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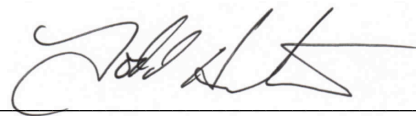
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Todd D. Hunter



Kurt Fredrickson

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THE REINTEGRATION OF DOCTRINE WITH CHURCH LIFE AND MISSION

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF THE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

RICHARD B. YALE
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ABSTRACT

The Reintegration of Doctrine with Church Life and Mission

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Doctor of Ministry

School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary

2015

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the disconnection of Christian doctrine from both the practices internal to congregational life, and the church's external mission, particularly in Episcopal and Anglican congregations; and discuss how the synthesis of basic Christian practices, the contextual reframing of baptismal vows, and the teaching of doctrine as narrative can work toward their reintegration among the members of congregations.

It begins with a discussion of how the three areas have become disconnected in late modernity, using the insights of philosopher Charles Taylor and his concept of "social imaginaries." What is suggested is that the Christian social imaginary has been subverted by modern secularist ones. This theory is expanded by critique of the approaches of both traditionalist and progressive Anglicans in dealing with it.

A theoretical framework is discussed presenting doctrine as the vision, end, or *telos* which is pursued by the intentions of believers, and is shaped by a set of basic practices. The vision is framed as doctrine reframed as the narrative of God's mission, with its proper end being the Reign of God, rather than focus upon propositions. Intentions are explored through the classical promises made at baptism, and the vows of monasticism, together with discussion of a set of basic practices and their role in Christian formation.

Vision, intention, and practices are discussed in terms of knowing the story of God, committing to that story, and participating in it. A narrative scriptural theology provides the vision, and becomes a common doctrinal core. Intention is pursued through reframing baptismal vows. The basic practices discussed are Eucharist, the Daily Office, Lectio Divina, ministry to and with the marginalized and poor, and indwelling neighborhoods as places of mission. The proposals are then discussed the larger issues of leadership and further strategies for implementation.

Content Reader: Todd D. Hunter, D.Min.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to explore how parishes might reintegrate doctrine with church life and mission. It will address the problem through reframing doctrine as narrative, commitment to the vows of baptism, and engaging in a basic set of congregational and missional practices. This study is written particularly with Episcopal and Anglican congregations in mind, but it is hoped that many of the insights can be applied in other churches and traditions.

My interest in this topic began in earnest with the controversy and crisis which gripped the Episcopal Church in 2003 with the election and ordination of Gene Robinson as the first openly gay man in a relationship as Bishop of the Diocese of New Hampshire. Beyond the various issues surrounding Christian sexuality, the crisis revealed for me the disconnection in congregations between the application of basic Christian doctrine beyond recourse to platitudes of the right and left while discussing the issues. Many of my colleagues, in the weeks and months which followed these events, summoned their parishioners to open forums and discussions, believing that an honest airing of feelings and concerns would reveal a way forward in the midst of divergent opinions on sexual issues. Rarely, it seems, did this work out well, except in instances where the overwhelming majority held the same perspective on the issue at hand. As reported to me, there seemed to be far too little common ground theologically or politically to have any constructive dialogue. In one instance, in which I was asked to facilitate a dialogue in a small neighboring Episcopal congregation, battle lines were drawn quickly between the “liberal” and “conservative” factions. What recourse there was to the theology of the

Church was restricted to proof texts and verbal parrying. The congregation soon divided, and eventually closed.

In my parish I opted to avoid the open forum for discussion, and decided instead to deal on a personal and pastoral basis with concerns and questions from all sides of the issue. While my approach avoided the conflagrations that engulfed more than a few congregations, it did little to allay my fear that, were we to have a similar conversation, we would arrive at a similar schism as these other congregations. What I did discover, even with attendant biblical quotations from people from all sides, was that primary motivators had more to do with previous political positions and personal history than with their Christian faith, and that there could be little common ground theologically between members of my congregation.

Of course, this dynamic had long been at work in every parish in which I had served since my ordination in 1985. When I served as an assistant in several congregations in Southern California, this was a reality to be tolerated. When I became the rector of my own congregation in Northern California, I imagined that the consistent preaching and teaching of what I sometimes referred to as “congenial orthodoxy” would create a common theological ground from which our life and mission would flow. It would also be from this common theological consensus that we could navigate contentious issues from human sexuality, through divisions surrounding music in worship, to a common missional posture toward the homeless in our city. The divisions that I saw manifested in 2003 revealed that my preaching and teaching had failed in this respect. I began to wonder if the people’s opinions about the faith and doctrine of the

Church had been formed by larger social and political commitments and affiliations, with doctrine tailored to support their a priori stances.

Since that time I have become more acutely aware that there is a disconnection between two vital aspects that comprise the life of each congregation from the doctrine of the Church. These two aspects are: the practices, programs, and polity that make up the internal life of each congregation, and its mission beyond its borders in the name of Christ. Furthermore, this disconnection results in a diminution of each. We can readily identify how this occurs in various aspects of parish life. Fellowship, rather than being reflective of the *koinonia* of the Holy Spirit and bearing each other's' burdens in Christ, is reduced to social connections, often weaker than that of the Rotary Club or bowling league. Worship, even for those churches engaged traditional liturgy and music, can be lowered to the level of performance for an audience pulled by many consumer choices, rather than the work of the people glorifying God. Pastoral care is reduced to low cost therapy.¹ Such lines of inquiry can be traced along a variety of other aspects of congregational life as well.

In terms of mission, this reductionism can be seen in even greater relief. In the Baptismal Covenant in the *Book of Common Prayer*, Episcopalians promise to engage in the undeniably missional practices of proclaiming by word and example the Good News of God in Christ, seeking and serving Christ in others, loving our neighbor, and striving for justice and peace among all people.² Such full-orbed mission is rarely in my

¹ David E. Fitch, *The Great Giveaway* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 73-74.

² The Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corp., 1979), 305.

experience understood as a unified witness to the mission of God in Christ. Evangelism is all too often reduced to employing strategies for church growth. Furthermore, motivations for this reduction of evangelism tend to have less to do with apostolic commissions of Jesus to be his witnesses and to make disciples of all nations (Acts 1:8; Mt. 28:16), rather than the rising anxiety at declining and aging membership both in individual congregations and as a denomination.³

Similarly, mission can be reduced to simple social action without any specific reference to the Christian faith or gospel. On a national level, this is reflected in decision by the General Convention of the Episcopal Church designating the United Nations Millennium Development Goals to eradicate world poverty by 2015 as the top mission priority of the denomination.⁴ In a similar vein, the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church, in their October 2011 message to the denomination, speaks of mission in these terms: “In 2009, General Convention closed with a strong emphasis on mission, mission, mission. . . . God is calling the church to meet Jesus in the marginalized – the poor, the lonely, the suffering, the lost.”⁵ At the same meeting of the Executive Council, resolutions regarding mission were limited to a request that the House of Bishops release a pastoral letter on “the sin of racism,” and support for the Occupy Movement of 2011 as a “powerful witness in the tradition of Jesus to the sinful inequalities in society,” and

³ See Charles Fulton and James Lemler, *Truth and Hope* (Cincinnati: Forward Movement, 2006).

⁴ The Episcopal Church, *One Episcopal*, http://archive.episcopalchurch.org/79425_130307_ENG_HTML.htm (accessed October 22, 2013).

⁵ Episcopal News Service, “A Message from the Episcopal Church Executive Council,” (October 24, 2011), http://archive.episcopalchurch.org/79425_130307_ENG_HTML.htm (accessed October 22, 2013).

calls upon Episcopalians to make their witness in similar fashion.⁶ While many of these goals and actions are laudable, they represent only one slice of vision of the Reign of God. The justice that the Church is called to embody is an extension of God's holiness and righteousness, and God's peace is fulfilled in reconciliation with God and one another in Christ.⁷ The case of affirming the tactics of the Occupy Movement as "in the tradition of Jesus" aligns a clear Gospel imperative of engaging in ministry to the marginalized and poor (cf. Mt. 25:33-46) with a particular political ideology.

Congregationally, this reduction of mission to social action can vary in its expression from parish to parish. Some congregations, perhaps more centered in urban centers, such as All Saints' in Pasadena, can engage in social action in a distinctively partisan fashion. Others, perhaps the majority, engage in activities such as serving food at the local homeless shelter or supporting reading programs in underperforming schools in ways not too dissimilar from the Rotary Club or Soroptimists. As with the reduction of mission on a denominational level, the connection with Jesus and the Reign of God atrophies.

This brings us to the diminution of the theological understanding of the members of the church when doctrine becomes disconnected from parish life and mission into the world. In many respects, this mirrors the age old problem of nominal Christianity. Responding to nominal Christianity has occasioned many reform movements throughout Church history, including the early monastic movements, the rise of mendicant orders such as the Franciscans, the Reformation, and the Great Awakenings in the United States,

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer*, 855.

to mention just a few.⁸ Writer for the Religion News Service, Cathy Lynn Grossman, cites several research projects being done among Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant populations that indicate a marked growth of “the Nominals,” “people who claim a religious identity but may live it in name only. They’re proud — but not practicing — Catholics. They’re Protestants who don’t think Jesus is essential to their salvation.”⁹

There is a significant difference between dealing with nominal Christianity today as opposed to previous times. In the past, reform movements and revivals took place within the context of an ostensibly Christian cultural context, in which a return to a more robust orthodox Christian faith and practice on the part of the nominal Christian received societal approval and perhaps even official support. Without the societal support, more and more of the “nominals” will move into the growing category of the religious unaffiliated, the so called “nones.”¹⁰ Episcopalian historian and columnist Diana Butler Bass comments, “Generally, being part of a faith tradition ‘in name only’ will be increasingly hard to maintain as society grows more accepting of people who have no religious ties.”¹¹

Yet even those who are firmly ensconced in the life of the church can experience this disconnect between faith and life. In more instances than most pastors would like to

⁸ Certainly wisdom in dealing with our current situation can be gleaned in part from such movements.

⁹ Cathy Lynn Grossman, “Religious ‘Nominals’ Drifting Away from Mainstream Judaism and Christianity.” *Huffington Post* (October 5 2013). http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/10/05/religious-nominals-judaism-christianity_n_4032592.html?view=print&comm_ref=false (accessed October 8, 2013).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

admit, what doctrine that is adhered to often serves as markers of ecclesiastical identity rather than as a font of Christian living. In David Fitch's use of the philosophy of Slavoj Zizek, doctrine has become a "Master Signifier." In defining this Fitch writes that a Master Signifier is "a conceptual object to which people give their allegiance."¹² And yet, it remains empty; "It is an enigma for the members themselves because no one really knows what it means; but each of them presupposes that all the others know."¹³

The question that all this raises is: how are we to reintegrate doctrine with church life and mission? Few in my experience deny that there has been a significant disconnect, whether they are evangelical, mainline Protestant, or Catholic. What varies are the approaches to deal with the situation. Two ranges of approaches will be discussed and critiqued. First, there is a more conservative strategy of focusing upon the dissemination of Christian doctrine that will in turn shape polity and mission. Second, there is the so-called Progressive Christian approach of focusing upon Christian practice with little, if any, consensus upon the content of doctrine.

What will be presented as a third option will be a view of Christian formation affirmed by writers such as Alasdair McIntyre and James K.A. Smith, which sees Christian life as the intention of the heart aimed at a specific *telos* or end, which is formed by a set of practices which are both shaped by and apprehend the *telos*. Our three aspects we seek to reintegrate are present within this view of formation. The end that the Church pursues is the final purposes of God for creation most often discussed under the rubric of the Kingdom or Reign of God. This end is expressed through doctrine, not as a

¹² David E. Fitch, *The End of Evangelicalism?* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 203.

¹³ Ibid.

set of propositions that inculcate a worldview, but as a grand narrative of God's actions in history in Christ Jesus through the Spirit.

The practices that will be discussed which embody and apprehend this end are the Eucharist, the Daily Office, *Lectio Divina*, ministry to and with the poor and marginalized, and indwelling our neighborhoods as the locale of the in-breaking Reign of God. This is not an exhaustive set of practices. Indeed they exist within a much larger matrix of practices within the congregation. Nevertheless, these five can be considered as basic practices in which all members of the congregation can participate.

Connecting the practices, I suggest, to the *telos* expressed through the doctrinal narrative of the church are the intentions of the heart. Thus work among the poor, for instance, finds its proper *telos* not in merely in the sense of civic duty or political action, though it may be both, but as a foretaste of the Reign of God manifest in Jesus Christ. While much fruit can be conceivably borne through an exploration of what specific intentions that a congregation might hold in common, we might be better served by a reflection upon the intentions we already share with the people of God as expressed in our baptismal vows. As an Episcopalian these intentions are expressed in the classical renunciations of the devil, the world, and the flesh, combined with the adherence to belief and trust in Christ, and the commitment to follow and obey him. What is required is to reflect on them in light of our context, both in the broad sense of North America in late modernity and in the more focused sense of our local contexts.

