a production line.[7] Henry David Thoreau's *Walden,* his paean to productive self-reliance and deliberate living, with a special attention to nature at its core, emerged as one response to industrialization.[8] As the Fordist and Taylorist models of industrial production gained normativity in the first part of the twentieth century in the United States, the Arts and Crafts movement emerged as another response. More of an "aesthetic impulse" than a movement, Arts and Crafts societies emphasized handcrafted goods, often attempting to incubate cottage industries, not simply hobbyism.[9]

To the extent that the United States has become a postindustrial society, many of us are further alienated from the processes by which, and conditions under which, our material goods are produced. Food comes from the supermarket. The computer comes whole from the electronics store. And the car comes from the showroom. Few people see the sausage get made.[10] This distance exacerbates our

[7] Heilbroner, *The Worldly Philosophers*, 136–69.
[8] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden; Or, Life in the Woods*, Unabridged edition (New York: Dover Publications, 1995).
[9] Shi, *The Simple Life*, 189–93.
[10] We have long been told that we are, or are in the process of becoming a postindustrial society. See, for instance, the American sociologist Daniel Bell. Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting*, Reissue ed (New York: Basic Books, 1976). The extent to which this shift has actually taken place is open to debate. The globalization of production creates something of an illusion of postindustrialism in areas from which production has been shifted, but industrial production arguably continues apace. Moreover, the amount of industrial production that continues to take place in the United States is significant. Nonetheless, it is certainly true that many in the United States have experienced a shift

tendency to devalue the material world even as we accumulate more material goods.[11] We have stuff, but we do not know where, nor care about, where it comes from, and so we devalue it in favor of the "soul" of the thing, the spirit of the brand or the "way of being" it represents. The narrative attached to the product has nothing to do with its material reality.

There is evidence, though, of a continued longing in contemporary society for greater agency in production and a new ethic of materialism. Some traditional handcrafts like knitting and homebrewing have seen a resurgence as hobbies among young adults. Specialized markets seek to elevate handcrafts to the level of "artisanal" products -- craft brews or farm-to-table meals, for example. Similarly, handmade products that carry the exotic whiff, authentic or not, of another culture than that of the consumer, are especially desired -- brightly painted Salvadoran crosses, or Australian didgeridoos, for example.[12] Many would argue that the commodification of the aura of artisanship is part of the triumph of consumer culture, and I agree with them. Often, in buying such products, we are signaling our knowledge, our ethics, our cultured-ness in the same way that our Adidas shoes

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to a "knowledge economy" that further removes them from the processes of production than experienced in previous generations. Perhaps most importantly, people experience themselves as being removed from the processes of production, and in some sense experience this removal as a loss.

[11] Beaudoin, *Consuming Faith*.

[12] One accessible example of the commodification of artisanship and the slipperiness of the concept of authenticity comes in the Discovery network television series *Moonshiners*, which purports to follow Appalachian moonshiners as they tap into the demand for their handmade liquor while, supposedly, evading the law and other misfortunes. In one episode, a pair of moonshiners hire an inventor to make them a means of giving their liquor the taste of well-aged bourbon in a fraction of the time. The invention works, and the moonshiners sell their product to a well-heeled buyer thrilled to be getting the "real" article. While I cannot speak to just how much of the show is staged and how much is "reality," the mere existence of the show epitomizes the consumer culture's commodification of a fetish for the artisanal. “Moonshiners,” *Moonshiners* (Discovery Channel, 2011).

signal that we are not taken in by the crowds who flock to Nike.[13] My point here is not uncritically to celebrate this turn to artisanal consumption. It is to argue that the turn itself is evidence of a deeper hunger that is not yet satisfied. CoPs that foster a way of being that provides alternatives to the culture of consumption can and should attempt to satisfy this real, human longing for production. Moreover, in appreciating the materiality of what we ourselves produce, we are also more likely to be conscious about the ways we use what is produced by others. Such is the new materialism.

Schor points to another manifestation of this longing to be producers -- the growth of a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) ethic that has many people building their own crafts or repairing their own goods even though it would be, in the short run, more efficient to pay a professional to do it. She notes also, though, a newer type of DIYer -- those who are willing to embrace technology as a way to allow them to produce goods efficiently on a small enough scale for personal use or for a small manufacturing business. Production need not be restricted only to the realm of expensively-equipped custom machine shops and massive factories.[14]

What Schor points to is also captured in the ethos of the loose "Maker Movement." It is an ethos that connects various DIY builders around such values as

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[13] Sociologist of consumption Grant McCracken writes that the "patina," the greenish film that accrues on bronze through the process of oxidation, was much prized in eighteenth-century British and American homes as an indicator that the object must have been in the family for a considerable period of time and therefore must have been inherited from a wealthy or successful forebear. Manufacturers of new goods sought to increase their value by covering them with an artificial patina, giving the aura but not the reality of antiquity and wealth. Perhaps something of the same dynamic is at work when we buy "distressed" jeans, pre-torn to hint at the history of adventures that the wearer has not actually had. Grant David McCracken, *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

[14] Schor, *Plenitude*, 115–23.

sharing knowledge and encouraging design, and its appeal seems to be growing. Schools and summer enrichment programs increasingly use the term "maker" in their slogans. Adult "fabbers" and tech enthusiasts see themselves as creating but also sharing ways of designing and creating functional goods that are enjoyable to use.[15] It is not simply about making things yourself and for yourself. It is about creating, designing, and sharing knowledge with the idea that the use of technology and the sharing of information scale up the labor in a way that is liberating. Schor insists that the Maker Movement is not simply about a nostalgia for doing everything with painstaking hand-craft, which is not particularly conducive to human flourishing. She summarizes the insights of the philosopher Frithhof Bergman in capturing the Maker spirit, "Self-provisioning is great, but it needs advanced technology to be liberating"[16] from the drudgery.[17]

I argue that including practices of production as part of a CoP's shared enterprise tends to help people learn and live alternatives to consumerism in at least two ways. First of all, it tends to foster what Schor calls "true materialism." By this term she means that we value our material world, our material items, in a way commensurate with the human and natural costs of their production. When we do so, she suggests, we are more likely to think differently and to change our consumer

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[15] See, for instance, Mark Hatch, *The Maker Movement Manifesto: Rules for Innovation in the New World of Crafters, Hackers, and Tinkerers* (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2013). Another articulate enthusiast of the movement is Chris Anderson, *Makers: The New Industrial Revolution* (Crown Business, 2014). Anderson especially thinks that the technology that is emerging will give significant economic power to makers, so that small-scale manufacturing is less cost-prohibitive and will aggregate significantly.
[16] Schor, *Plenitude*, 119.
[17] Pope John Paul II made a distinction between "work" and "toil" that is useful here. "Work" is part of what the human person is designed for, to put forth effort that is productive and creative. In a lapsed world, however, humans are all too often set to "toil," the kind of effort that is frustrating and minimally if at all productive. Toil grinds us down. Work is redemptive and is co-creative with God. See Pope John Paul II, “Laborem Exercens,” 4, 7, 9, 24–27.

behaviors to become more conscious consumers as well as producers. For example, she suggests that we will prize better-made, longer-lasting goods than we currently do in our throwaway society. McKnight and Block offer their own example of shoes. We could buy one mass-produced pair of shoes each year for five years, or we can buy a well-made, custom-fitted, and reparable pair of shoes that will last for five years. The cost is higher up front, but the long run costs, financial as well as ecological, are lower.[18] We will also, Schor suggests, be open to buying (or producing) goods that serve multiple functions.

My experience with the producers at Bikes for Change suggests that Schor is right about this tendency towards true materialism. At the time I interviewed nineteen-year-old Daniel, even though he was a BfC bike shop employee, his personal bike was not currently in functional condition, and was going to require some significant work to get it running well. His intention to rebuild it was a matter of aesthetics, a sense of ownership, and an appreciation for the material reality of the bike. He said:

> I mean, I would modify it, to improve it, but, I don't know, it's just like that bike, it's just like, I've had it for so long and I love the way it is and how it rides and stuff. . . . But it's just, I love the bike so much, I don't want to just let it go to waste and let it break down. I just want to keep it for as long as possible. And I built it.