Part One of this study will consider two core issues: 1) the sources of this disconnection we have observed above, and 2) will critique two Anglican responses to

the problem. While a thorough study of the current situation could take an encyclopedic look at the considerable literature concerning the end of Christendom and the emergence of the modern and postmodern conditions, attention here will be focused on Charles Taylor's theory of secularization as a shift in the social imaginaries of modernism from being grounded in transcendent values and time to what he refers to as "the Great Disembedding." In this disembedding, the three central questions of humanity's relationship to the cosmos, the nature of human society, and the meaning of human thriving are no longer derived from larger narratives involving the divine or being itself, but are explored self-referentially through human reason, science, and politics.

Taylor's theory of secularization finds an interesting parallel in the recent book, *Bad Religion: How America Became a Nation of Heretics* by New York Times columnist, Ross Douthat. From the perspective of this study, Douthat illustrates how Christian beliefs and practice disembedded from a transcendent source pursue non-Christian ends. We see this in the reduction of spirituality to neo-gnostic asceticism, the health and wealth gospel, and the identification of the Christian faith with partisan political agendas. These all stem from a prior theological error of trying to remove the scandal of Jesus by reducing him to a sage or mere prophet of love and tolerance.

Part One continues with critiquing two current approaches to the problem. These two ineffective approaches closely correspond to two differing, but equally problematic strategies, Douthat has identified for dealing with the disintegration of Christian life in America. They are resistance and retrenchment on the one hand or accommodation to late modern values and practices on the other hand.

While certainly a minority voice in North American Anglicanism, there is a growing movement, represented by the recent “Jerusalem Declaration” affirmed by conservative Anglicans, to return to the proclamation of traditional Anglican theology, especially as enshrined in the Reformation era *Articles of Religion* and the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*. The Anglican Church in North America’s recently published *To Be a Christian: An Anglican Catechism* employs the principles of the “Jerusalem Declaration” in a resource envisioned as renewing a basic knowledge of classical Anglican doctrine among individual church members and inquirers. In Douthat’s parlance, this is a strategy of resistance.

A prominent strategy of accommodation can be seen in the work of Episcopalian writer Diana Butler Bass, especially in her book *Christianity after Religion*. Many of the aspects of Bass’s approach find parallels with the proposals I will make in the chapters that follow. This is especially true in the emphasis she gives to the concept of practices in Christian life and formation. Yet there are significant points of divergence between her vision and the one presented in this paper. In Bass’s view priority is given to faith as subjective experience, with doctrine as expression of such experience. This follows closely the experiential-expressive model of George Lindbeck.¹⁴ The problem inherent in this approach is the discernment of any specific Christian end or *telos* beyond the experience of the individual, and the susceptibility to the imposition of the ends of late modernity as discussed by both Taylor and Douthat.

In Part Two we begin to build the theological foundation for the task of reintegrating doctrine, ecclesial practice, and mission. The reintegration will be

¹⁴ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 16.

accomplished through a review of significant theological, philosophical, and missional writings which will inform our work. I will then propose a theology grounded in the mission of God to give shape to the task before us. Our literature review will begin with the first section of N.T. Wright's monumental *New Testament and the People of God*. In the early chapters Wright expounds hermeneutical principles for reading Scripture as a single grand narrative. Wright's work will be supplemented with David Bosch's work on theology as the mission of God. Together their perspectives will help form the basis for understanding doctrine as narrative, enabling pastors and congregations to sail between the Scylla of propositionalism and the Charybdis of experientialism. The philosophical anthropology of James K. A. Smith in his book, *Desiring the Kingdom*, will provide the epistemological underpinning of the proposals which will be made in the Third Part of the book, while Alan Roxburgh in *Missional Map Making* applies Charles Taylor's concept of the social imaginary to the church's life and mission in late modern and postmodern America. Finally, the spiritual insights of the late Dallas Willard in *Renovation of the Heart* will help provide a concrete means of employing Smith's anthropology in congregational settings.

Informed by these theorists and theologians, the latter half of Part Two will propose a narrative theology that informs church practice and polity and the church's mission in the world. The contours and trajectory of this narrative is grounded in the scriptural story from Genesis through Revelation. This theological perspective will employ the concept of the mission of God, the *missio Dei*, as the primary motif of doctrine, with the biblical idea of the Reign or Kingdom of God as the *telos* of the

narrative and of the Church's call and mission. Particular focus will be upon several prominent themes in the narrative. In Genesis the theme of human creation as being in the image of God emerges. This presents a multifaceted human vocation as a community of priests and stewards of God. This vocation has parallels with the three aspects of ecclesial life that we seek to reintegrate. Further exploration of the Old Testament narratives will focus upon the idea of covenant and the practices which constitute the covenantal life. All these themes are then recapitulated in the life and ministry of Jesus. This narrative that finds its full expression in Jesus is carried on by the Spirit-filled Church as a continuation of Christ's mission in its own practices and mission.

The narrative embodied, announced, and demonstrated by Jesus illuminates the end or *telos* of the Reign of God. The reign of God is then pursued by the church. It is this core pursuit that has the potential to reintegrate our three aspects of ecclesial existence. Once a clear *telos* is in view, one's heart then naturally intends to pursue that end through the practices of the church as discussed earlier in this introduction. The task, then, is to make concrete proposals on the presentation, teaching, and proclamation of our narrative theology, the congregational expression of their baptismal vows, and the seeding of the basic practices of the church. Such strategies can take the form of small group formation, renewed catechesis, or more subtle measures in integrating these into the life of a congregation. These proposals also exist within, and depend upon coherence with the larger framework of congregational life, including such aspects of leadership, preaching, and the crafting of liturgy. While these are not directly a part of the proposals that are to be explored, such other practices of ecclesial life provide the necessary context

for the pursuit of the vision of doctrinal, ecclesial, and missional reintegration presented here.

What is at stake here is more than just the frustrations of an Episcopal priest as I find myself wrestling with the disintegration and disconnection of doctrine from polity and mission. The issue ultimately is about the integrity and vitality of our proclamation and life in an increasingly secular society. As disintegration continues apace, so does the loss of both the Church's distinctiveness within this society and our ability to herald, sign, and foretaste of the Reign of God. What these pages present is hardly a "fix" to our situation. What the Church needs to be and do in our culture and context is a multifaceted and vexing challenge being discussed by many pastors, theologians, and practitioners. What I offer here is my modest contribution to our common life and mission in our day.

I write as a priest of the Episcopal Church in the United States, raised in a broad Anglican setting. It will be evident that I write from this context and will most likely find an audience among my North American Anglican and Episcopalian sisters and brothers. I hope, however, that those from other backgrounds and traditions—mainline, Evangelical, Orthodox, and Catholic—might find something of worth here, and *mutatis mutandis* share my concerns and vision for the reintegration of doctrine, polity, and mission in their own settings.

PART ONE
THE MINISTRY CHALLENGE

CHAPTER 1
THE DISEMBEDDED SOCIETY

In 1949 Dorothy Sayers parodied the Catechism of the Church of England in a way that aptly describes the predicament in which contemporary churches find themselves when they assess the disconnection between their doctrinal positions and their application of said doctrine to the lives of Christians. Concerning the Trinity she wrote, “Q.: What is the doctrine of the Trinity? A.: ‘The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the whole thing incomprehensible.’ Something put in by theologians to make it more difficult – nothing to do with daily life and ethics.”¹ A review of the considerable literature assessing the situation of contemporary congregational life would find few dissenters to this idea of disintegration so disarmingly described by Sayers. While church leaders and theologians might describe the problem differently, it would not be too much of an exaggeration to suggest that there is a growing consensus that something has gone awry.

¹ Dorothy Sayers, *Creed or Chaos* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1949), 22.

For Alan Hirsch the Church has forgotten what he calls the Apostolic Genius of the early church: the paradigm consisting of a passion for Jesus, a practice of disciple making, missional-incarnational impulse, the recovery of apostolic ministry, flexible organic systems, and Christian fellowship based on “*communitas*,” a group identity forged in the liminal adventure of mission.² David Fitch describes the disintegration specifically as it has manifested itself in evangelical congregations. He discusses the situation as “the Great Giveaway,” wherein congregations have given away their core practices either by adopting the secular models of modernity, such as the methods of corporate world replacing biblical models of leadership, or by outsourcing what should be core ecclesial practices to outside experts or parachurch organizations.³ In this latter sense of the giveaway, spiritual formation is outsourced to psychotherapists and evangelism of young people to groups such as Young Life and Campus Crusade for Christ. While Fitch is explicitly critiquing Evangelicalism in the United States, those in mainline churches certainly will see themselves reflected in his works as well. Such descriptions, and the myriad of others that could be cited, while different, have many points of overlapping diagnoses and concerns. The question, of course, is how to address the situation.

² See Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006).

³ David E. Fitch, *The Great Giveaway* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 13.

The Lapsarian Mindset

While taken on their own, the numerous ideas, programs, and strategies for renewal may have much to commend themselves, addressing the larger issue of disintegration that has been described here requires standing back and taking a look at the root cause or causes of the predicament. One perennial means of discussing the larger issue is to employ what can be called the “lapsarian mindset.”⁴ The current dilemma the churches face stem from a moment, movement, or intellectual revolution in history that constitutes a “fall” from an earlier vitality or integrity that the Church experienced before this lapse. The means of revitalization for those engaged in this lapsarian mindset is to return to the commitments and practices of earlier more pure or innocent time.

Candidates for the historical event that constitutes the fall abound, and vary from one tradition to another. Thus for a certain strand of traditionalist Roman Catholicism the lapse occurred with the Second Vatican Council. More conservative Episcopalians might point to the ordination of women and the adoption of the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* in 1976⁵ or the ordination to the episcopate of a partnered gay man, Gene Robinson, in 2003.

Most often, however, identification of the critical turn in history after which the shape of the Church’s belief, practice, and mission are deleteriously changed is tied to more epochal changes and shifts. Prominent in the writings of many theologians and

⁴ This is admittedly a neologism that the author has coined to delineate the mindset outlined here.

⁵ It should be noted that the first vote in General Convention on the new Prayer Book was in 1976, with the canonically required second vote at Convention 1979. Thus the conflict over both ordination and Prayer Book coincided.

church leaders is the identification of the vast shifts that occur beginning with Constantine, with the adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire. Here we see the movement of the Church from being an eschatological community and sign often over and against the presumptions of imperial power to supporting and underwriting the state.⁶ In the terms of disintegration that are being employed here, this shift which begins in the late Roman period saw doctrine expressed increasingly in abstract and speculative doctrines and less as the narrative of God's creating and redeeming work in the world, and church polity began mirroring civic organization and supported the political system. The concept of mission underwent similar deformation. To non-Christian populations mission was all too often tied to territorial expansion of empire or principality, while mission internal to Christendom was reduced to providing the means for the believer to get to heaven after death.⁷ Alan Hirsch sees this emergence of Christendom as a colossal defeat for the Church as it entailed the emergence of a calcified institution marked by institutionalism focused upon church hierarchy and control of the means of grace through the sacramental system.⁸

Certainly grappling with the legacy of the Constantinian shift is, and will continue to be, a significant challenge to be faced by all churches in our Post-Christendom situation. Nevertheless, the temptation of the lapsarian mindset is to idealize a past era, in this case a romanticization of the early church, which also constitutes a dismissal of the

⁶ See Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom* (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2004), 22ff.

⁷ Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishers, 2000), 109.

⁸ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 276.

grace present throughout history, and an inability to learn from both the successes and failures of the past. For instance, Hirsch tells us that the church prior to Constantine was a non-hierarchical movement with organic leadership, and yet it is clear from the sub-apostolic patristic writings such as Ignatius of Antioch that some early form of the episcopate had emerged.⁹ Hirsch's proposals for the renewal of the Church are grounded in the recovery of pre-Constantinian church's organic five-fold leadership ethos found in Ephesians 4:11, apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher.¹⁰ The problem is that there is scant evidence of such a five-fold organization of leadership, or that patristic exegetes, beginning with the post-apostolic writers read Ephesians 4:11 as prescriptive of authentic Christian leadership. This is not to say that reflection on Ephesians 4:11 will not bear fruit in envisioning church leadership in our time and context, but to maintain, as certain strands of lapsarian thinking are wont, that return to some prelapsarian model is the *sine qua non* of renewal is not tenable. As suggested, it is often a call to an imaginary past. But even when the description of the supposed ideal era has some grounding in accurate historical documentation, the current historical moment and context is so significantly different that a real return to such earlier models is impossible. The past practice, tradition, and vitality of previous eras are certainly resources for congregations and denominations today grappling with disintegration as it has been described here, but

⁹ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 153. See Ignatius of Antioch's Epistle to Smyrna, chapter VIII as evidence directly counter to Hirsch's hypothesis.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 170.

the disconnection between doctrine, ecclesial practice, and mission cannot be avoided by returning to an idyllic past.¹¹

Disintegration and Translation

In reality, rather than being the result of some fall, the process of disintegration is inevitable in churches, and in fact has been evident from the beginning. One need look no further than the New Testament to see this at work. Consider the situation in the church in Corinth. The disintegration between their Eucharistic practice from a theology the indivisibility of Christ expressed both ecclesiological and sacramentally results in the congregation riven with class distinction, which would also have a deleterious effect in their mission to be a sign and foretaste of the Reign of God in the midst of an unbelieving world (cf. I Corinthians 11:17-34).

Disintegration is inevitable because of the very nature of God's mission to redeem and restore fallen humanity and a disfigured creation. Darrell Guder expresses this as the gracious risk that God takes in entering into human history in Christ Jesus, subject to the vicissitudes of history, and committing the message of this saving work to fallible human communities and individuals.¹² Rather than the message being transmitted by the communication of immutable universal truths that require the submission of the will, it is transmitted as personal encounter with the living Christ in community, where the primary

¹¹ This lapsarian strategy can push further back than Constantine. A common tactic among Episcopalians debating open communion, for instance, is to discount Paul in favor of the pristine inclusivity of Jesus. Yet even the Gospels can be the targets of this mindset, looking behind the ecclesiastical accretions to the "real" Jesus.

¹² Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, 74.

modes of reception are the virtues of faith, hope, and love. The message is also conveyed in time, to people in different contexts and cultures.

Missiologist Lamin Sanneh has described this transmission of the Christian faith as a matter of translation. In contrast to Islam that spreads its message through diffusion of untranslatable Scriptures that privilege Arabic language and culture, Christianity has been spread through translating its message into different languages and cultures.¹³

Although it was not without much debate and controversy, the early church did not privilege Jewish culture and language as normative for all Christians, but could be rendered in the vernacular, and lived within the context of varying cultural expressions. Certainly some aspects of the host culture would be challenged and contradicted by the gospel.¹⁴ Whereas other aspects of the culture could be brought into service of the new faith, and, indeed, add to the larger tradition of faith.¹⁵

It is precisely in this act of translation that the possibility of disintegration exists. This can happen in two ways. On the one hand the critical stance of the Gospel toward the culture is mitigated, perhaps for what may seem as exceptions for sound pastoral or evangelistic purposes, and practices that are inimical to the Gospel become normative. Consider the pastoral stance that many churches have taken toward those Christians

¹³ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, 2nd Edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009), 1.

¹⁴ One obvious example of this is the Roman practice of infanticide, exposing unwanted babies to the elements. This was expressly forbidden by the early Christians. See Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 126-127.

¹⁵ A well-known example of such enculturation is Vincent Donovan's description of Eucharistic worship among the Masai people, during which a tuft of grass was passed from person to person during the worship as an embodiment of peace and reconciliation. If at any time the grass would stop the Eucharist would not proceed. Cited in Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1983), 110-111.

facing divorce. It has resulted not in occasional exceptions to the norm, but in divorce rates among Christians that are largely indistinguishable from non-Christian couples. The other potential is for some cultural form or expression becoming a vehicle for Christian life and mission but instead supplants the Gospel as the proper end or purpose of a practice. Here one might think of the Christian leader going beyond skills that might be learned from secular business management to instead defining success by the same criteria as a CEO of a multi-national corporation.¹⁶

Disintegration is thus unavoidable and chronic in the life and experience of the church. What will vary from era to era and from one context to another are the particular ways disintegration is manifested. Furthermore, the church will need to wrestle with these various forms and sources of disintegration as it has inherited them through history. Thus while grappling with the legacy of Constantinianism, American denominations also need to face the disintegration received from the development of American denominationalism, which has resulted in churches as brands for spiritual consumers.¹⁷ There is, in fact, no Grand Unified Theory of ecclesial disintegration and requisite reintegration. Constantinianism or the loss of Apostolic Genius is not the sufficient cause of all our maladies among the churches of the West. All causes are partial and all strategies for response are provisional, often specific to a particular time and place. What is helpful in exploring moments, movements, and historical processes where crucial and deleterious turns are made, is that the church is provided a framework in which to

¹⁶ See Fitch, *The Great Giveaway*, 73-75.

¹⁷ Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 83.

propose a response. But congregations should explore past responses aware that they will not “solve” the problem, and that Christian existence will always entail the risk of translation and what Guder calls “Gospel reductionism.”¹⁸

The Great Disembedding

The problems resulting from the Constantinian legacy will continue draw the attention of Christian leaders and theologians. Nevertheless, it cannot serve as a Grand Unified Theory of what ails Christian life and practice in the twenty-first century. Other accounts of the disintegration of doctrine, ecclesial life, and mission can help highlight aspects often missed, and assist in avoiding engaging in a lapsarian mindset in search of the idyllic past. One such account can be found in the work of Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor and his work on the process of secularization in his books *Modern Social Imaginaries* and the magisterial *A Secular Age*.

In Taylor’s retelling of the narrative of the modern era, Western civilization has undergone since the late Middle Ages what he calls “The Great Disembedding.”¹⁹ Central to his thesis is the concept of a “social imaginary.” By this he means a pre-theoretical construct of story, ritual, legend, and practices shared by a wide social grouping, broader and deeper than the theoretical reflection of an intellectual elite. A social imaginary is so pervasive that a society or group cannot imagine life constituted differently from this common “imagination.” An interesting, if tragic, example of this is the inability of the foreign policy mavens under President George W. Bush to imagine that the people

¹⁸ Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, 98.

¹⁹ Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 49.

“liberated” from the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein would desire anything other than liberal democracy in the governance of their country.

Three critical questions that social imaginaries seek to answer concern the people’s relationship to the gods, God or the cosmos, the right ordering of human society, and the meaning of human flourishing.²⁰ Taylor sees three great epochs that have answered these three questions differently. Earliest societies were fully embedded in an enchanted cosmos where there was no delineation between the sacred and secular. The world was full of gods and spirits, which, on the whole, tended to be indifferent to human society and flourishing. There was a capriciousness of the divine world which is evident in ancient myths, such as those recounted by the early Greeks. Human flourishing in such cultures focused upon the survival of the society amid a hostile world and capricious deities and spirits. The ordering of the society was centered in sacral leadership that functioned both religiously and politically, propitiating the gods and organizing the people for their survival.²¹

A profound shift begins to occur in the last millennium among a number of civilizations, seemingly independent of one another when “higher religions” begin to emerge. Taylor calls this the “post-axial” era, employing Karl Jasper’s reference to the “axial age.”²² This was the age of Confucius, Gautama, Socrates, and the Hebrew Prophets. While the world was still viewed as enchanted and populated by spiritual

²⁰ Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 56.

²¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 147-149.

²² Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 57.

forces, both good and evil, the Divine, though construed differently in different cultures, ceases being capricious and is viewed as benevolent. Combined with this, the Divine also is viewed as transcending the cosmos, inhabiting now a heavenly realm or sphere.²³

This had implications for the ordering of the social order, as it was now to be construed as a reflection of the heavenly or ideal order.²⁴ Examples range from Confucius' heavenly hierarchy reflected in Imperial China, Plato's *Republic*, and Augustine's *City of God*. Another aspect of this shift in the social imaginary was that in relation to the heavenly or divine realm, the world was now viewed as disordered, and the object of reordering and reform to better reflect the transcendent order.²⁵ Justice emerged as a primary concern of the social order. This differs from pre-axial societies where the world, with both blessing and bane, was taken as given.²⁶ Evil in these early societies is "just a part of the order of things, to be accepted as such," merely the dark or harm-inflicting side of the cosmos.²⁷ The social order was not focused upon social improvement as much as magnifying blessings and mitigating curses, whether spiritual or material.

Human flourishing also is reimagined in post-axial societies. Taylor writes, "The highest human goal can no longer be just to flourish, as it was before. Either a new goal is posited, of a salvation that takes us beyond what we usually understand as human

²³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 151.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 151.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 152.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 151.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 153.

flourishing. Or else Heaven, or the Good, lays the demand on us to imitate or embody its unambiguous goodness, and hence to alter the mundane order of things down here”.²⁸

Human flourishing would still entail the basic needs as it was in early societies, the post-axial imaginary relativizes such needs in light of transcendent ends. Thus self-denial and ascetic practices emerge, not as a denial of the more mundane aspects of flourishing, but for their proper ordering.

The Christian faith as it develops in the New Testament era progresses into the medieval era is a post-axial social imaginary. The answers to the three questions are found in a transcendent framework. Moreover, these answers but become ends to be pursued. These transcendent pursuits become formative of people and are evident in vows made. They are stated in a negative fashion in the classic baptismal renunciations of the Devil, the world, and the flesh. They are also present in varying fashions in monastic vows such as the classic Augustinian commitments to poverty, chastity, and obedience, and the Benedictine vows of stability, *conversation morum*, that is continuing conversion of life, and obedience.

Taylor asserts that in both pre-modern eras, the pre and post-axial, not believing was simply not an option. Atheism as understood today with the affirmation of the “immanent frame,” a socially constructed space which precludes transcendence, was not possible. One might convert to a non-theistic post-axial social imaginary such as Platonism or Stoicism, yet such an imaginary would still be reflective of some semblance of transcendence, such as the Realm of Ideas or the Logos. The pre-modern self, in

²⁸ Ibid., 152.

Taylor's terms, is a "porous self," open to enchantment, to grace on the one hand and possession on the other, and to the spirits or the Spirit.

Beginning with the late Medieval era Taylor posits that this post-axial social imaginary begins giving way to modern social imaginaries which, for the first time, make non-belief a viable option. This is "the Great Disembedding." The story of this disembedding that Taylor weaves is a long and complex which takes the better part of his magnum opus, *A Secular Age*, to tell. For the purposes of this discussion of the disintegration of doctrine, ecclesial life, and mission a few salient points need to be mentioned.

First, the process of secularization is a long historical process, and its genesis cannot be identified by a single date or event. We cannot point to where the wrong turn was made as is possible for those who point to the conversion of Constantine or the Edict of Milan. It predates by centuries the ideas of Rene Descartes and the devastation wrought by Protestant and Catholic kings and princes fighting each other in the Thirty Years War. The process begins in Taylor's story with subtle reforms to Christian life and practice in the late Middle Ages and continue with both the Protestant and Catholic Reformations of the sixteenth century.²⁹ What this means is that there can be no recourse to the lapsarian mindset when discussing disintegration from within the framework of secularization which Taylor offers. There is no identifiable fall, nor an ideal age to which the Church might return. There is simply no going back.

Secondly, the process of secularization was not a top down project of philosophers and scientists. Certainly theorists contributed to the process. But the point

²⁹ Ibid., 291.

Taylor is making through his concept of social imaginaries is that secularization happens through shifts in a whole matrix of stories, theories, ritual, art, and myth. This explains the shortcomings of preaching and teaching described in the introduction. Too often preaching is offered as a top down dissemination, not able to penetrate the existing social imaginaries. Any proposal that can address the disintegration discussed herein must be undertaken on the level not simply as better presentation of pertinent ideas or doctrines, but the seeding of an alternate social imaginary among a people. Any proposed alternate imaginary that is open to transcendence will not be a return to a post-axial Christian imaginary, but will be a different - but no less - modern imaginary.

It is also important to point out that people can inhabit different social imaginaries simultaneously. This is particularly evident among American Christians, such as a sizable number of Evangelicals inhabiting both a form of a Christian imaginary as well as an imaginary of certain strands of conservative politics. This is no less true of many on the “left,” such as Diana Butler Bass inhabiting both a liberal Episcopalian imaginary and a progressive political one. Often there are places of overlap between imaginaries. At times one can subvert another.

Lastly, for the purposes discussed here, among the possible modern social imaginaries are those which exist entirely within the immanent frame. The ends pursued in addressing Taylor’s three questions regarding God or the cosmos, the ordering of society, and the meaning of human flourishing can be rendered without any reference to any transcendent value. Thus the relationship to the cosmos in the immanent frame might become a consideration of the exploration of a godless universe. Visions of a more fair

society present a new end without needing to be underwritten by a heavenly realm, and human flourishing entails pursuing one's own pleasures and passions. In essence, these modern social imaginaries are an invitation to join the crew of the Starship Enterprise as portrayed in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Within such an imaginary one may choose to follow a spiritual or religious path, but it tends to be a quest for authenticity within the immanent frame.³⁰

A Nation of Heretics

Framing the discussion of disintegration within Charles Taylor's work of secularization and social imaginaries, it can be suggested that the problem is the subversion of the Christian imaginary by the ends pursued within the immanent frame. This is illustrated by *New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat in his book, *Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics*. Douthat's thesis is that American religion had always been since the colonial period a mixture of a broad Christian orthodoxy and a myriad of heretical sects, "a succession of fascinating only-in-America faiths" such as Emerson's Transcendentalism, Mormonism, and Christian Science.³¹ Douthat, himself an orthodox Catholic, does not decry this, but sees that often those he would count as heretical "have tugged their Christian countrymen forward toward new ideas, new horizons, new visions of justice, and new experiences of the numinous," citing numerous

³⁰ Ibid., 486.