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[18] McKnight and Block, *The Abundant Community*, 34–35. This example may work better as metaphor than as an actual reflection of the social and economic realities of shoes, but in the process also points to the larger issues of cultural change. Cultural pressures that demand different shoes for different circumstances, the ferocity of marketing of shoes, and the social significance especially of women's shoes complicate this example in the real world. What this complexity does point to, though, is that (1) it is the very process of developing a habit of true materialism that builds some resistance to the marketing pressures around shoes, and (2) if and when communities of practice produce more and more people who think differently about what footwear should and can be as part of the personal wardrobe then professional and social standards can be changed. At the very least, they will not change without pressure from a critical mass of such people.

Repair and restoration are symptoms of his true materialism.

Meanwhile, his fellow employee Deron's plan for refurbishing a bike evinced a materialism that was a mix of distinct aesthetic tastes, functional practicalities, and an appreciation of the work that would go into achieving both to his liking. Note that Deron does not eschew all aspects of consumer culture, but that he is at pains to bring his aesthetics, purchasing behaviors, and identity as a producer into some kind of integration.

> For starters, the bottom bracket it has to change. The crankarms are way too short and it's a one-piece. I'm gonna get probably longer crankarms, and turn it into a three-piece sealed. And then I have wheels for it but I don't like it. They're the ones with these really ugly spokes that are rusting, and I don't feel like shining, polishing them or whatever it's called to remove the rust, but I'm probably gonna change out the rims by buying some stuff from the shop. Or the skate shop that's in Copley. Those handlebars gotta go, too. Like the whole headset is just too small for the wheels I want.

The second way in which the inclusion of practices of production in CoPs tends to foster alternatives to consumerism is tied to the development of identity. The more of our identities in a CoP evolve around ourselves as producers and makers, the less we depend on displays of what we consume to give ourselves souls. Granted, we are all complex persons, with multiple aspects to our identities, aspects that are not always perfectly integrated. It is certainly possible to be a volunteer who is generous with one's time in support of development in the Two-Thirds World and also simultaneously to be a fashionista who buys without regard for the conditions of production. There is less room for the latter, however, if the former is prominent. Moreover, I contend here that part of the goal of educating for prophetic imagination is to lay bare for the learner this juxtaposition, to provoke in the learner

a subjective sense of disequilibrium that brings this mismatch into consciousness and forces change and integration.

Again, my experience at BfC points towards the developing sense of identity as a producer leaving less space for, or at least changing one's sense of, an identity as a consumer. For instance, when I asked interview subjects about their purchasing behaviors, they very rarely mentioned specific brands. The exception that stood out was in conversation with Daniel, who claimed not to spend much on sneakers, but whom I had observed on an earlier occasion tying plastic bags around his shoes before bringing students outside to play a game. Reminded of the incident, he smiled. "Yeah, those were my Ewings."[19] When he mentioned other specific brands, however, he did not seem to be tying his identity to the "soul" of the brand as described in Chapter One. An aspiring car mechanic, he lauded Hondas for their reliability.

By and large, when the BfC subjects got specific about preferences, it was about styles, not brands. Deron mentioned that he likes to travel outside of the city, to the area near his mother's workplace, because he could find there styles different from what he perceives that every store close to him sells. He wanted something different from what everyone else was wearing. Daniel similarly emphasized a desire to distinguish himself a little bit, not through brands, but with the pastiche of styles that allowed him to carve out an individual space. There is a certain level of independence from the consumer culture here in that these young adults seem not to be tightly tied to the hegemony of brands that so much of the literature

[19] The Nike-branded signature model of former basketball star Patrick Ewing.

emphasizes.[20] On the other hand, the pieces of clothing from which these consumers patch together something of a personal style are still the same pieces available in the commodified marketplace. They may be putting together their own style, but it is with the pieces available to them in the culture of consumption.

A particularly notable aspect of the limited influence of brands on consumer preferences and identity came when I spoke to subjects about their bicycles. (Most had multiple bicycles that they had earned from the shop with volunteer credit hours and had repaired themselves.) Expecting them to talk about the brands and models of the bike frames and perhaps components, it was I who brought up the subject. Daniel spent several minutes trying to remember the brand of his bicycle. Sheila rolled her eyes when, as she described the Campagnolo components she had installed on her commuting bike, I "oohed" in approval. "Listen to you, you're, like, ooh, Campy and whatever." Deron was able to identify the brands when pressed, but was much more interested in describing the styles, and Malik more or less dismissed the subject entirely. The brand preferences, and the assumption that they were meaningful, either in terms of quality or signaling as a consumer, were mostly my own projections.

I do not want to imply that style is unimportant to either the interview subjects or the youth involved in the program. At one session, one 14-year-old boy agonized over whether to keep or to remove a rear fender. (He finally kept it

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[20] See for instance Klein, *No Logo*. Other works that note the prevalence of brand strategies as central to marketing include Gene Delvecchio, *Creating Ever-Cool: A Marketer's Guide to a Kid's Heart* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publ. Co., 2002). See also Beaudoin, *Consuming Faith*. Adriana Barbaro and Jeremy Earp, *Consuming Kids: The Commercialization of Childhood*, DVD (Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 2008) focus on the brand affiliation as central to marketing strategies to children with an aim of creating lifelong brand loyalists.

because "It makes it look like a motorcycle.") Another spent hours looking for a pair of shifters that he thought looked just right for him. He admitted that it would bother him a lot if his bike didn't "look right." He is still a consumer, of course, and his consumer choices are part of how he signals to the wider world, and especially his peers, how he wants them to perceive him. I am pushed to surmise, however, that the deleterious influence of brand marketing on adolescents, as described in Chapter One, may be less marked in CoPs where production is emphasized.

Finitude

Related to this idea of true materialism is a realistic appreciation of finitude as an essential aspect of the human condition. We can only own and use so much. Our accumulation of goods has little or no effect on our ability to induce others to do our bidding, our ability to avoid pain and suffering, or our ability to extend our lives. This acceptance not only curtails the misery of an unending quest for more but also, in encouraging satisfaction, taps into a sharing that releases some of the abundance that otherwise lies as dormant potential. In other words, the paradox is that embracing the inability to fulfill all we can envision encourages us to act in ways that allow us to create and enjoy more abundantly than we otherwise could. Philosopher Matthew Crawford, reflecting on trading in his academic position in order to open a motorcycle repair shop, contrasts the consumerist imagination with that cultivated in the repairer. Part of what drives the consumerist mindset is the illusion of limitlessness: we can be what we want, technology will take us wherever we want, and we have mastery over ourselves, culture, and the natural world. This

mindset is precisely the grounding, he argues, of the narcissism discussed in Chapter One as especially characteristic of consumer culture. We see the world and technology as extensions of our own will, feeding our "delusions of omnipotence."[21]

However, the experience of repairing goods, he argues, "chastens the easy fantasy of mastery" that permeates a culture of consumption. The repairer has to "notice things" for what they are, get into the reality of the material world. He cannot simply impose his will on the machine as he imagines it to be, he must work with it as it is, must figure out how it has worn, what is not working and why, and often craft repairs based on what materials are available rather than according to an idealized manual.[22] The practices of repair and maintenance force us to confront not only the limits of the materials with which we work but also our own limits. As an antidote to narcissism, the practice of repair also allows us to accept and even to embrace finitude.

Watching youth at BfC struggle to come to grips with the frustrations of finitude was an especially poignant experience, as the pace of repairs frequently ran up against the limits of their patience and skills. On one occasion, a high school senior, most of the repairs on his bike already complete, told me he had a flat tire. Because the participants had learned to patch an inner tube during the first week of the program, I suggested that he find and patch the hole. When I returned to check on him, he had already tried, unsuccessfully, to install two brand new tubes rather than patching the old one. In his hurry to install them, rather than work the tire

[21] Matthew B. Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), 16.
[22] Ibid., 17.

carefully onto the rim, he had used metal tools to pry the tire onto the rim quickly -- and in the process had ruined the new tubes. By the time I reached him, he was agitated over his lack of success but continued to resist a more patient approach to the problem.

On the same day, a fourteen-year-old boy struggled to fix his brakes -- a process that can take quite a bit of trial and error when aligning the pads to the braking surface of the wheel. As he and I worked, he expressed a mixture of pride, anticipation, and frustration. At one point, having finished his front brakes and making progress on the rear set, he set his jaw with pride, determination, and, it seemed, a bit of defiance against some unseen naysayer, "I'm almost done." Later, in the midst of a tricky part of the repair, he dropped his tools in exasperation, "I want to be done RIGHT NOW!"

One of the essential elements of Jesus's prophetic imagination is a confidence in God's providence. Ironically, then, it is the acceptance of finitude, the belief that God will provide enough for us, the belief that we do not need everything, and that we cannot be/do everything, that best allows for practices of sharing scarce resources. When we know that even in our apparent insufficiency we will actually be/have enough, then we can turn from scarcity to abundance. Consumerism depends on a mindset of scarcity, a deep-seated belief that there is not enough and that unless we accumulate and consume, we will not be enough.[23]

[23] In economics, scarcity of goods, that is, a limit to their availability, is part of the model of any market. I intend here, though, something deeper than this economic assumption. Our culture of consumption thrives when, on a personal level, we as consumers believe that there is not enough, that we are not enough. Moral theologian John Kavanaugh makes this same point about the imagination underlying consumer culture, or what he calls the "commodity form" (which he wants to be replaced by a "personal form") Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society*.

Unlike a mindset of scarcity, a mindset of abundance, allows for the sharing of resources in a way that not only reveals but also enhances their abundance. When I believe that there will be enough for me when I need it, I do not have to take and hoard it, pulling it out of circulation. In the act of believing that there is enough, I engage in practices that make more available. As Block, Brueggemann, and McKnight express it, "It isn't just that there is enough, but the practice of a belief in abundance makes more available."[24]

One type of practice in which communities can engage to live in abundance while accepting finitude is in the sharing of resources, including time and skill. Reflecting on their sociological study of people participating in time banks, cashless exchanges of services, Lindsey Cafargana and her colleagues assert, "If the watchword of global capitalism is greed, as declared by *Wall Street's* Gordon Gecko, the mantra of the plenitude economy is share."[25] Couchsurfing,[26] shared ownership of cars and other durable goods, and the bartering of time and skills free up resources for a broader sense of abundance. Again, an example from BfC illustrates this principle well. Bikes for Change solicits donations of used bikes and parts for use in its programs. Of course, many people donate what they have worn out, stopped using, or just consider excess. However, there are a significant number of

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[24] Block, Brueggemann, and McKnight, *An Other Kingdom*, 3. This analysis is appropriate when using the economic definition of scarcity, which is about demand potentially always outstripping supply. When "scarcity" is really about an absolute lack of sufficient resources, abundance cannot be artificially created.
[25] Lindsey B. Carfagna et al., "An Emeriging Eco-Habitus: The Reconfiguration of High Cultural Capital Practices Among Ethical Consumers," *Journal of Consumer Culture*, April 1, 2014, 1469540514526227, doi:10.1177/1469540514526227.
[26] "Couchsurfing" in the internet age involves people volunteering sleeping space for travelers whom they do not know, and traveling to and staying with strangers who make such offers. It is like airbnb without cost or privacy. Couchsurfing International, "Meet and Stay with Locals All Over the World," *Couchsurfing*, accessed July 7, 2017, https://www.couchsurfing.com/.

people with limited resources involved in the community who donate parts that are still usable. They do so knowing that they themselves may or may not someday have need for those parts. However, instead of keeping those parts themselves, they donate them with the confidence that, some day, they will be able to find similarly-donated parts that they need. Without this confidence, they would be reluctant to donate parts they might someday need, which would keep them out of circulation. Instead, however, bolstered by this faith, they make resources available for someone who perhaps can use them right away.

This acceptance of finitude and the mindset of abundance that it paradoxically cultivates is both developed and expressed in practices of temperance. Above, I discuss one movement that emphasizes practices of temperance, what is often called the "voluntary simplicity" movement.[27] Given that one of the goals of replacing a culture of consumption with a culture of humanizing plenitude is improving personal well-being, it is significant to look at studies on "downshifters," people who have voluntarily reduced their spending as well as, often, their paid working hours. Juliet Schor's research finds the vast majority of such downshifters to report being happier than before, with only ten percent stating that they regret the change.[28] Psychologist Alexios Monopolis also notes that downshifters experience levels of subjective well-being about twenty percent higher than those of the average American.[29]

[27] See Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity*.
[28] Schor, *Plenitude*, 108.
[29] Alexios Nicolaos Monopolis, "Voluntary Simplicity, Authentic Happiness, and Ecological Sustainability: An Empirical Psychological Analysis of Deliberate Reductions in Consumption and the Cultivation of Intrinsic Values on Subjective Well-Being in Addition to a Conceptual Exporation Regarding the Impact of Individual Simplicity and Socio-Economic Localization on Global Ecological Sustainability" (Ph.D.,

One issue that Monopolis does not address, however, is the possibility of wealth as a confounding variable. Sociologist Douglas Holt points out that much of the buy-in to the plenitude economy comes from those who are looking to "downshift," to consume less so that they can work fewer hours and spend more time with family, friends, and self-provisioning.[30] Kahl agrees that most of the "Simple Livers" she studied were highly educated, white, and disproportionately female.[31] There is a privilege to voluntary simplicity, but if such a movement is really going to spread, it must offer pragmatic value to people who do not have a choice simply to "consume less" and "work less."[32] In their stirring call to imagine prophetically a community of abundance, Peter Block, Walter Brueggemann, and John McKnight urge that it is only if there is a sense of "aliveness" in the practices of such movement that such a community can be imagined and sustained.[33] A culture of human plenitude cannot be grounded in a subtraction story; it must be experienced as adding to human flourishing.

Another specific practice in which CoPs can engage in order to support an acceptance of finitude is creating marketing-free zones in places where CoPs gather. Given the extent to which marketing is what carries and transmits much of the consumer culture, especially in its rejection of limits on either desire or possibility,

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University of California, Santa Barbara, 2010), ix–x, http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bc.edu/pqdtft/docview/757878702/abstract/2F7E1318BDFA4478PQ/211?accountid=9673.

[30] Douglas B Holt, “Why the Sustainable Economy Movement Hasn’t Scaled: Toward a Strategy That Empowers Main Street,” in *Sustainable Lifestyles and the Quest for Plenitude Case Studies of the New Economy.*, ed. Juliet B. Schor and Craig J. Thompson (Yale Univ Press, 2014).

[31] Kahl, “The Crisis of Social Change for Simple Livers,” especially 52-76.

[32] Holt, “Why the Sustainable Economy Movement Hasn’t Scaled: Toward a Strategy That Empowers Main Street,” 215.

[33] Block, Brueggemann, and McKnight, *An Other Kingdom*.

then CoPs that are actively developing practices of resistance to consumerism and the fostering of alternatives do well to engage in practices that offer refuge from marketing. I do not want to pass over the immense challenge here. The ubiquity of marketing is difficult to overstate. We live in a world of marketing saturation, surrounded by what is sometimes called 360 Degree Marketing. However, creating at least some physical and psychic space to free us from the ceaseless demands and expectations of consumer culture -- both the expectations we have and the demands the culture places on us -- is a worthwhile practice.

Given the relentless pressures of marketing in the consumer culture, carving out some refuges from marketing, while helpful, is not sufficient to fostering the prophetic imagination that supports a culture of humanizing plenitude. In keeping with the prophetic task of deconstructing the imperial consciousness of which Brueggemann speaks, practices that expose marketing tactics and strategies can also be among those employed by CoPs with alternatives to consumerism. Because so much of consumer culture is encoded in marketing messages, decoding[34] the many assumptions and ideology embedded in the marketing is essential. In CoPs where such decoding becomes a common practice, even part of the general conversation, the ideology of the culture becomes visible. The fish can see the water. One practice that is both attractive and effective in exposing the ideology behind

[34] Brazilian educator Paulo Freire sees "coding" as the representation of a concrete situation. For instance, he presented Brazilian peasants with drawings in which he had represented such existential realities as peasants working, wells, and farms. The process of "decoding" involves the person seeing herself as a subject in that concrete, existential situation. It is in this decoding that the existential reality is able to be analyzed critically and apprehended as object. See Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 95–97. In consumer culture, much of the existential reality -- or at least what we have imagined to be reality -- is encoded in advertisements. Hence, rather than creating images to be decoded, CoPs could decode marketing messages in ways that allow for the apprehension and critical appraisal of the unspoken assumptions on which they trade.

consumer culture is parody. When people are motivated to identify what is encoded in the culture in order to turn it back on the culture itself, they are especially apt to think and converse critically about the culture.