³¹ Ross Douthat, *Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics* (New York: The Free Press, 2012), 6.

examples such as the Deists and Unitarians among the Founding Fathers, the violent prophetic excesses of John Brown, and the spiritual renewal sparked by Pentecostalism.³²

But the point Douthat makes is that these heretical movements and leaders have always required a robust orthodoxy that bound the nation together and would help mitigate the excesses of ubiquitous heretics. “From the beginning, the existence of a Christian center – first exclusively Protestant, and then eventually accommodating Catholicism as well – has helped bind together a teeming, diverse, and fissiparous nation.”³³ This mainstream of Christian orthodoxy, a sort of “mere Christianity” for a nation without a state church, “provided an invisible mortar for our culture and a common vocabulary for our great debates.”³⁴ Orthodoxy would be both affirming national purpose and also be, in Joseph Bottum’s words, “the unhappy conscience of the American Republic.”³⁵

Douthat sees the zenith of this broad American orthodoxy in the post-World War II era, with the towering figures of Reinhold Niebuhr, Billy Graham, Fulton Sheen, and Martin Luther King Jr. near the center of national culture, conversation, and debate.³⁶ In the 1960s this Christian orthodoxy begins to enter into rapid decline, and the heretical movements begin to take center stage, with heretical ideas and practices present now

³² Ibid., 7.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 19-54.

within heretofore orthodox denominations.³⁷ To employ Taylor’s language, Christian orthodoxy in America has been subverted by other social imaginaries, and has begun pursuing different ends than before.

Douthat outlines four areas where this subversion has taken place. These areas are Christological reductionism, the Prosperity Gospel, a spirituality centered on “the God Within,” and the cooption of Christian churches by partisan politics. While it may seem that they tempt different strands of Christian belief – Christological reductionism seems more prevalent in liberal churches, while evangelicals have been more apt to succumb to the allure of the Prosperity Gospel – each “heresy” manifests itself across the theological spectrum.

The Christological problem is manifested as an attempt to solve the paradoxical character of Jesus himself.³⁸ This is more than just resolving questions concerning his divine and human natures. Douthat sees it in the entirety of the Gospel narratives: the celibate ascetic who turns water to wine; consorting with prostitutes while preaching against lust. “He can be egalitarian and hierarchical, gentle and impatient, extraordinarily charitable and extraordinarily judgemental.”³⁹ Orthodoxy is marked by a “fidelity to the *whole of Jesus*.”⁴⁰ The heretical impulse throughout Christian history has been “to extract

³⁷ Ibid., 55-82.

³⁸ Ibid., 152-153.

³⁹ Ibid., 153.

⁴⁰ Ibid., emphasis in original.

from the tensions of the gospel narratives a more consistent, streamlined, and non-contradictory Jesus.”⁴¹

While this impulse is as old, if not older, than the New Testament documents themselves, the attempts to streamline the portrait of Jesus in way more congenial to contemporary mores and sensibilities has accelerated in recent years. One can point both to scholarly tomes written by people such as Marcus Borg, Elaine Pagels, and Reza Aslan, and to popular works such as the novel *The Da Vinci Code*. While some of the work surrounding this most recent quest for the historical Jesus has been serious and careful scholarship, much of it has been compelled by polemical concerns. In such cases the purpose of this revisioned Jesus is to show first that the orthodox telling of Christian origins was mythical and fraudulent. Instead Christian communities were much more diverse than the expected narrative, and these alternate Christianities were then forcefully suppressed by the orthodox in league with Imperial Rome.⁴²

This itself is a form of the lapsarian mindset, with Constantine again often playing a major role. And yet the near unanimity in the polemical motivations finds no consensus in describing the prelapsarian Jesus or the communities formed in his name. Pagels thus projects a Gnostic Jesus preaching enlightenment rather than redemption, while Borg posits a Jewish mystic and sage critiquing the political theology prevalent in first century Judaism. Others propose their own different views of Jesus.⁴³

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 158.

⁴³ Ibid., 160.

Much of what is going on is simply a projection of the authors' own ideologies and politics. Jesus becomes the cypher embodying contemporary social imaginaries. For instance, "what better way to reimagine their religion for an age of diversity and multiculturalism and 'cafeteria' spirituality than to assert that diversity was in the faith's very DNA – that in the time of the apostles as in the 1970s, Christianity was a do-it-yourself religion, and that details have always been in flux and up for grabs."⁴⁴ This is an apt description of doctrinal disintegration that is not unknown in many Episcopal congregations.⁴⁵

From the perspective of the three questions that social imaginaries seek to answer, this Christological reductionism as it has crept into the popular imagination addresses the question of the relationship with the Divine. Jesus rather than revealing the transcendent God (Jn 1:14), is the one who underwrites American culture's own social projects. If God serves any transcendent role, it is as guarantor of post-mortal existence, which in the popular imagination is viewed as the apotheosis and continuation of the pleasures of and experiences of this present life.⁴⁶ Ultimately the question of the Divine is collapsed into the other two questions of the right ordering of society and the meaning of human flourishing. The other three heresies Douthat discusses can be seen in just this light. The partisan politicization prevalent among conservative Christians, but also among many on the Christian left, has replaced a specifically Christian social imagination for secular

⁴⁴ Ibid., 158-159.

⁴⁵ Evidence of this is the Episcopal congregation which chose Reza Aslan's book on Jesus for its Lenten book study.

⁴⁶ Note eulogies and remembrances often heard at funerals where the emphasis is not about meeting God, but upon reunion with loved ones, often engaged in a favorite hobby or diversion.

imaginaries, which also is a source of ecclesiological disintegration, as the church exists to serve the American project, however one's partisan fellow travelers envision it.

Similarly, Douthat's discussions of both the Prosperity Gospel, advocated by leaders such as Joel Osteen and T.D Jakes, and the spirituality of "the God within" with priority placed on self-discovery and personal happiness show that the classic Christian understanding of human flourishing have been supplanted by more immanent goods. Christian spirituality, rather than transforming people into the likeness of Christ, becomes a project of self-improvement and contentment. Although few Anglicans or Episcopalians have been seduced by the Prosperity Gospel, this has less to do with having superior theological bearings than with the relative affluence of this demographic. Perhaps the prevalence of people having "bucket lists" of desired experiences prior to death is becoming the Episcopalian version of the Prosperity Gospel.

The result becomes a growing number of nominal Christians as mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation. As the ends pursued are increasingly found in the immanent frame, specifically Christian practices will be superfluous to the pursuit. If the goods of human flourishing, for instance, can be more easily attained through access to a financial planner, a therapist, or the Oprah Channel, then the hard work of Christian discipleship and formation will be discarded. This is the end of disintegration.

A Way Forward?

The overlapping insights of Charles Taylor and Ross Douthat help to frame the problem of disintegration as it has been discussed in these pages. The process of

disintegration is not merely the problem of inadequate preaching and teaching; it is in the modern social imaginaries that congregations indwell. Of course, theological content will be a significant part of any proposal to address this problem. But such content will be part and parcel of seeding a renewed Christian social imaginary, replete with stories, rituals, practices, and art, as well as doctrine. While this Christian social imaginary will have significant affinities with the great sweep of the Christian tradition, learning from previous eras of devotion and discipleship, there can be no going back. Any imaginary that is seeded will still be a modern one, with all the risk and susceptibility to subversion that late modern existence entails.

CHAPTER 2

RESISTANCE OR ACCOMODATION

While not all would employ the language of disintegration used here, many from all traditions and theological stripes have been actively working on proposals to address renewal and revitalization in congregations and denominations. Ross Douthat, in discussing Christian responses to the erosion of orthodoxy which began in the 1960s, says that there have been two paths churches could take in responding to the challenges: accommodation or resistance.¹ By accommodation he means an “attempt to sustain Christianity’s midcentury reconciliation with Western liberalism by adapting itself to changing cultural circumstances,” while resistance represented a retrenchment in the old orthodoxies, whether Catholic or Evangelical.² For Douthat, neither strategy proved as fruitful as promised. Nevertheless, this has not prevented their perpetuation to this day.

Certainly not all approaches to the challenges the churches face can be neatly placed in the accommodationist and resister boxes. There have been those who have

¹ Douthat, *Bad Religion*, 83.

² *Ibid.*

sought what might be thought as a third way,³ this proposal among them. But the gravitational pull of one or the other remains a factor. Some “third ways” succumb in one direction or the other.⁴ But perhaps the development of an authentic third way is aided by navigating between the two poles of response.

One of the effects of church leaders adopting either an accommodationist or resistant stance has been division and schism within denominations.⁵ For North American Anglicans, both poles existed for years within the same denomination. In fact, Episcopalians prided themselves in their unity in diversity, referred to as “comprehensiveness,” that not even the American Civil War could sunder. This unity in North American Anglicanism, both in the United States and Canada, did begin to fray beginning in the 1970s with Prayer Book revision and the ordination of women, and continued through the 1980s and accelerated in the 1990s around issues of biblical authority.

The breaking point came with issues surrounding the election of Gene Robinson, a partnered gay man, as Bishop of New Hampshire in 2003, followed shortly by Canadian Bishop Michael Ingham who allowed liturgies for gay and lesbian marriages. These events set off a storm that affected not only North American Anglicans, but the entire global Anglican Communion. The point here is not to retell that story, but rather to note that within North American Anglicanism strategies of accommodation and

³ Among Anglicans Todd Hunter and Scot McKnight would be among those seeking a third way.

⁴ The emerging third way of Brian McLaren’s *A New Kind of Christian* becomes in time the Christian progressivism of *A New Kind of Christianity* some years later.

⁵ Consider divisions within Presbyterianism.

resistance have been institutionalized, the former present in the Episcopal Church (hereafter TEC) and the Anglican Church in Canada, and the latter in the new Anglican Church in North America (hereafter ACNA), which formed in the wake of the crisis which began in 2003 and includes congregations both in the United States and Canada.

Since this proposal in these pages suggests a third way that is specifically, but not exclusively, Anglican, navigation between accommodation and resistance will be charted between different Anglican options. In terms of resistance, the more conservative pole is the return to Anglican confessionalism and a propositional approach to doctrine evident in the new catechism recently produced by the ACNA.⁶ The accommodationist response, on the other hand, is well represented by popular Episcopalian writer Diana Butler Bass, particularly in her recent book *Christianity After Religion*.⁷

The Return to Confessionalism

It is often said that Anglicanism, unlike Lutheranism and the Reformed denominations, has never been confessional in nature. There is no overriding confessional document such as the Augsburg Confession or the Westminster Confession. There are the Articles of Religion, popularly known as the 39 Articles, but the contention

⁶ The Anglican Church in North America, *To Be a Christian: An Anglican Catechism*, https://c119b78671d19b8aee34-1ab073aa91389396dfc8b6aabc9b141e.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/Anglican_Catechism.pdf (accessed July 9, 2014).

⁷ Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion* (New York: HarperOne, 2012).

has been that these moderately Reformed articles have never functioned the way that these other Protestant documents have for their respective churches.⁸

Certainly in TEC the role of the Articles has been in decline for some time. In previous American Prayer Books the Articles were printed after the Catechism. They are still present in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*, but now in a section listed as “Historical Documents” together with a number of other texts such as the Athanasian Creed and the Preface to the first Prayer Book of 1549.⁹ This in effect rendered the Articles as an historical artifact rather than an authoritative Confession.¹⁰ Instead it has been posited that Anglican unity is found not in doctrinal formularies, but in Common Prayer.

The crisis that began in 2003 called into question whether or not the commonalities of Anglican liturgies were an adequate basis for unity, and whether or not something else was needed to maintain unity on the one hand and place limits on diversity on the other.¹¹ A task force convened by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, would produce in October of 2004 “The Windsor Report,” which proposed that an Anglican Covenant be drafted to adjudicate such conflicts. TEC would largely maintain that this was unnecessary. Anglican conservatives from around the globe would

⁸ Whether or not this is entirely true is open to debate. John Henry Newman’s infamous Tract 90 and its inability to square with the theology of the Articles fomented a break in the Oxford Movement and began Newman’s journey to Catholicism.

⁹ The Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer*, 864-878.

¹⁰ Their authority rested lightly even on the shoulders of many theological conservatives in TEC, whose reservation of the Sacrament or inherent Arminianism are flatly contradicted by the Articles.

¹¹ See Drexel W. Gomez and Maurice W. Sinclair, *To Mend the Net* (Carrollton, TX: The Ecclesia Society, 2001).

insist that the proposed Covenant was not enough. Furthermore, they would assert that the sources for Anglican unity and the limits on diversity already existed in the Bible, the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* of the Church of England, and the Articles of Religion.

These confessional elements emerge as the formal principle of conservative Anglicanism, with the 2008 “Jerusalem Declaration.” The Declaration was crafted by a group of conservative Anglicans known as GAFCON, the Global Anglican Future Conference, and became the foundational document for the fledgling ACNA.¹² Whether or not a return to confessionalism is an adequate response to the problems of theological diversity within Anglicanism is well beyond the scope of this present study. What is pertinent here is the extent to which confessionalism emerges as the center of Christian formation in the ACNA, as evidenced by the publication in January 2014 of the seventy-two page *To Be A Christian: An Anglican Catechism*.