Relationality

In Chapter One, I highlight the research of MIT psychologist Sherry Turkle, who noted that, empirically speaking, an increasingly-digital consumer society contributes to a sense of personal isolation.[35] Moreover, the work of Robert Putnam has drawn attention to the ways in which community breakdown both contributes to and is a result of consumerism.[36] At base, then, say Block, McKnight, and Brueggemann, is a lack of focus on the commons and the common good as the locus of culture. To some extent, the individualism that is at issue is ideological. But in some ways, it is, simply, a side effect of the realities of market life; we do not appreciate our interdependence with our neighbors because it is not visible to us to the extent that it used to be. "I no longer need to borrow sugar," say Block and his co-authors. "I can purchase it 24/7."[37]

This individualism undermines the sense of solidarity that recognizes interdependence not only as fact but also as good, the solidarity that results, says Pope John Paul II, in a "firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good."[38] Individualism misunderstands the human person as a monad rather than as a person in relationship. Communities of practice that seek to live

[35] Turkle, *Alone Together*, 151–264. See also Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, 3–56.
[36] Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 184–203.
[37] Block, Brueggemann, and McKnight, *An Other Kingdom*.
[38] Pope John Paul II, “Sollicitudo Rei Socialis,” 38.

into and to envision alternatives to consumer culture should engage in practices that promote the development of humans as relational persons -- and as aware of that relationality. I propose three particular ways to do so. First, CoPs should be involved in projects that genuinely require cooperation. Second, CoPs should engage in practices of reconciliation through sharing. Finally, such CoPs should emphasize teaching, sharing, and mentoring those who are most at risk of being marginalized.

Robert Kegan describes a vocational education program whose greatest success, as he sees it, is the way it socializes its participants into understanding and valuing their relationships with others. The program happens to teach boat-building, but the activity almost does not matter; what matters is that it is structured in such a way that participants' work depends on others doing their work. Participants report being aware of their dependence on others and, perhaps more importantly, of caring that others depend on them.[39]

Almost any communal project requires that we tap into human relationality, but not every such project brings us to appreciate or celebrate that relationality. While it may be cliché, team sports can foster such acceptance and celebration of human relationality. However, most of us have known athletes whose individual goals trump team goals, or who never think to attribute their success to the concerted efforts of the group. Conversely, we often see athletes who succeed in what are apparently individual sports but who express a keen awareness of and appreciation for the efforts of supporters who have contributed to their success. After winning a 400-meter gold medal in world-record time at the 2016 Olympics in

[39] Kegan, *In over Our Heads*, 46–47.

Rio, the first words of South African sprinter Wayde Van Niekerk were to attribute his victory to the discipline imposed by his coach -- a 74-year-old great-grandmother named Anna Botha.[40]

There are two key aspects here worth noting. First, the practices in which the community engages should have a communal component, an element of mutual dependence. This part is straightforward. After all, most of what we do as humans depends on others. Secondly, then, the rhetoric of the community must highlight the centrality of these relational interactions. The basketball scoring leader whose coach praises her teammates' passing and defense is more likely to understand this mutuality and the engagement around a common goal than is the one whose coach only highlights individual statistics.[41] Central participants and mentors in a CoP take on the role of a coach.

The second type of practice in which CoPs can engage are less about the particular practices themselves and more about the ethos of reconciliation and healing that spurs them. For some, these practices arise naturally from the shared experience of working with others in community. At BfC, Deron's work with youth

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[40] Liam Fitzgibbon, "Rio Olympics: Wayde van Niekerk 400m World Record and Gold Medal Engineered by 74-Year-Old Great Grandmother Ans Botha," *Fox Sports*, August 15, 2016, https://www.foxsports.com.au/olympics/great-grandmother-ans-botha-is-the-mentor-to-south-african-sensation-wayde-van-niekerk/news-story/8c164a1e7a94e59ab83bf120b31ba268.

[41] The metaphor of central participants as coaching more peripheral members into fuller participation and identity is a particularly useful one. An example from New England Patriots head coach Bill Belichick illustrates this point. Notoriously curt and prickly with the press, Belichick's demeanor is, by contrast, open and effusive in a weekly, team-sponsored video where he explains to one member of the press what happened on key plays from the previous game. Rarely, however, does he focus on who caught or threw the ball. Instead, he highlights a player who stayed on a block long enough to open up a running lane, or a defender whose correct positioning forced the opposing quarterback to hold the ball for too long. Belichick does not consider himself to be coaching football players so much as he is coaching athletes to do things in a certain way, to identify themselves with that "Patriot Way" through their practices and attitudes. See, as a typical example, *Belichick Breakdown: Top Plays from Patriots vs. Steelers*, Belichick Breakdown, 2017, http://www.patriots.com/video/2017/01/27/belichick-breakdown-top-plays-patriots-vs-steelers.

allowed him to be attuned to their social and financial circumstances. He developed the habit of bringing clothing in to donate anonymously to youth staff whom he knew to be in particular need. Donating clothing is a common practice, to be sure, but one that has the potential for bringing some healing into the recipient's broken reality. Although he did not explicitly say so, it is also fair to suppose that Deron's instinct to pass on rather than discard clothing as he grew out of it was very much of a piece with the true materialism that comes from repairing and re-using goods.

It is particularly easy to lose this sense of material value with clothing. Once upon a time, fabric was valuable, sufficing even for payment of debts in some cases.[42] Over the centuries, and perhaps especially in the age of globalization, clothing has become artificially cheap and therefore, for many, disposable. Schor's material flow analysis indicates that what has been most significant in recent decades has not been the increase in the dollar value of textile imports into One-Third World countries; it has been the volume of those imports. The prices of textiles have plummeted in the global economy, so that relatively small increases in the dollar value of textile imports obscures the immense volume of these imports.[43] Deron seems to have overcome this devaluation of the materiality of textiles.

Finally, given the importance of invitation by mentors for the success of CoPs in general, it is especially important that membersof CoPs that seek to live out alternatives to a culture of disposability treat not only material goods but also

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[42] See for instance Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*, Reprint edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1991). Ulrich notes the importance of spinning and weaving in the household economies of colonial Maine and the value that linen had in comparison to other household items.
[43] Schor, *Plenitude*, 25–31.

persons as valuable. Daniel captures this synergy between the material and the personal in his poignant story. As someone who experienced difficulties with learning in school, he started in a BfC program with others with learning disabilities, and little confidence in his ability to learn. When he learned mechanics, he began to see himself as a learner and a doer. What first got him to stay involved at BfC was the opportunity to teach youth like himself. "Seeing kids like that learn, and being able to do it, is very impressive. And it shows . . . how much potential they have." When I asked him if he saw a connection between his desire not to waste a good bike and his desire to make sure kids with disabilities get a chance to feel the freedom he feels when riding a bike he built, Daniel nodded his head in vigorous agreement.

It seems, then, that communities of practice, as loci of situated learning, have the potential to be loci of education towards the prophetic imagination as it fosters human flourishing. CoPs that foster humanizing plenitude in this way are grounded in an anthropology that values the person as producer, as relational, and as able to embrace finitude. In that way, such CoPs can encourage practices that generate a true materialism and promote a confidence in the sharing of resources. Given that such CoPs have the possibility to foster human flourishing, they must provide lessons for a Church whose mission is also to foster human flourishing.

Conclusion: Picking Up Speed:
The Church as a Prophetic Community Transforming Consumerism

Communities of practice that help to develop participants' identities of themselves as producers, trust in the sufficiency of what they have, and enhance the virtue of solidarity through practices of relationality and reconciliation are perhaps our best pedagogical hope for fostering the prophetic imagination of humanizing plentitude. One element, though, of the prophetic dimension of such communities bears further mention. If part of the prophetic task is denouncing the failed system, revealing the failures of those in power to achieve true flourishing, then so too must the prophetic community point to the alternative, not simply in theory, but in practice. CoPs that enact these alternatives do so in two ways. First, they create the space for people to live and to flourish counterculturally. Second, they act as witness to the alternative possibilities, as living instantiations of an alternative imagination. Given that the Church itself is called to create space for living a countercultural gospel and also to witness to the world the abundant life that can be part of this alternative imagination, then we must consider how the Church might effectively act as an agent of education for the prophetic imagination in consumer culture.

Communities of practice, as loci for the negotiation of identity, have the potential to foster the identities and imaginations of participants in ways that make possible the realization of alternatives to a culture of consumption. They have the potential to help move their own participants and others towards a culture of humanizing plenitude. The mission of the Church, in its concern for the liberation of persons and the building up of communities, is to help create conditions that enable

people to live lives of integral human flourishing. Fostering the prophetic imagination supports and leads to such a culture of humanizing plenitude. It is a culture aligned with Jesus's own prophetic imagination, and it is a culture in which concern for the common good and especially for the most vulnerable feature prominently. The prophetic imagination can be grounded in a theological anthropology of human creativity, acceptance of finitude, and relationality -- a theological vision that the Church ought to help bring to the culture.

It is essential that the Church recognize the ways in which ideology and vision feed imagination and serve as the longest levers of cultural transformation.[1] The transformation of imagination, however, does not come merely from the identifying of an alternative imagination. If the Church's exercise of prophetic imagination for a culture of humanizing plenitude is to be effective in well-structured and lively communities of practice, then the Church ought also to be using its resources to kindle and sustain such CoPs.

I suggest here three venues in which the Church could play a role in supporting the CoPs that flourish in the exercise of prophetic imagine. Such CoPs foster a sense of identity as relational persons who are producers in touch with finitude. They engage participants in the community and its practices. They successfully promote participants' development in alignment with the values of the CoP. By no means should these three venues be considered comprehensive -- I am hopeful that readers will consider further ways in which the Church can engage in

[1] See for instance activist Donella Meadows, who calls changing mindsets and shifting paradigms the two most effective elements for social and systemic change. Both of those leverage points are essential aspects of the prophetic imagination. Meadows, “Places to Intervene in a System.”

and support the sorts of CoPs that will educate for the prophetic imagination and alternative to consumer culture. Nor are the specific ways in which I propose that these CoPs might work intended to be restrictively prescriptive. Again, it is my hope that readers will adapt or add to these suggestions in light of their own experiences and the particular circumstances in which they find themselves, taking due consideration of the specific resources and needs of their own communities.

Here I envision the promotion of CoPs that foster prophetic alternatives to the practices and imagination of consumerism in three venues: Catholic higher education, Catholic parishes, and in local communities. In each of these, the Church is challenged to bring material and intellectual resources. The Church is also tasked with promoting participation amid very different circumstances, with developing leadership, and with balancing the continuity and change that are essential aspects of the developing prophetic imagination.

In Higher Education

As a young man, I read and enjoyed some of the work of the accomplished alpinist and adventure writer David Roberts. In some of his writing, he describes his initiation into the mountaineering scene during his time as an undergraduate.[2] I was struck both by how much of his learning took place in what I would now identify as a loose community of practice and by the extent to which this particular type of learning was quite separate from his life as a student. I propose here, then, two particular ways in which colleges and universities can bring such CoPs under their

[2] David Roberts, *Moments of Doubt* (Seattle: Mountaineers Books, 1986).

auspices for the purposes of fostering the prophetic imagination in general, and a culture of humanizing plenitude in particular. Universities can maximize an appreciation for the material world's possibilities and limitations in their many extracurricular activities; and they can leverage community service experiences by emphasizing the opportunity to reflect on the cultural ideas and practices. They can make an effort to bring into this dynamic models and mentors, community connections, and resources for imaginative reflection.

Many colleges and universities offer their students opportunities to learn from the experience of working in the community. Moreover, a walk through a college "club fair" at the start of the school year makes clear the many activities in which students can engage -- sports, hobbies, political activities, outings, and affiliation groups. The late adolescents and young adults that make up much (though certainly not all!) of the population at these schools are exactly at a developmental phase when the link among engagement with groups, formation and transformation of identity, and the alignment with values in communities of practice is particularly salient.[3]

Moreover, the mission of the Catholic university -- of colleges and universities in general, one might argue -- is centered on the formation and transformation of identity and imagination. Involvement in experiences in the community and the school are not simply about healing town-gown rifts, filling leisure time, nor even the marketability of the university in a highly competitive

[3] Chickering and Reisser particularly cite the potential for colleges and universities to provide environments for signficant student development. See Chickering and Reisser, *Education and Identity*, 265–81.

environment. These experiences are among the raw materials of formation and transformation. So, Catholic colleges and universities should, among the clubs and organizations that they sponsor for students, make efforts to promote the development of communities of practice that can tend to be formative of the prophetic imagination that is an alternative to a culture of consumerism. Their understanding of learning must include the co-curricular as well as the curricular venues. They ought to seek ways to promote in such CoPs, in particular, human identity as producers and creators; a grappling with the reality of human finitude; and practices of sharing that arise from and reinforce human relationality in ways that promote the virtue of solidarity through a concern for the common good.

I propose some examples of what I imagine this might look like, with the proviso that student development professionals are the real experts in their own colleges and universities and are best able to think creatively and practically about how to foster CoPs with such characteristics in their particular circumstances. Colleges and universities have the particular resources of a large pool of potential participants; often they have space where CoPs can meet. For instance, returning to Roberts' mountaineering tales, he frequently mentions the tasks involved in preparing and repairing his gear, both in preparation for trips and in the field. His appreciation for the materials he used -- materials whose care could quite literally save his life -- was evident, as was his keen awareness of the limitations of the human condition.

While Roberts largely undertook these endeavors alone, it is possible to imagine a different experience for students at the many universities that have

outdoors clubs that sponsor outings and that have sports equipment that members can borrow or rent. When the gear wears out, club dues and university funding are used to replace it. Some universities even have employees in charge of the gear and of organizing trips. Consider, however, how powerful might be the experience of members of such outdoors clubs also involving themselves in the practices of caring for, repairing, or even of making some of their equipment. In addition to learning practical skills, such students develop their identities as producers, appreciate the materiality of the equipment they use, and are further in touch with the way in which the sharing of such resources makes those resources more abundantly available than if each participant needed to purchase his or her own. The barriers to trying out new activities would be prohibitively high without this sharing of resources.

Granted, not all equipment is equally amenable to this sort of treatment, and, because safety matters, any repairs must be taught and supervised by qualified and experienced leaders. Participants can be taught to care for climbing ropes, but certainly not to repair them. Participants can patch a hole in an air-filled foam camping mattress or re-seal the seams of the rain fly of a tent used for a weekend backpack trip, but probably should not be re-sewing seams on a four-season tent destined for a winter trip up Mt. Washington. Still, from re-stringing tennis rackets to fixing chains on bicycles, there are plenty of ways in which such clubs and become CoPs that promote practices of true materialism.

Service learning is another area in which colleges can -- and often already do -- provide opportunities for experiences that socialize students into or challenge

them into transformation for the prophetic imagination. Catholic colleges and universities are among those -- but certainly not alone -- that place great emphasis on an ethic of service, in the local community but also, often, in the wider world, with "alternative spring breaks" to Appalachia, the Gulf Coast, and Latin America filling to capacity. In a report for the Association of American Colleges and Universities, George Kuh, a scholar of student learning in higher education, identifies experiential learning, including service learning, as a practice with a "high impact" on student learning and development.[4]

What these local, national, and global experiences offer that is most transformative of the learners' identity and imagination is the encounter with persons, situations, and cultures that challenge the learners' ways of knowing and interpreting the world. It is not simply cognitive or affective learning;[5] it is potentially learning that changes ways of knowing. The university can play the role of providing the logistics to help make these encounters happen -- transportation for students who might otherwise be stranded on campus, for example, and relationships with agencies and communities open to encounter with students. The other crucial resource that universities must provide, though, is the psychic space, the time, and the prompts to reflect imaginatively on these experiences. When students must reflect on the way in which experiences confront their "basic assumptions about the world," then their complacency about their assumptions is

[4] George Kuh, "High-Impact Eductional Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter" (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2008).
[5] Indeed, Adrianna Kezar and Roberth Rhoads reject as false a cognitive/affective dualism in learning. Adrianna Kezar and Robert A. Rhoads, "The Dynamic Tensions of Service Learning in Higher Education," *The Journal of Higher Education* 72, no. 2 (March 1, 2001): 148–71, doi:10.1080/00221546.2001.11778876.

shaken.[6] And what else is that but the making room for the prophetic imagination? Otherwise, the unreflective encounter with new experiences merely reinforces old ways of knowing and seeing the world.[7] Scholars of higher education Adrianna Kezar and Robert Rhoads emphasize that service learning is most effective when it is not siloed as one part of the university. It should involve a shared commitment among academic, administrative, and student life professionals.[8]

One aspect of CoPs to which colleges and universities must devote extra attention is the element of inviting new participants into deeper engagement and into fuller participation in something of an accelerated manner. While the influx of new students each year provides a fresh pool of potential participants, there is a time limit to the arc of participation, even an idealized trajectory. The dynamics of continuity and change in the CoP are circumscribed by the transitory nature of the college or university. The time-limited nature of the college experience also means that traveling the arc from socialization into the norms of the community and central participation in the continued development of the CoP to passing the institutional knowledge, values, and leadership to newer participants has to happen quickly.