Most of the specific content of this new Catechism is unremarkable in its theological teaching, positing a rather moderately conservative Anglicanism, which attempts to steer a middle course between the Anglo-Catholic, Reformed, and charismatic factions that make up the ACNA.¹³ In fact, with the exceptions of the rejection of homosexuality and abortion, it would not be too farfetched to suggest that liberal Episcopalians would allow that the content of the Catechism is within the bounds

¹² GAFCON, “The Jerusalem Declaration,” August 4, 2013, <http://gafcon.org/the-jerusalem-declaration>, (accessed February 12, 2014).

¹³ See for instance, the catechism’s avoidance of the subject of women’s ordination, a controversial topic among various factions of the ACNA.

Anglican comprehensiveness, although they would not accept the theological vision therein as compulsory.

This new catechism is prefaced by an Introduction by J.I. Packer on behalf of the task force that was charged to produce this document, and a “Letter of Recommendation” from the Bishops of the ACNA signed by Archbishop Robert Duncan. Both of these set the broader confessional context in which this new catechism operates. For Packer and the Task Force, this present work is a return to the vibrancy of Reformation Anglicanism, explicitly echoing the style of sixteenth century Prayer Books.¹⁴ Duncan’s remarks place the catechism within the larger framework of Anglican formularies and other sources of authoritative teaching, including the Reformation era texts of the 39 Articles, The King James Bible of 1611, and the earliest editions of the Book of Common Prayer. Arguably, then, this catechism functions for individuals in the way that the formularies discussed above were intended by the GAFCON signatories for the Anglican Communion as a whole, setting limits on belief and practice while trying to establish unity in a non-negotiable core of Christian doctrine and behavior.

It is organized in the classic question and answer format employed since the second Prayer Book of 1552, and is addressed to the individual believer or inquirers. It is divided into four sections, starting with an introductory section on salvation and the meaning of the Gospel, complete with prayers to receive Christ. The subsequent sections are based in the Apostles’ Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Ten Commandments, dealing with Christian believing, Christian life, and Christian “behaving” or morality. Implicit is a process that intends to renew North American Anglicanism along the lines of

¹⁴ The Anglican Church in North America, *To Be a Christian*, 1-2.

resistance. Acceptance of the Gospel in faith turns to “grasping God’s revealed truth about Jesus with our minds,” followed by prayerful communion with God, and obediently doing God’s will.¹⁵

While the specific content of this catechism is a fine example of traditional Christian belief, taken as a whole various overarching affirmations it makes may well prove problematic for the renewal of North American Anglicanism. Three aspects in particular are worthy of mention: the meaning of the Gospel, the understanding of the Kingdom, and the absence of an understanding of mission. In different ways each of these topics will play a significant role in the approach that is being proposed in these pages.

What Is the Gospel?

This new catechism of the ACNA goes out of its way to underscore that it is operating with a very specific meaning of the word “Gospel” upon which the entire document hangs. The meaning presented at the very beginning of the catechism as the “divine remedy” for the problem of sin and personal estrangement from God.¹⁶ The Good News is centered in the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ, which is then received by the individual “personally believing”¹⁷ the truth of Jesus’ actions on our behalf. This faith or belief goes beyond the mere affirmation of facts about God or Jesus toward trust,

¹⁵ Ibid., 52.

¹⁶ Ibid., 3.

¹⁷ Ibid., 10.

surrender, and commitment. Nevertheless, faith is primarily centered in the cognitive grasp of particular propositions. The result is the forgiveness of sins, and the promise of eternal life. This theme, stated expressly in the first five pages proper of the catechism,¹⁸ is reiterated time and time again throughout the text.

This standard evangelical definition of “Gospel” has come under much scrutiny and critique in recent years, particularly among some evangelicals themselves. Dallas Willard famously referred to this understanding as a “Gospel of sin management.”¹⁹ The Good News is reduced to the means by which one’s sins are forgiven and then goes to heaven after death.²⁰ For Willard this disconnects the Christian faith from having any real transformative effect upon the individual. The rest of life between accepting Christ and going to heaven after death is rendered insignificant in any theological or spiritual sense. What occurs is a transferal: the sinless life of Jesus undergoes death so that the sinful life of the believer might be forgiven and receive eternal life. But there is another sort of transference at work as well that is evident in the catechism. If the importance of the transformed life of the Christian is rendered as insignificant to the heart of the Gospel, so also is marginalized the life and ministry of Jesus prior to his death and resurrection. The ministry of Jesus is simply missing from the catechism, which advertises itself as containing “what is essential for Christian faith and life.”²¹ It moves from the virginal

¹⁸ Ibid., 9-14.

¹⁹ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco: 1998), 35.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Anglican Church in North America, *To Be a Christian*, 9.

conception of Jesus, the discussion of which is focused solely on a Chalcedonian turn to divine and human natures of Christ, directly to the sufferings and death of Jesus.²²

A further criticism of such a definition of the Gospel has been made on biblical grounds by evangelical New Testament scholar and recently ordained ACNA deacon Scot McKnight. McKnight would affirm the basic outline presented in the catechism; that of coming to Christ and trusting in his saving death and resurrection, and thus being saved by grace through faith. But this *ordo salutis*, order of salvation, is not coextensive with the term Gospel. Rather the *ordo salutis* exists as a part of the larger frame of the Gospel.²³ McKnight reviews the evidence of the New Testament and the early church and affirms that the Good News is the story in which through the entire life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus the God of Israel is victorious in overcoming sin and injustice and becomes the true King of the cosmos. It is grounded in the story of Israel and its covenant relationship with God which is then recapitulated and embodied in Jesus. Thus the preaching of the Gospel as evidenced in texts such as the sermons recorded in the Acts of the Apostles²⁴ amounts to a retelling of the story of Jesus as the fulfillment of the promises to Israel, or in the case of Paul's sermon on the Areopagus (Acts 17:22-31) as the true fulfillment of all religious longing. The invitation to believe in these instances is an invitation to more than just believe in the merits of Jesus' atoning death, but is an invitation to participate in this new story through baptism and the life of the church. In

²² Ibid., 22-23.

²³ Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 29.

²⁴ Ibid., 166-175.

this regard ACNA bishop Todd Hunter defines belief as “obedient participation” in this story.²⁵

The term *Gospel* cannot be reduced to the mechanism by which individuals are saved, although believing in the soteriological implications of the death and resurrection of Jesus is certainly contained within the Good News. N.T. Wright, in his forward to McKnight’s book, comments

For many people, “the gospel” has shrunk down to a statement about Jesus’ death and its meaning, and a prayer with which people accept it. That matters, the way the rotor blades of a helicopter matter. You won’t get off the ground without them. But rotor blades don’t make a helicopter. And a microcosmic theory of atonement and faith don’t, by themselves, make up “the gospel.”²⁶

Kingdom and Mission

Following on, and perhaps from, this reduction of the term Gospel in the Anglican catechism are the reduction or loss of two other terms that will become significant in this proposal of reintegration; those of kingdom and mission. The Kingdom, or Reign, of God, which has emerged as a central motif in understanding both the ministry of Jesus in the New Testament and the mission of the Church,²⁷ denotes the return of the sovereign rule of the God of Israel, in which the covenant people of God are gathered out of their exile, whether real or spiritual, its sins forgiven, and Israel’s enemies are defeated. The establishment of this reign ushers in God’s shalom, replete with the people reflecting God’s holiness in justice. While the expectation of the inbreaking Reign of God was

²⁵ Todd D. Hunter, *Christianity Beyond Belief* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2009), 37.

²⁶ McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel*, 13.

²⁷ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 31-35.

prevalent among numerous Jewish groups in the first century, Jesus' vision of this Reign has some significant differences from other groups. While a fuller discussion will wait until a later chapter, it is important to mention at this juncture that the Kingdom in the teaching of Jesus a profound social dimension as well as a theological one. In this social dimension the outcasts and marginalized are gathered, sinners forgiven and reconciled to God and the covenant community, with the community itself formed by the virtues of love, justice, and mutual servanthood.

To Be a Christian speaks of the Kingdom of God in the section pertaining to the Lord's Prayer, and specifically the petition "Thy Kingdom come."²⁸ While perhaps not exclusive of the social meaning of the Reign of God, any mention of such a dimension is absent from the catechism. The Kingdom is simply defined as "The Kingdom of God is his reign over all the world and in the hearts of his people through the powerful and effective operation of his Holy Spirit."²⁹ This begs the question as to the character of that Reign, and the issue of the Church's relationship to it. In fact, even here the language of the Kingdom returns to the individualist context that governs the document. To the question, "How do I live in God's Kingdom?" the answer given is, "My Kingdom life as a Christian consists of living with joy, hope, and peace as a child of God, a citizen of heaven, and a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ."³⁰ One has the sense that were reference to the Kingdom not made in the Lord's Prayer, then the catechism would have little reason to mention it. Kingdom parables, such as that of the sheep and the goats, where the sheep

²⁸ The Anglican Church in North America, *To Be a Christian*, 43.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

have served the King wherein they have given food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, hospitality to the stranger, clothes to the naked, care for the sick, and visitation to the imprisoned, are not mentioned (Mt. 25:31-46). Perhaps there is an implicit rejection of the theological leanings of TEC, which may all too quickly equate God's Reign with social action without specific Christian content. Nevertheless, there is, in the words of a recent well received evangelical book, "a hole in the Gospel" as evidenced by this catechism.

The Reign of God and mission are inextricably linked. While the Church is not to be equated with the Kingdom, it serves, in Lesslie Newbigin's terminology, as sign, foretaste, and herald of this inbreaking Reign. The Church's mission is pursued as it announces and enacts God's Reign in its concrete aspects of ecclesial life and shares that life in word and deed with those beyond the borders of the congregation. Again, this is a subject that will be discussed more fully later.

What is important to note is that the concept of mission is entirely absent from the new ACNA catechism. Fleeting reference is made to the Great Commission, making disciples, and loving one's neighbor, but for a document that purports to be "missional" this omission is glaring. And yet this omission can be explained by the notion of the Gospel that underlies the entire document. The late David Bosch writes,

The church's missionary involvement suggests more than calling individuals into the church as a waiting room for the hereafter. Those to be evangelized are, with other human beings, subject to social, economic, and political conditions in this world. There is, therefore, a "convergence" between liberating individuals and peoples in history and proclaiming the final coming of God's reign."³¹

³¹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 377-378.

Perhaps the expectation underlying the catechism is that individuals converted to Christ and obedient to God's commands will naturally engage their communities and neighbors more justly and assist in ameliorating human suffering and injustice. Such a view, prevalent among earlier generations of evangelicals,³² has been vigorously critiqued by since the 1974 Lausanne conference of 1974.³³ No less of a giant among Anglican evangelicals than John Stott would write in 1975, "I now see more clearly that not only the consequences of the [Great] commission but the actual commission itself must be understood to include social as well as evangelistic responsibility, unless we are to be guilty of distorting the words of Jesus."³⁴

The Problem of "Worldviewism"

The problems that *To Be a Christian* present in being a catalyst for renewal go beyond deficiencies in content. The structure of the document itself, and its inherent expectations of how Christians are formed places significant limitations on what it is able to accomplish. Implicit within this catechism is a logic and pattern of renewal focused upon the individual inquirer or believer who moves from right belief to right Christian practice to right behavior or morality. There is a pedagogical unidirectionality to the project itself: cognitive belief leading to religious practices that eventuate in proper moral

³² Ibid., 404.

³³ Ibid., 405.

³⁴ Ibid.

conduct. It is a form of what James K.A. Smith has called “worldviewism,”³⁵ the understanding that change, whether social or individual, begins with inculcating the right worldview which will then trickle down into other aspects of life and ethics. For Smith this presupposes that we are primarily thinking creatures, or “brains on stick” as he has evocatively suggested, and only subsequently embodied people of loves and intentions that are formed (or deformed) by the cultural practices around us.³⁶ In place of prioritizing the cognitive aspect, Smith follows an Augustinian anthropology of the human person primarily as one who loves.³⁷ It is the heart that seeks the true, the good, and the beautiful. It is drawn not by abstract ideas or doctrinal propositions, but a vision embedded in story, ritual, practice, and art. In short, it is not a worldview that will lead to renewal, it is immersion in a Christian social imaginary. Catechesis thus is not simply the transmittal of concepts, but a “renovation of the heart,” to use Willard’s phrase. It is precisely here that *To Be a Christian* fails; there is little here to love.

Some will counter that this Anglican catechism is not meant to stand alone, but is only one part of a larger formational process.³⁸ Nevertheless, unlike the massive catechism of the Catholic Church, organized on similar, albeit far more comprehensive, lines as this new ACNA catechism, *To Be a Christian* is designed not as resource for

³⁵ James K.A. Smith, *Discipleship in the Present Tense* (Grand Rapids: Calvin College Press, 2013), 76.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 46-47.