Certainly, the expected or possible trajectories of participation will vary somewhat, not only across persons, but also by institution. A four-year college where most students are 18-23 years old, full-time, residential students, with many

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[6] Ibid.

[7] I think here of Upton Sinclair's "Travel is So Broadening." His Babbitt character repeats the maxim of the title, but his own recounting of his travels display an ignorance and lack of reflection that render his travels merely the occasion of reinforcing his own old biases. Sinclair Lewis, *The Man Who Knew Coolidge: Being the Soul of Lowell Schmaltz, Constructive and Nordic Citizen* (Harcourt, Brace, 1928).

[8] Kezar and Rhoads, "The Dynamic Tensions of Service Learning in Higher Education," 155.

planning to spend a semester abroad during the junior year, is likely to have a student body with more time to experiment with such CoPs. On the other hand, that school will be pressed to engage students deeply early, preparing them for leadership in their second year and/or helping them reconnect to the community of practice after an extended absence. The question remains, then, as to how, in organizations that are voluntary and that necessarily have a relatively high rate of turnover, the college may both quickly engage new members and also promote enduring values and a sense of continuity.

Another of the high-impact educational practices cited by Kuh is having students engaged in first-year seminars and experiences. He especially notes their effectiveness when they emphasize intellectual and practical skills like "critical inquiry, frequent writing, information literacy, and collaborative learning."[9] It seems to me, though, that another aspect of such first-year experiences could be the practical skills involved in community engagement and leadership.

Meanwhile, a school with more of a commuter population, first-generation college students, and more students working longer hours at off-campus jobs may find student engagement particularly challenging. Such students are unlikely to trot off to check out a club meeting on the spur of the moment at the suggestion of a friend in the dorm. However, it is crucial that we not limit humanizing plenitude, the prophetic imagination, or the life of Christian discipleship to a luxury for those with free time and the fortune to be in a location with a critical mass of other people with time and resources to experiment, engage, and imagine. If the problems of consumer

[9] Kuh, "High-Impact Educational Practices," 9.

culture are human problems, then so too in humanizing plenitude for all persons. As sociologist Douglas Holt[10] argues that an alternative culture to consumerism will catch on only if it includes real value for the vast majority of people on Main Street, so too will the imagination and practices that are part of prophetic alternatives only be worth fostering in higher education if they are life-giving for all. Given the additional challenge in such a situation, one role that the college can be particularly intentional about filling is that of creating opportunities for connection among people with busy lives.

In the Parish

Sociologist Kristina Noelani Kahl's interviews with Christians living a "simple lifestyle" reveal frustrations at a lack of support from fellow parishioners and a resistance to pragmatic actions within the walls of the Church -- even on such issues as using fairly traded coffee at parish events.[11] Similarly, we may note the resistance in many circles, including among many Catholics, to Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical on sustainable development, *Laudato Si'*.[12] This resistance is not, I contend, simply about an unwillingness to adopt lifestyle changes that are, at least in the short term, costly; it is representative of congregational inability to imagine a different system. Although sustainable growth and simple living are well grounded in the imagination of the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching, that grounding itself seems not to have been communicated to, and certainly not adopted by, most people in the pew. The

[10] Holt, "Why the Sustainable Economy Movement Hasn't Scaled: Toward a Strategy That Empowers Main Street."
[11] Kahl, "The Crisis of Social Change for Simple Livers."
[12] Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*.

old saw calling Catholic Social Teaching the Church's "best-kept secret" should be heard not as a curiosity but as an indictment of the Church's pedagogy. When the imagination that supports a sustainable economy and ecology is restricted to theoretical discussions, academic circles, and the lives of dedicated but isolated workers in the field, then its impact on the popular Catholic imagination is minimal. The imagination must be implemented in the practices of the parish at large if something like a papal vision of sustainable development is to find fertile ground in which to grow in the congregation's social imaginary. The parish, with some generational heterogeneity, room for a constellation of communities of practice, and practical, material, and spiritual resources, must strive to seize the opportunity to be agents of the prophetic imagination in consumer culture.

First, parishes must devote resources to developing communities of practice. As Jane Regan has urged, parishes can create a culture in which communities of practice are normalized, encouraged, and thrive.[13] What parishes have to offer include, often, some of the infrastructure that facilitates the coming together and functioning of CoPs -- physical meeting spaces, perhaps a web presence that can serve as a central spot for announcements. Often overlooked, the parish can be a place where the skills of fostering strong, vibrant CoPs are themselves taught. As it stands, the mere existence of committees in the life of the parish is not necessarily life-giving; they are not automatically CoPs. Kahl notes that even when a parish has social justice committee, most of its members who do participate at all come for an

[13] Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*.

hourly meeting once a month or listen to a speaker with no real engagement.[14] Active CoPs happen intentionally. The tactics that create inviting benches for those on the sidelines, that open spaces for engagement, that coax participants into developing identities, and that genuinely and authentically reify the values with which participants can align do not simply happen. These skills can be taught and coached. The parish can and should do so intentionally, for the health of all of its CoPs.

Secondly, the parish can be a locus for the development of the social capital, even the simplest of ties, that bring refreshment to CoPs. The parish can be the place where people who would otherwise not be brought together can meet. If it is often true that our existing social circles provide the connections that allow new organizations, ideas, movements, and civil society in general to flourish, and if it is true that those social circles have become increasingly spare over the last decades,[15] then the parish can be a place where social capital and community ties flourish.

Parishes have the potential for particularly fruitful intergenerational relationships. So, on the one hand the parish offers greater opportunities for long-lasting, identity-formative, imagination-inspiring participation with central participants in the position to act as mentors who hand on the vision and practices of the CoP. On the other hand, unlike many residential colleges, where a student body provides a dense population of young adults with disposable time, parishes tend to have a concentration of families -- whose time is often overtaxed for many reasons, including the demands of the consumer society's work-and-spend

[14] Kahl, "The Crisis of Social Change for Simple Livers," 115–17.
[15] As noted above, such is the thrust of the "Bowling Alone" thesis. See Putnam, *Bowling Alone*.

treadmill. Moreover, many adults' social circles are circumscribed by the activities and social circles of their children. Religious organizations have the potential, more than most organizations, to widen those circles of community and concern. They are one of the few types of organizations that have been relatively resistant to the breakdown of American community.[16] It is in parishes that people can be brought into contact not only with, say, the parents of other children in the religious education program, but with more or less diverse groups of people who may be willing and able to connect in a CoP. Older parishioners with fewer time demands -- and often a desire to connect with and to pass knowledge and values on to younger generations -- constitute a potential pool of participants, and overcoming tendencies to separate generations is both a task and opportunity for CoPs in the parish.

This need to overcome the tendency for some CoPs to become restricted clubs extends to social media. It may seem superfluous to list the parish's digital presence among the assets that it can offer to CoPs. After all, it costs nothing but information[17] to set up a free social communication group on Facebook or Google+. The danger, though, is that such groups easily become restricted, even if unintentionally. Without including outreach to the broader parish community in its communication, the CoP can too easily close the conversation so that only those who are already in on it, who already know where to find the news, who already have the connections, and who already know the norms of the CoP can easily access it. In

[16] It remains to be seen whether and how the much-discussed rise of the "nones" will erode this resistance. Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, "'Nones' on the Rise."
[17] I do not consider this demographic information to be cheap, neither in terms of the privacy it costs nor or the valuable demographic data it allows marketers to mine.

such a case, the CoP's directive to invite engagement will fail. The invitation must be addressed properly if it is to be read.

Thirdly, then, the parish must see that the CoP that most intentionally promotes and practices the prophetic imagination of a culture of humanizing plenitude is an active and visible member of that constellation of CoPs. Part of what allows for the spread of the prophetic imagination is the healthy and integrated development of a cluster of CoPs that shares people, ideas, and practices on the borders. Indeed, the anthropological imperatives to create, to grapple with finitude, and to live relationally are not and should not be restricted to a narrowly focused community; they are universally anthropological imperatives. Moreover, the prophetic imagination spreads, as argued in Chapter Four, partly in the interaction of people across and between these CoPs. People cross boundaries, and should be encouraged to do so. In this way, the prophetic imagination spreads also to other CoPs in the parish constellation and, hopefully, beyond. The prophetic imagination that envisions and enacts a culture of humanizing plenitude should not be limited to the parish sustainability committee's recycling initiative. It should permeate the ethos of the whole parish. It should be manifest in the sacramental preparation programs. It should be evident in liturgy and homily.

Whether in the parish, the university, or elsewhere, this prophetic imagination can thrive as an alternative to consumerism when the Church draws on its own historical, theological, and spiritual resources. The Church ought to bring principles such as the common good and the option for the poor into the conversations, reflection, and practices in its purview. It can and should preach and

teach the value of an integral humanism as both a theological anthropology and a standard for the flourishing of Christian life.

Moreover, the Church's rich cache of spiritual treasures can be brought to bear in the effort to cultivate the practices and virtues that allow for the development of the prophetic imagination. However incongruous it may seem in, for instance, a largely middle-class parish, monastic practices that twin work and prayer can be adapted for contemporary use in elevating humankind's creative and productive aspects. Franciscan spiritual teachings and practices around material poverty can help people grapple with the acceptance of finitude. The relational anthropology so often embodied in practices of Hispanic communities and families can help to transform parishes where people have too long been stuck in an individualistic understanding of the person and the world. My point here is not to prescribe the exact spiritual resources that can best be used. It is merely to remind the reader that such resources exist in abundance in our Church and to urge participants in CoPs to draw upon and adapt these resources in ways that serve the needs of the local Church and the community beyond it. When doing so allows for the flourishing of CoPs with a prophetic alternative to consumerism, so then may that practical, prophetic imagination spread more readily.

Across Communities

Given the Church's mission to be an agent of transformation in the broader society, that mission can be lived out by engaging society not only on the broadest stages but also in particular localities. The Church -- or, more to the point here, local

churches -- playing a prominent role in civil society,[18] bring the potential to enhance the connectedness in the community, helping to develop the connections that promote the proliferation of prophetic imagination. To do so, the Church should offer its own resources for the development of CoPs of humanizing plenitude especially when they move beyond Church boundaries. Grounding the endeavor in a theological anthropology that responds to human needs allows the endeavor more easily to engage other denominations, religions, and persons who disavow any religious belonging. Such a stance also requires humility and a willingness to release control on the part of the Church.

While universities and parishes can be incubators for the practices, imagination, and communities that denounce the inadequacies of the operative regime while they announce in their words and practices a hopeful and prophetic newness, the prophetic imagination is a goal the Church has not just for its own members but also for society as a whole. It is not the prophetic imagination that saves; it is the transformation of society through prophetic practice and imagination that facilitates the liberation of persons for human freedom and flourishing. Hence, religious organizations, as part of the fabric of civil society, must contribute their

[18] By "civil society" here I mean the large realm of voluntary associations that mediate between the individual and the state. The appropriate role(s) for religious institutions in American civic life is often debated, and the phrase "separation of church and state" is often misunderstood or misused in such a way as to try to make faith lives separate from not only political life but from civic life in general. The result would be an impoverished civic life, what Richard John Neuhaus has called "the naked public square." Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1988). I take the position here that religious institutions ought to, and legally do, play as much of a role in civil society as any other institutions, and that such a role in no way violates either the letter or the spirit of the First Amendment's establishment clause. Like political parties, football clubs, trade associations, and neighborhood watch groups, religious institutions participate in and to some extent shape the discourses and practices of communal life.

resources to the development of CoPs that enact and promote the prophetic imagination in local communities, across and beyond Church boundaries.

I see the Church bringing three crucial resources to this endeavor -- theological vision, material resources, and the practices of skillful reflection. As I hope to persuade readers, the Church brings theological resources for a culture of humanizing plenitude. Foremost among these theological resources are an understanding of the human person (who is relational, productive, and embraces finitude) and a vision of society (highlighting the common good, solidarity, and the option for the poor) that identify and respond to the broader longings of the human heart. These longings are not met by the truncated imagination of consumer culture.

Paradoxically, the theological grounding of the Church's prophetic imagination does not render that vision sectarian; instead, it gives the vision a universality. However, if religious organizations are to reach across the borders of faith traditions, then we in the Church, especially in practical CoPs, must be "bilingual"; we must speak not only the language of faith but also the language of the public square that, while not to be stripped of faith, should invite engagement from those without a Christian faith commitment. Fortunately, the language of justice, creativity, and authenticity has broad purchase in both religious and secular circles. The experience of desiring, of our reach always eluding our grasp, the conflict between freedom and finitude, these are universal human experiences, and people deal with them with or without religious language. Certainly, virtues like temperance as means of rightly ordering desire accord easily with something like fundamental Buddhist tenets about desire as the cause of suffering. The very idea

that human flourishing ought to be a goal for societies puts the prophetic imagination easily into conversation with something like the 'capabilities' approach to human development.[19] The goals of the positive psychology movement are also about human flourishing, and without using religious language, identify things like commitment to larger causes and the experience of agency as causal of the experience of human flourishing.[20]

Practically speaking, then, this vision, or, perhaps more accurately, the confluence of these visions, emerges in the practice and the reflection that mark a CoP. Church organizations must do what they can to help such CoPs flourish, including dedicating resources to them. Church spaces have long been used for such CoPs as twelve-step recovery groups; I propose that such spaces be made available for CoPs like Bikes for Change, farmers' markets in urban food deserts, childcare cooperatives, and other creative CoPs that allow people to live out and live into a culture of humanizing plenitude.

In addition to the physical resources they can bring to such CoPs, church groups can offer help people to develop the skills of engagement in CoPs and the habits of reflective practice on which the prophetic imagination depends. When

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[19] Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*.

[20] While for much of its history, psychology as a science was focused on identifying and correcting abnormalities, the movement of positive psychology of the last several decades has emphasized well-being in ordinary human experience. For an example of this broadening of the concern of psychology, see Martin E. P. Seligman, *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment* (New York: Atria Books, 2004), ix–xii. At its heart, then, psychology also must identify an anthropology that allows it at least to enter into a conversation about what constitutes human well-being. While there is certainly a temptation to take a truncated view of human well-being, reducing it to positive affect, the work of psychologists has generally gone beyond momentary good feelings to deeper levels of satisfaction. For the orientation grounding positive psychology and a nuanced understanding of what the human person is whose well-being is sought, see Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990). See also Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Isabella Selega Csikszentmihalyi, eds., *A Life Worth Living: Contributions to Positive Psychology* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

these practices are developed in parish committees, they transfer well to other CoPs. The know-how to mobilize practical resources and the virtue of prodding people into reflective practice that develop in church CoPs should not only be fostered intentionally but also should be intentionally brought to bear in the borderlands where brokers from Church-based CoPs also encounter the rest of society.

If this commitment of Church resources to the community more broadly is to be successful in fostering a prophetic alternative to consumerism, two things must happen. First, the Church, or, more to the point, local religious organizations, must assert and capitalize on their rightful role in civil society, as social institutions with voice, resources, and, perhaps most importantly, the ability to connect people. Religious institutions must put themselves in the service of the community. I have argued a number of times in this dissertation that the prophetic imagination spreads where connections have been made, where brokers move across boundaries. Education activists Margaret Wheatley and Deborah Frieze put it aptly:

> Despite current ads and slogans, the world doesn't change one person at a time. It changes as networks of relationships form among people who discover they share a common cause and vision of what's possible. . . . Our work is to foster critical connections.[21]

While I do not want to dismiss the changing of the individual mind, I find much wisdom in this assertion from Wheatley and Frieze. It requires, then, that as we engage in our own reflective practice to move towards the prophetic

[21] Margeret Wheatley and Deborah Frieze, "Using Emergence to Take Social Innovation to Scale" (The Berkana Institute, September 20, 2006), 1, http://berkana.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Emergence.pdf. See also Margaret Wheatley and Deborah Frieze, "Beyond Networking: How Large-Scale Change Really Happens," *School Administrator* 64, no. 4 (April 2007): 35–38.

imagination, to effect a culture of humanizing plenitude, we must invite connection, even create connection, and do so actively.

Secondly, in putting ideas, people, and material resources into engagement with the community, religious institutions must do so with the humility that understands that the Church will not control such CoPs, and in fact that the Church must be ready and willing to learn from the ideas and practices brought into the CoPs that exist outside of Church auspices. On the interpersonal level, most people will find such humility and openness fairly natural. On an institutional level, however, genuine, dialogical engagement risks the status quo in both its strengths and weaknesses. Religious organizations, besides providing material and intellectual resources, must find ways to engage in conversation with such CoPs so as to make their ideas and practices available to Church members. A BfC open house after Mass, an interfaith program on meditation practices for accepting finitude, or a community forum on adolescents and creativity are some examples of such opportunities. They also take control out of the hands of the Church, and therefore involve some risk to its authority and positions.