³⁸ In fact, in the extended edition of *To Be A Christian* one will find appended essays on the development of an Anglican catechumenate that is engaged in an ecclesial process along similar lines one would find in the Catholic program of the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, commonly known as RCIA, or even the process of the catechumenate developed by the Episcopal Church in late 1980s.

catechists, but as a basic introduction of the essentials of the Christian faith for inquirers and believers. There is little content that can locate this catechism within a larger imaginary.

A Lapsarian Catechism

Ultimately *To Be a Christian* suffers from the lapsarian mindset of the authors, and, one suspects, a significant number of the ACNA leadership. It posits the Anglican Reformation, specifically in its Edwardian and Elizabethan phases, as the golden age of Anglicanism, undergirded by moderately Reformed confessionalism of the Articles of Religion and the Book of Common Prayer. This new catechism is an attempt to return to the vitality of that period.

However, the extent to which Reformation catechesis was able function as formational for both individuals and congregations may well be due to the fact that the catechetical process existed within already extant Christian social imaginaries. Its inherent task was not to introduce inquirers or believers drenched in secular imaginaries to the truth of Christianity, but rather to assist those already engaged within Christendom with a means of distinguishing the new Anglican imaginary from either that of the Catholic Church or Puritanism. Any attempt at a renewed practice of catechesis must assist in embodying a new Christian social imaginary amid these other imaginaries that usurp the central position of the Gospel among Christians. Perhaps the situation in which Anglicans find themselves now is one that calls for a renewal of the catechumenate without a catechism. In place of such a document will be a people who together tell a rich

story of faith, not eschewing doctrinal truth statements, but affirming them within a shared praxis of liturgy, pastoral care, and mission. There will be more interest in listening to the real questions that come from the hearts of believers and inquirers, rather than providing ready-made answers to questions that few are asking.

Christianity After Religion?

In 2006, after years of decline in the mainline denominations and the apparent growth of evangelicalism, especially among the mega-churches, *Christianity for the Rest of Us* was published by Episcopal laywoman and syndicated religion writer Diana Butler Bass that gave a needed shot in the arm to mainline congregations.³⁹ It gave an encouraging assessment of various Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Methodist congregations living out in their neighborhoods a type of unheralded renewal marked by such virtues as hospitality diversity, justice, and contemplation. Bass soon became a regular and very popular speaker at numerous conferences and seminars.

By 2012, however, the sanguine outlook Bass adopted six years before concerning the vitality of the mainline congregation had darkened. While she would still affirm the vitality of the congregations she discussed previously, as well as the values they embody, the outlook for religious institutions themselves has worsened. In her recent book *Christianity After Religion: The End of the Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening*, Bass tries to come to terms with the growing phenomenon of what has been referred to as the growth of the “nones” in the sense of those who do not identify with any religion or any religious institution. Yet rather than becoming openly atheistic or

³⁹ Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006).

agnostic (although there is some growth in these categories), more and more are defining themselves as “spiritual, but not religious.”

While congregations are struggling, Bass says that North America is experiencing a spiritual Great Awakening, “a time of cultural revitalization and reorientation rather than a time of religious apocalypse.”⁴⁰ This spiritual awakening challenges the calcified institutions and practices of Christian denominations and congregations, hence, while a new spirituality is emerging, religion, at least as it has been known in North America, is coming to an end.⁴¹ For Bass this does not necessarily mean the demise of congregations or religious institutions, but it does mean that churches will have to rethink the three cardinal issues: Christian belief, behavior, and belonging.⁴² Not only will the meaning of these three areas need to be addressed, but their priority in the life of the Church as well. She writes that for the past few centuries Western Christianity “taught that belief came first, behavior came next, and finally belonging resulted, depending on how you answered the first two questions.”⁴³ In order to reclaim religion, or rather *religio* as meaning a living experiential faith,⁴⁴ rather than as an institution, “we need to reverse the order to belonging, behaving, and believing.”⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 19.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 33-35.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 201

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 204. One can quibble about the exact order between behaving and belonging. Todd Hunter suggests that the traditional order has been that right belief has issued in joining a church, and then the adoption of Christian behavior and practice (Hunter, *Christianity Beyond Belief*, 24). Certainly the ACNA catechism reflects this older pattern. Hunter also writes “I suspect, though, that upon reflection we may see

In addressing questions of belief, behavior, and belonging she asks many important questions that do challenge the calcified denominational orthodoxies, and aims at a sort of reintegration pursued here. The difficulties come with Bass's reworking of what for her are the three cardinal issues of Christian life. They will be considered in the order in which she addresses them in the book.

Believing as Experiencing

Bass begins her discussion of believing with what she calls "the belief gap," a place of incredulity toward long held propositions and doctrines about the Christian faith, such as the virgin birth or the bodily resurrection of Jesus.⁴⁶ Belief about God or the Christian faith is rapidly eroding, while people remain thirsty for a real and vibrant spirituality.⁴⁷ And yet, the churches, whether Catholic, Mainline, or Evangelical still try to ask "the *what* questions" of Christian believing.⁴⁸ In light of the increasing hostility to doctrines, the response from some is jeremiads against perceived heresy. Others, especially among the clergy, are in quiet sympathy with this shift away from doctrine,

that people have come to faith in more varied ways. Today, many people are starting at the 'end' and practicing their way into the faith. It seems to be working just fine. Others start in the middle by joining a Christian community before they believe." (Ibid.) Whether or not Bass would agree with Hunter's assessment, both seem to eschew a "brains on a stick" view of Christian renewal, and see a much more complex and embodied engagement in Christian life which is the burden of this proposal of reintegration.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 105.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 110.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 111.

“yet they fear someone finding out – that they might lose their jobs in religious institutions that continue to mark their boundaries with such beliefs *about* God.”⁴⁹

Recovering believing will necessitate a turn from “what questions” to “how questions.”⁵⁰ What Bass is calling for is a shift from believing as a cognitive assent to doctrinal propositions to a faith that is centered in the heart. On the surface this seems similar to Smith’s view that people are not “brains on sticks” but centered in the heart which reaches out in love toward what it values. The root of the problem for Bass is etymological. In Latin the word for believe is *credo*, denoting “I set my heart upon” or “I give my loyalty to.”⁵¹ The problem comes when translated into English wherein belief becomes opinion about what is held to be facts about God.⁵² Certainly mere belief as opinion, as Bass describes, plays into the sort of disintegration discussed here and which was so wickedly lampooned by Dorothy Sayers as mentioned in the previous chapter.

With the emphasis placed upon the action of the heart in trusting, rather than the head in believing, Bass gives priority to personal subjective religious experience of the divine. Creedal statements are communal means of articulating individual experiences. Thus she can render the Apostles’ Creed as

I give my heart to God the all-powerful One, who created the universe, and Jesus Christ, God’s Son, the Christ, who through the power of the Holy Spirit was born of the Virgin Mary.... And I give my heart to the Holy Spirit, devoting myself to

⁴⁹ Ibid., 112.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 113.

⁵¹ Ibid., 117.

⁵² Ibid., 118.

the church and the communion of saints, trusting in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.⁵³

This rendering “no longer expresses philosophical ideas about God; rather these words turn the affections toward what the early Christians had experienced.”⁵⁴

Here is where Bass’ perspective diverges from that of James Smith. Both affirm the priority of the heart. But for Smith the affections of the heart for the Christian are to be turned to the Kingdom of God embodied in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, present in part now by the power of the Spirit, and in fullness at the eschaton. While this end or *telos* cannot be reduced to propositional statements, neither can it be reduced to subjective experience. This end that is pursued is an objective reality manifested in Christ and promised by God.

For Bass the affections of the heart are turned to the person’s own experience as the proper end. While these experiences are couched in Christian vocabulary and symbols, ultimately these are *adiaphora*. Bass may make reference to God, Jesus, and the Spirit, the meaning of such words are subject to change depending with how they comport with her experience and her own reason.⁵⁵

Consider her retooling of the Apostles’ Creed. The section referring to Jesus’ suffering, death, resurrection, ascension, and *parousia* are simply omitted. Even then she is not satisfied with what remains. Of her new creed she writes, “Notice that not all the intellectual problems of Christian doctrine are solved here – the language remains sexist

⁵³ Ibid., 133.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 124-125.

and hierarchical, and we are still stuck with a virgin birth and a sin-filled church. You and your skeptical friends may not want to devote yourselves to this particular God.”⁵⁶ One wonders if even the most rudimentary aspects of Christian doctrine will eventually be expunged as they no longer are expressive of her experience.

At the end of the chapter, she take a lead from a statement of Rowan Williams apparently comparing Christian creeds to the Three Jewels of Buddhism, in which the devotee takes vows to “take refuge” in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha (Community). Once more the Creed is retooled to taking refuge in God the Creator, the teachings of Jesus, listed as forgiveness, love, and justice, the Spirit, and the Church or the community.⁵⁷ It is interesting to note is that Jesus has now been reduced to his teaching, which ultimately renders him superfluous. Even the teachings listed can just as easily be attributed to late modern liberalism, and a term such as justice redefined to reflect the platform of the Democratic Party.

Following the lead of George Lindbeck, there is even a more fundamental problem in giving priority to experience. For Lindbeck religious doctrines serve neither as propositional truth statements, nor are they merely expressive of subjective experience. Rather religions resemble languages and their correlative cultures, “that is, as idioms for the construction of reality and the living of life.”⁵⁸ This “cultural-linguistic” approach sees religion as “a communal phenomenon that shapes the subjectivities of individuals

⁵⁶ Ibid., 135.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 134-135.

⁵⁸ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 18.

rather than being primarily a manifestation of those subjectivities.”⁵⁹ Thus an experiencing agent must first be embedded in a language and culture in order to even understand that inchoate stimuli are religious experiences: “One could also claim that an experience (viz., something of which one is prereflectively or reflectively conscious) is impossible unless it is in some fashion symbolized, and that all symbol systems have their origin in interpersonal relations and social interactions. It is conceptually confused to talk of symbolization (and therefore of experiences) that are purely private.”⁶⁰

This is not to say that there is not a dialectical relationship between the cultural construct and subjective experience. At times the power of a particular experience challenges or expands upon the existing religious construct, nevertheless, such an experience does not emerge *ex nihilo*, but is still mediated by the tradition it seeks to transcend or transform.⁶¹ No matter how one wishes to characterize the religious experience of Muhammad, it is forged in the context of the political chaos of polytheistic Mecca and the Prophet’s uneasy relationship with the monotheistic Jewish community in Medina.

While this present proposal has some points of connection with Bass’ prioritizing the heart over the head in Christian believing, disagreement, and a profound one at that, stems from the insistence here that faith as primarily setting one’s heart upon God or the Gospel need not exclude cognitive content and reference to some objective reality or

⁵⁹ Ibid., 33.

⁶⁰Ibid., 38.

⁶¹ Ibid., 33, 39.

“facts.” Bass merely takes the inability to believe in the specifics of Christian doctrine as a priori - “we are still stuck with a virgin birth” – and simply argues from that position that truth statements about God are accidental at best to spiritual believing and practice. Yet part of the difficulty may stem from a false dichotomy, wherein the choice is between propositional truths Bass has eschewed having renounced evangelicalism and her own turn to a reworked liberal subjectivist position inherited from Schleiermacher. Proposing a way beyond this dichotomy will wait until a later chapter.

Yet ultimately even Bass will tie her spirituality to objective truth statements. Rather than being statements about the divine, however, they will be political truth statements from within the immanent frame. This truth is about the moral superiority of eating locally produced food, and the emergence of a new “civil spirituality” coextensive with the progressive politics of Barack Obama, who Bass sees as a visionary promoting a new “civil spirituality” as part and parcel of a Great Awakening.⁶² In a telling moment Bass avers, “Other than joining a political party, it is hard to think of any other sort of community that people join by agreeing to a set of principles.”⁶³ Propositional truth returns. Belief may not be *about* God for Bass. But is it *about* something.

Practicing Faith

Another area in which what is being offered in these pages has affinity with *Christianity After Religion* is in the emphasis upon the renewal of spiritual practices for

⁶² Bass, *Christianity After Religion*, 264.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 202.

Christians. Bass rightly differentiates between emphasis upon what she calls the external aspects of religious performance and upon formative spiritual practices or. This emphasis is neither new nor unique to Bass, and actually forms a growing body of literature beginning with Alasdair MacIntyre, and continuing with the likes of James McClendon, Stanley Hauerwas, and Dallas Willard.

Bass employs the definition of Christian crafted by Dorothy Bass and Craig Dykstra as the “things that Christian people do together over time in response to and in light of God’s active presence in the world.”⁶⁴ Within this chapter are some helpful discussions. Echoing Jesus’ admonition to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves Bass sees Christian practices falling into the categories of devotion and ethics, a dual emphasis missing from the Anglican catechism discussed above.⁶⁵ It also contains a thoughtful discussion of spiritual practices as the anticipation of God’s Reign.⁶⁶

A central question for Bass is which specific practices will be adopted from among the myriad of options. Returning to her emphasis upon the subjective experience of the individual, the particular practices engaged are the choice of each person.⁶⁷ The “comfortable” generally choose practices from their own tradition, while the “spiritual explorers” might choose from a variety of traditions and even from different religions.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Ibid., 146.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 148.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 157-160. Although in light of her lack of doctrinal affirmations it is odd to find a sort of doctrine of eschatology creeping in here. What the nature of this eschaton is unclear.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 146.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 146-151.