These risks are not only worthwhile; they are necessary. Consumer culture is pervasive, and it is harmful to persons, interfering with human flourishing both personally and communally. The most vulnerable are especially subject to its damages, but none is immune. The Church's response must be to help people identify the imagination that undergirds the current culture and to develop, as a pilgrim people in the world, alternatives that promote humanizing plenitude. Because the stakes of this cultural transformation are so high, the liberation of

persons and society for human flourishing, a privatized or sectarian response is not sufficient. A risky engagement with society is called for.

Beyond Consumerism and Humanizing Plenitude

In this dissertation, I have offered humanizing plenitude as an alternative to consumerism. I have argued that the greatest barrier to moving beyond consumerism has been the desiccation of our imaginations, a drying up of our vision of the human person and the society in which that person can flourish. The imagination that denounces the failures of a culture of consumption and that begins to live into a culture where God's Reign is made effective from within the radical trust in God that allows for the sharing of scarce resources and the inclusion of the marginalized is, substantially, the prophetic imagination of Jesus of Nazareth. As Jesus's annunciation of the alternative, the Reign of God, emerged in the community of practice we call the Jesus Movement, so may communities of practice today be vehicles for the interplay of practice and reflection that stimulate the prophetic imagination. In particular, through emphasizing humankind's productive creativity, radical relationality, and embrace of finitude, the practical imagination that brings moves towards humanizing plenitude may better emerge.

Of course, consumerism is not the only aspect of our culture that stultifies human flourishing. Nor is it the only such aspect that rests on our unreflective subscription to an intellectual and institutional regime, an unexamined social imaginary. A culture of racism, or militarism, sexism, and anthropocentrism similarly requires prophetic deconstruction and re-imagination. In the same way

that communities of practice are venues for the development and proliferation of such practical, imaginative alternatives to the culture of consumption, such CoPs can be venues for a broader re-imagination. As a Church, we ought to be involved not only in the intellectual and theological work of analyzing and judging the current culture, of deconstructing and denouncing the stale imagination that underpins what ails society, we ought also to be involved in the formation and sustenance of CoPs that both proclaim and offer a foretaste of the alternatives, that develop and propagate the prophetic imagination.

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Appendix: Bikes for Change (BfC) Qualitative Study

I undertook this qualitative research with the hypothesis that local communities of practice have the educative potential to foster alternative ways of thinking and acting as consumers and producers. Further, I hypothesized that whether and how this education occurs depends heavily on what values those communities of practice embody and how those values are conveyed to newer or peripheral participants in the community. In particular, then, I hypothesized that the messages and values embodied by long-term participants in Bikes for Change can have transformative effects on they way they think about themselves and act as consumers and producers.

Research Questions

- What values do participants in Bikes for Change hold in theory and in practice, especially around themselves as consumers?
- What messages do participants in BfC embody and teach to each other and to newer participants, especially around consumption and production?
- How are such messages conveyed?
- How do new participants internalize these messages? How do the seem to react divergently?

Methods

- Data was collected through both interviews and observation at Bikes for Change, a community-based organization.
    - Four staff members who had gone through the program and then gone on to work at the organization agreed to participate in semi-structured interviews of 30-60 minutes. The ranged in age from nineteen to twenty-three years. One interviewee was female, three were male.
    - I formally observed two, four-hour sessions of the youth program in operation. I also made less formal observations in my weekly role as a program volunteer. On all of these occasions I was a participant-observer.

Interview Protocol

Interview Questions

First, I want to thank you for agreeing to this interview, I appreciate your sharing your thoughts, experiences, and expertise with me.

I want to reiterate that this interview is for work I am doing at Boston College. When I write up the interview, you'll be identified only with a pseudonym, so you actually remain anonymous.

With your permission I'd like to audio record the interview so that I don't have to write everything down. This recording will never be broadcast or anything, it's so that I can look back on this later.

I also want to be really clear that you can decide not to answer certain questions, you can decide not to answer any questions, you can end the interview any time you want to.

You've received and had a chance to read and sign an informed consent form, right?

Preliminary Data
Tell me a little bit about yourself now. How old are you now? School? Work?

Probes:

- Where do/did you go to school? How far along are you? Full-time? Part-time? How do you feel about school?
- Do you work? Full-time? Part-time? Where/doing what? How do you feel about that job?
- Where are you from? Where do you live now? Who was in your family growing up?
- How would you describe your neighborhood growing up?
- How has the area changed or stayed the same economically?
- Then, the demographic questions -- how would you prefer to identify yourself ethnically?

History at BNB
Tell me a little bit about BNB. How do you see it?

Can you talk a bit about your involvement at BNB? What do you do here now?
Probes:

- How old were you when you first got involved at BNB? How did that happen? What drew you?
- Why are you still involved?
- Over the years, what has your involvement with BNB? What roles have you played?
- What were some of the things that kept you hanging around?
  - Tell me about some people at BNB that have been special to you.
  - What sorts of things have you enjoyed doing and learning?
  - What have been some of the challenges?

Ideology and BNB
Over the years you've spent here, you may have identified some of the values that get held, practiced, and promoted here. I wonder if you could name what YOU see those values to be.

- Based on your own experience, what values are important here?

- Could you give an example of how those values show up here?

Probes:
- Could you give an example of that value being lived or promoted in your experience here?
- Is this a value that fits with your life outside of BNB? How so? Why not?
- What values are in conflict here?

Current Consumer Practices -- Personal
Since we are talking about BNB, let me ask you this. How do you get around? What kind of transportation do you use?
- What are you riding/driving?
- Tell me about your bike(s). Something you've bought? Or something you have built up here at BNB? What have you done to it, what modifications? Why?
- How do you decide what you like when it comes to bikes (cars)?

I am hoping you can talk a bit about your experiences of stuff outside of BNB.
- What would you consider to be your most prized possessions? Tell me about them. (Ask about use, looks, how acquired, why it's important)
- How do you acquire your possessions? What do you get new? Used? Other?
- Do you get stuff on your own or as gifts?
- Where would you say you spend your money?
- Do you enjoy shopping? Tell me a little about the experience of buying something. (Ask about context, place, companions, etc)

Self-Understanding as a Consumer (The Bourdieusian part)
- What would you say influences you to want what you want or to buy what you buy?
- Can we talk a little bit more about your tastes? What kind of stuff do you like? (Brands? Styles?)
- Who else shares your tastes?
- Where do you encounter people with those same tastes? (Ask particularly about FB and other social media, personal encounters, etc.)
- How are your tastes different from the people you know?
- Ask for examples.
- Any other influences?
- Have those things changed over time? Compare to when you were, say, 14.
- If you look at the kids in the BNB program now, do any of them remind you of yourself at that age? Why?

Systematic Consumer/Economic Understandings (Freire)
I'd like to ask a little bit about some of how you see aspects of the world. In your opinion, who has power in our economy?

Probes:

- How do they exercise that power?
- What do they use that power for?
- What power do you have?
- Can you describe a time you exercised power as a consumer?
- Can you describe a way others have exerted power over you as a consumer?

Past Consumer Practices and Understandings

I want to ask you to try to remember your 14-year-old self, and think about some of those same questions.

- What kind of stuff did you like? What were your tastes?
- Who shared your tastes then?
- What influenced you to get what you got, to want what you wanted?
- Did you have money to spend? From where?
- What were your most valued possessions? Why?

Self-Reflection on Differences over Time (More Freire)

How do you see yourself as being similar today? How do you see yourself as different? Is there an event or an idea that highlights changes in your thinking over that time?

Self-Understanding of Role of BNB on Changes

Do you think the time you've spent at BNB over the years has affected the way you think, what you buy, what you like?

- Does the practice of fixing things here carry over into other aspects of your life in terms of what you buy or don't buy? Other practices?
- Does the practice of working with kids here carry over into other aspects of your life?
- How does what you teach here affect they ways you think and act in other contexts?
- Could you give an example?

Wrap-Up

Is there anything else that you would like to tell me, anything else you want me to know about any of this? About the experience of BNB, about your view of the economy, about the ways you are and the ways you were?

Thank the participant.