This latter point Bass underscores by suggesting that Christianity is itself a “blended faith,” a mixing of sources such as the “spiritual experiences of Jesus, Rabbinic Judaism, Greek philosophy, Gnosticism, and Roman paganism.”⁶⁹ Therefore she advocates a sort of spiritual bricolage, a do it yourself means of engaging in spiritual practices picking up “the fragments of practice from various sources at hand and construct[ing] new sorts of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and other religions.”⁷⁰

The difficulties with this account of the practices are several. First, there is the inherent individualism, and even consumerism, in Bass’ view. Individual choice is regnant in engaging in practices. This, however, is in opposition to the definition that she herself uses of practices, wherein they are things Christian people do together over time.⁷¹ As the authors of this definition discuss the meaning they elaborate that “Christian practices are social and historical. They are activities people engage in together over time.”⁷² In fact a common feature of the various definitions of Christian practices underscore both their social and historical, and it might well be added ecclesial, nature. The authors of *Missional Church*, for example, define practices as “socially established cooperative human activities carried in traditions that form people in a way of life.”⁷³

⁶⁹ Ibid., 151.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 150.

⁷¹ Ibid., 146

⁷² Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, *Practicing Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishers 2002), 26.

⁷³ Guder, *The Missional Church*, 153.

This social and historical character of the practices, while not necessarily inimical to Bass's perspective, is ultimately accidental to and extrinsic from an individual's engagement in such practices. The social aspect is subsequent to the practice, in the sense that it may seem a good thing to engage a practice in common with others, that itself is the choice of the individual. It would seem that the commonality of practice in, say, an Episcopal parish, is roughly parallel to the relationship of reading a book to joining a book group, perhaps a way to increase enjoyment or insight, but not necessary.

The bricolage approach eventually cuts the practice from the deep history and tradition which animates the practice, and also from the end that the formation of a practice originally intended. Recall the well-known parable with which Alasdair MacIntyre began his seminal work *After Virtue*, which reintroduced the concept of practice into moral philosophy, and then into theological studies.⁷⁴ MacIntyre asks his readers to imagine a society where science is blamed for the ills that had befallen the people, and the powers that be abolish all teaching and learning of science, executing the scientists, and destroying most all scientific equipment and texts. After time there is a reaction against anti-science group, and the enlightened

seek to revive science, although they have largely forgotten what it was. But all they possess are fragments: a knowledge of experiments detached from any knowledge of the theoretical context which gave them significance; parts of theories unrelated either to the other bits and pieces of theory which they possess or to experiment; instruments whose use has been forgotten; half chapters of books, single pages of from articles, not always fully legible because torn and charred.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (South Bend, Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 1997), 1-5.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

In time in MacIntyre's parable a new practice of science emerges, but it would appear arbitrary and cut off from its sources, unrecognizable to the likes of Galileo, Newton, and Einstein. Such a practice would be fragmentary. Neither would the proper ends that the sciences originally sought to pursue be apparent. Presumably other ends would seduce the practitioners of this new "science."

Christian practices reduced to individual choice and eclectically joined with other practices, perhaps even from other religions, are in ways similar to MacIntyre's parable shorn from the contexts and traditions that gave them coherent meaning. Furthermore the practices can become pursuits of ends that may indeed be contrary to the very vision the tradition sought to inculcate in its followers. Here we are right back to Douthat's "The God Within."⁷⁶

Compounding the problem is the inter-religious aspect of Bass' understanding of spiritual practices. Certainly the question of the relationship between Christianity and other religions in a pluralistic world is immensely complex. Only a few points can be considered at this juncture. The first of these is that Bass' claim that Christianity itself as a "blended faith," thus validating her spiritual bricolage. The assertion, however, is a vast oversimplification of what has mentioned in the previous chapter as the process of missiological translation. It is not that the early Christians were the equivalent of a blue jay picking up all manner of shiny things to adorn a nest, but rather there was a process begun with the mission to the Gentiles and the decisions of the Apostolic church (Acts 15) to translate the Gospel into the cultural forms and vernaculars of host cultures. Rather

⁷⁶ Douthat, *Bad Religion*, 211ff.

than bricolage, it was a dialectical process grounded in a theology of incarnation, inculturation, and a messianic understanding of history. Some aspects of a host culture were affirmed, others challenged and abandoned.

Furthermore, Bass envisions a basic interreligious commonality, that all a part of the new spiritual awakening she sees emerging.⁷⁷ This basic unity is an a priori belief held by many, but has of late come under some serious critique. Stephen Prothero writes,

What the world's religions share is not so much a finish line as a starting point. And where they begin is with this simple observation: something is wrong with the world.... They part company, however, when it comes to stating just what has gone wrong, and they diverge sharply when they move from diagnosing the human problem to prescribing how to solve it.⁷⁸

Religions are complex realities, not easily reducible into simply different religious practices all pursuing common visions of justice and compassion. Frankly, the impulse to just overlook the unique narratives, doctrines, and visions of other religions in order to allow the adoption of their practices and to envision them as just affirming the same things that Christianity at its best affirms is both condescending and arrogant. In essence it says to devotees and believers of other religions that all the specifics of their belief and practice that they hold to tenaciously are actually inconsequential and insignificant, and that, if they could only see it, they are just affirming what religious syncretists such as Bass had been saying all along.

Belonging as Authenticity

⁷⁷ Bass, *Christianity After Religion*, 268.

⁷⁸ Stephen Prothero, *God Is Not One* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 11.

Central to Bass' thesis is that belonging precedes believing: "faith [is] a matter of community first, practices second, and belief as a result of the first two."⁷⁹ Thus the chapter on belonging is crucial to her entire argument. At the center of the issue of belonging for her is the question of identity: "I am a part of this family; I am related to these people; I throw in my lot with my tribe. I both belong and I am. Belonging is intimately related to being. To belong is to be."⁸⁰

And yet, there is a crisis of identity. Old forms of belonging are in crisis. Families are breaking, denominations and other institutions which gave many a sense of belonging are in decline. The availability and prevalence of mobility and ever shifting personal geographies have made the situation even more problematic. What one may expect at this place in Bass' argument is a new ecclesiology of parish church as community rather than as outpost of an institution. One would be disappointed.

The strange turn made here is not toward community, but toward the self. Too long has Western Christianity taught, in Bass' view, that the problem is the self, rooted in pride. It was thought that the "church's job" was to diminish the self through rituals of penance and renunciation, and thus "stamping out humanness."⁸¹ Salvation was *from* the self. Whether or not this is a fair assessment of the history of the Western Christianity can certainly be debated.⁸² What is to the point here is that it leads Bass to her revising of

⁷⁹ Bass, *Christianity After Religion*, 203.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 181-182.

⁸² For an alternate view see Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 56.

salvation as “being saved to ourselves, finding what was lost and the joy of discovery of a loving creator.”⁸³ Sin becomes inauthenticity.

In an exegetically curious move Bass reads the events surrounding Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Christ (Mk. 8:27-29) as a story of individuals finding their own sense of self. “As people in the Gospels meet Jesus, they gain new insights on themselves. The question ‘Who do you say that I am?’ plunges Jesus’ friends into corresponding self-query.”⁸⁴ She suggests that “read the Gospels through the theme of understanding identity.”⁸⁵ When we strive to answer Jesus’ question posed to the disciples “we plunge into the mysteries of ourselves, peeling away layers of self-delusion, deception, and deceit, to the unfathomable knowledge of who we are when God is right there with us.”⁸⁶

To some extent it is true that answering Jesus question “Who do you say that I am?” involves self-knowledge. But such knowledge is contingent upon the content of Peter’s affirmation that Jesus is the Christ and its meaning. But Bass’ is little interested in that. The sense one gets is that self-knowledge comes from experiencing the authentic selfhood of Jesus. What emerges in these pages is a return to Gnosticism.

It would seem, although it is not clear, that this is where community and belonging fit in. Authentic selves are open to the authenticity of Jesus and of others. Communities and congregations are gatherings of those on the journey of self-

⁸³ Bass, *Christianity After Religion*, 182.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 186.

discovery.⁸⁷ And yet, even in communal practices, it is still about the individual selfhood. Worship is about Christians knowing themselves better. Charitable acts enable “greater insight into living fully into the world.” People seek Jesus in their lives so that they might have revealed to them “the truest dimensions of selfhood,” which gives “individuals the power to act in transforming ways.”⁸⁸

It does not necessarily follow, however, that this journey of self-discovery will lead to deeper community. Ross Douthat points out that the quest for the God Within often leads people to leave behind “more quotidian responsibilities, trust mere finite goals and merely mortal companions – which often means spouses and children – to providences care while they obey the promptings of their Supreme Self or Highest Thought.”⁸⁹ What communities that do form will of necessity be ephemeral, as the self is a journey,⁹⁰ and the next road to be followed may not be one that one’s current companions may want to take. There may be wisdom in reversing the order to belonging, behaving, and believing. But in the end, has this new vision that Bass proposes even get people to the first step?

Forward without *Ressentiment*

One has the sense in reading both *To Be A Christian* and *Christianity Beyond Religion* that they are a part of a larger polemic between resister and accommodationist

⁸⁷ Ibid., 191-192.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 187.

⁸⁹ Douthat, *Bad Religion*, 229.

⁹⁰ Bass, *Christianity After Religion*, 178.

Christians. Theological directions taken are done in light of the *bête noir* of each lurking nearby. As liberal Christians, including Episcopalians, have all too often redefined “Gospel” as inclusion and social justice,⁹¹ the ACNA must retreat into a restricted confessional reading. Since conservative Christians have used the creeds to demarcate authentic from inauthentic Christian teaching, so Diana Butler Bass must deprive creedal affirmations of any objective content. These are theologies of what Nietzsche called *ressentiment*, denoting not only resentment but also the “combination of anger, envy, hate, rage, and revenge as the motive of political action” indicative of both the Christian Right and Left.⁹² For the ACNA, the Episcopal bishops who stripped them of their holy orders remain off stage in the pages of their new catechism. For Bass, the conservative Christians that want to resist her new Great Awakening are secondary, but still very present, characters in her book. In both cases, the inherent polemics have limited their vision.

Crafting a means of reintegrating doctrine with church practice and mission has entailed critiques of other ways of addressing similar concerns. The focus has been upon areas of disagreement, rather than highlighting places of convergence and agreement. The way forward will have some affinities with both the writers of *To Be A Christian* and Diana Bass. With the former, the intention here is to take doctrine seriously, making statements about God and the Christian faith that are held to be objectively true. With the latter, the following pages will seek a path that integrates belonging, practice, and belief.

⁹¹ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 50.

⁹² James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 107.

What does need to be avoided, however, is a vision animated by *ressentiment*, a feature all too prominent as the church navigates through a changed culture.

PART TWO
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON REINTEGRATION

CHAPTER 3

SOURCES FOR REINTEGRATION

The task of reintegration of doctrine with church life and mission undertaken in these pages is a complex process that. The task is for congregational leaders to seed a new social Christian social imaginary in their congregations, which can be apprehended by members of the church. The proper ends of this new social imaginary follow along the lines of the three issues Charles Taylor sees as being addressed by every imaginary: the relationship between God and the world, a vision of the new social reality of the Kingdom of God, and a view of human flourishing that incorporates not only the earthly but the heavenly into the meaning of life. The means of pursuing these ends will involve the heart, mind, and will of individual Christians in congregations through aligning the intentions of the heart with these ends, and engaging in a set of habits or practices that are expressive of both the intentions and their ends. While this is perhaps still murky at this juncture in the proposal, an inquiry into the sources for reintegration, as well as later chapters, will bring this into greater clarity.

The sources for this proposal for renewal are varied, and are drawn from not only theology and practical ecclesiology, but also from ascetical theology, philosophy and

epistemology, liturgics, missiology, historical theology, and the current missional literature, among others. Several works have been particularly formative for this proposal as it was developed. The insights of the authors of these works deserve to be highlighted, enabling readers to further explore them. Further, it is worth noting that while in the pages to follow these particular authors may not always be directly cited, what they have written has influenced the proposal here in numerous and profound ways.

James K.A. Smith and *Desiring the Kingdom*

Desiring the Kingdom is the first volume of philosopher James K.A. Smith's three volume project *Cultural Liturgies*.¹ Written both for students at Christian colleges, as well as for his colleagues who teach in such institutions, Smith's goal is to change the focus of Christian learning from what Christians think, as in the inculcation of a "worldview," to what Christians do, "articulating the shape of a Christian 'social imaginary' as it is imbedded in the practices of Christian worship."² In essence, his task is to dismantle the Cartesian "I think, therefore I am" which has held sway not only in secular epistemology, but in far too many Christian ones as well, with "I love, therefore I am,"³ or better "I am what I love."⁴ Smith here takes an Augustinian turn away from the implicit Cartesian mindset that gives priority to the human person as a rational thinking person. Instead humans are motivated by love and longing in a pre-theoretical way.

¹ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 12.

² Ibid., 11.

³ Ibid., 39.

⁴ Ibid., 46.

Citing Heidegger, Smith points out that humans do not merely think about the world, but are involved as traditioned actors in the world through “care”.⁵ For Smith, following Augustine, the structure of this involvement or care is love.⁶ Humans’ lives are fundamentally oriented toward that which is ultimately loved.⁷ This ultimate love shapes and makes sense of penultimate desires and actions in the world.⁸ “It’s not what I think that orients my life from the bottom up; it’s what I desire, what I love, that animates my passion. To be human is to be the kind of creature that is oriented toward this primal, ultimate love – even if we never really reflect on it.”⁹ People give their allegiance to their ultimate love, or in the language that Smith prefers, they offer their worship. Hence humans can be said not to be *homo rationale*, thinking animals, but *homo liturgicus*, worshipping animals.¹⁰

This emphasis upon human beings as liturgical animals provides throughout the book a hermeneutical lens through which a wide range of social gatherings and institutions, secular and religious, can be assessed and critiqued. Smith employs this hermeneutical lens in the introduction of the book prior to setting out his thesis. He asks the reader to assume the perspective of an anthropologist from Mars studying the religious architecture and practices of a particular group of human beings.

⁵ Ibid., 49.

⁶ Ibid., 51.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 40.

In several richly narrated pages, Smith takes the reader into a vast temple where time seems abolished by being an interior space reminiscent in scale to a medieval cathedral that is closed off from the passage of the sun from the sky, or even the dark of night. Along what might be construed as the nave, numerous smaller chapels can be entered, with each displaying rich three dimensional icons of human flourishing, and acolytes who can assist each worshipper in his or her quest. “This temple – with countless other now emerging around the world – offers a rich, embodied visual mode of evangelism that attracts us. This is a gospel whose power is beauty, which speaks to our deepest desires and compels us to come not with dire moralisms but rather with a winsome invitation to share in this envisioned good life.”¹¹

Eventually it becomes clear to the reader that Smith is narrating a trip to an American mall. The mall is a liturgical and pedagogical institution that operates not on a rational and reflective level upon the shopper, but upon the affections with a vision of the good life. As Smith will later say, humans love before they think, and imagine before they theorize.¹² A shopper is not compelled by economic theories or by a rational utilitarian calculus of purchases. The mall as liturgical space whets the appetite and shapes desires.

Liturgy as a hermeneutical lens continues to be employed throughout the book. In terms of secular liturgies, Smith returns once again to an exegesis of the mall, as well as a discussion of the nexus between entertainment and national supremacy with its recourse

¹¹ Ibid., 21.

¹² Ibid., 134.

to violence, the “military-entertainment complex” represented by Fourth of July parades, the patriotic display at athletic events, and the films of Jerry Bruckheimer and those like it.¹³ Smith also critiques his own milieu of the university or college.¹⁴ These reflections, as well as his reflections in a similar light upon Christian liturgies, provide a helpful tutorial for Christians to critique the implicit liturgies of their own contexts.¹⁵

Understanding human persons as loving, liturgical animals requires Smith to inquire after how these persons pursue that which is loved; what the model of human a desiring creature might be described and understood. The first element is seen in the area of intentionality, to which he refers as “love’s aim.”¹⁶ Humans do not merely dispassionately think about the world and the objects in it. They are involved participants who, in Heidegger’s phrase, care for that in which they participate.¹⁷ Thus knowing is rarely, if ever, a dispassionate pursuit. There is always an element of intentionality and personal involvement. Smith uses the example of knowing a friend named Theodore.¹⁸ While a person might perceive and think about this friend, he also is one a person may remember with fondness or distain, and, in fact, my love or fear him. There is an involvement and an intentionality in knowing this other person, which also intends weal

¹³ Ibid., 109.

¹⁴ Ibid., 112.

¹⁵ Smith employs a similar exegesis of Christian liturgies, particularly the Eucharistic liturgy.

¹⁶ Ibid., 47.

¹⁷ Ibid., 49.

¹⁸ Ibid.

or woe for him. In terms of ultimate loves, then, construed perhaps as that of nation or faith, intentionality takes the form of allegiance or worship.¹⁹

Love is ultimately aimed and intended toward a *telos*, an end.²⁰ In ancient categories, the heart's intentions aim at that which is ultimately good, beautiful, and true. This tends not to be theoretical abstractions which constitute the end, but is embedded pre-critically in a social imaginary. Through such things as story, ritual, and iconography the good, the beautiful, and the true, for which the heart longs, the ultimate end is apprehended pursued by the intentions of the heart. In fact, it could be said that the *telos* pulls or attracts the desires of the heart.²¹ It is thus not the inculcation of a rational worldview comprised of doctrines and theories that affects human being in the world, which then "trickle down" to form the desires, motivations, and habits of life.²² It is actually quite the opposite. The *telos* lures the affections of the heart, which is expressed first and foremost as a pre-theoretical social imaginary. The formation of doctrine and theory is quite often subsequent to this attraction of the heart as a means of articulating both the content and the limits of the social imaginary.

For Christians, this end is, in Smith's thinking, the Kingdom of God. Yet, as he is quick to point out, human beings are set among numerous social imaginaries with different, and often opposing, ends.²³ Even the idea of the Reign of God can be

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 52.

²¹ Ibid., 54.

²² Ibid., 69.

²³ Ibid., 54.

envisioned and presented in conflicting ways. Although this is not Smith's focus, from the perspective of a pastor or congregational leader, this places upon the leader the responsibility to faithfully embodying and proclaiming a Christian social imaginary that is reflective of the narrative of Scripture. For Smith, practices derived from and expressive of the intentions of the heart and the end to which they aim become habits that are "love's fulcrum."²⁴ "Our habits thus constitute the fulcrum of our desire: they are the hinge that 'turns' our heart, our love, such that it is predisposed to be aimed in certain directions."²⁵ Practices "understand" the world in light of the Gospel.²⁶

Part and parcel of any pedagogical approach will thus give due attention to a rich understanding of practices, and the means of inculcating them among the community gathered for learning or formation. This is true whether the community is a Christian congregation or a college class. While certainly cognitive content is not unimportant, it must be recognized that the human persons are not containers for belief or ideas, but arrows aimed at something ultimate.²⁷ Practices that become habits correct the aim of the heart's intentions and desires toward the proper end. In turn, the end becomes a mirror of the type of persons they are to become.²⁸ In *Desiring the Kingdom*, Smith provides a

²⁴ Ibid., 55.

²⁵ Ibid., 56.

²⁶ Ibid., 78.

²⁷ Ibid., 71.

²⁸ Ibid.

solid philosophical anthropology for the project of reintegration that has been undertaken in this project.

Dallas Willard and *Renovation of the Heart*

Renowned late spiritual writer Dallas Willard engages in a similar project as James K.A. Smith in his book *Renovation of the Heart*.²⁹ As with Smith there is an interest in the priority of the human heart in Christian discipleship. Although he himself was an academic philosopher, Willard's focus was less on producing academic texts, but rather practical guides for both congregational leaders and individual Christians. As an evangelical Christian Willard's burden is to revive a genuine concern for human transformation into the likeness of Jesus Christ as a central feature of the Christian faith. The ministry of Jesus is not merely for the granting of eternal life to individual Christians through the forgiveness of sins, what in *The Divine Conspiracy* Willard called "the gospel of sin management."³⁰

Rather, Jesus came to start a revolution that will touch all of creation through the continuous revolution of the human heart or spirit.³¹ Such transformation is the transformation of the character of individual Christians into Christ's likeness, or as Willard expresses it "constantly learning how Jesus would lead our lives if he were we"³² By this the Kingdom of God is manifest and reigns in the life of the disciple of

²⁹ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2012).

³⁰ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 35.

³¹ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 15.

³² *Ibid.*, 241

Jesus Christ, and through him or her transformation can begin to transform the outward structures and social connections in the world.

He defines “genuine transformation” as the “transformation of the whole person into the goodness and power seen in Jesus and his ‘Abba’ Father – the only transformation adequate to the human self – remains the necessary goal of human life.”³³ Yet such transformation is not possible for the unaided human spirit. Such transformation is to manifested as a participation in the Kingdom of God, which Willard defines as “the range of God’s effective will, where what God wants done is done.”³⁴ God’s will is accomplished when the individual disciple is formed into the character of Jesus,³⁵ with the Spirit of God being the active agent of transformation indwelling in the believer’s heart.³⁶ Thus human transformation is a Trinitarian reality, where God is the goal, pattern, and agent of this renovation of character. This aspect brings into consideration an aspect missing, or perhaps muted, in *Desiring the Kingdom*. Smith is interested in describing a teleological account of human persons as lovers, irrespective whether the ultimate ends to which allegiances are offered have reference to the Christian God and faith. While it might be assumed Smith would envision a similar Trinitarian agency, a

³³ Ibid., 20.

³⁴ Ibid., 86. Whether or not this is an adequate definition of the Kingdom of God is an important question. It is also one beyond the scope of this study. The point that is being made above is that God is an active agent in transformation.

³⁵ Ibid., 87.

³⁶ Ibid., 38.

significant contribution from Willard to the proposals made in this study is a reminder that an account needs to be made for divine agency in any concept of renewal.

Helpful in the context of this proposal is Willard's outline of the elements of spiritual change. For him the three central aspects are a vision, intention, and means, for which he offers the mnemonic acronym VIM.³⁷ These are roughly analogous to Smith's *telos*, intention, and habits or practices. For Willard the vision is transformation into Christlikeness, where the individual participates in the Kingdom as God's effective will.³⁸ The intention of the heart, then, is to live in God's kingdom as Jesus did. This begins with trust in Jesus; to rely upon him as the Christ. The form this trust takes is that of obedience to his teachings and commands.³⁹ What is particularly helpful in Willard's account of intention is that the commitment is not made to a set of ideals or principles, but to a person, to Jesus. By the term "means" Willard is signifying a rich collection of spiritual disciplines that are discussed at length in the second half of the book.⁴⁰ It is important to point out that for Willard the VIM pattern is necessary; vision leads to intention which precedes the means.⁴¹

Much of the remainder of the book details how the renovation of character takes place in the various aspects of a person: the mind, the will, the body, the social dimension, and the soul. Much of this discussion is beyond the scope of this study.

³⁷ Ibid., 85.

³⁸ Ibid., 86-87.

³⁹ Ibid., 87.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 89.

⁴¹ Ibid., 85.

Willard's final suggestions on formation as apprenticeship are quite helpful. The first step for pastors and other leaders is to instill among a group of Christians that to be a disciple is to be an apprentice of Jesus.⁴² The second step is "immersing the avowed apprentices into the Trinitarian presence inhabiting and enclosing the group."⁴³ The importance is that the divine presence precedes and empowers the use of spiritual means and disciplines. The task of the pastor is to cultivate a prayerful parish that invokes and expects the presence of God in its life. Only then are spiritual disciplines embedded in the congregation.

N.T. Wright and *The New Testament and the People of God*

Both James Smith and Dallas Willard see the human heart directed toward and animated by an end or vision set before them. Each employs terms that serve as shorthand for this end as presented by the Christian faith, the Kingdom of God and transformation into Christlikeness respectively. The larger meaning of these terms needs to be fleshed out as they are defined by Christian doctrine itself. Yet as was discussed in the previous chapter, doctrine has to be understood as that which can animate a renewed Christian social imaginary. The contours of such doctrine that can serve as *telos* for this imaginary will be developed in the following chapter.

One of the most helpful sources in developing this has been the work of renowned New Testament scholar and Anglican bishop, N.T. Wright and his five act scheme for

⁴² Ibid., 244.

⁴³ Ibid., 245.

understanding the Bible as coherent narrative. While this scheme is reiterated in a number of his books written for a general audience, it appears first in the early parts of his magisterial *The New Testament and the People of God*.⁴⁴ In this context Wright's ideas of understanding the entire Scripture in as narrative are set within a larger consideration of the hermeneutical task of reading the Bible as Scripture.

Wright first discusses biblical hermeneutics within questions of an appropriate epistemological approach to the scriptural texts, assessing two basic stances that have been employed both by scholars and others. The first he calls the positivist or realist position.⁴⁵ The positivist approach is post-enlightenment search for indubitable truth in the text, grounded in verifiable knowledge, rather than shaded by belief, that there are some things "for which we have in principle a god's-eye view, and others for which all we have are prejudices and whims."⁴⁶ Criteria for establishing what is fact is gleaned by resorting to an a priori foundation for assessing what is factually true, such as the scientific method and the canons of historical research. Unless the truth statements of the Bible can be verified by these foundations, they cannot be held as true in any factual understanding, but should be considered metaphor or expressive of subjective experiences. By these lights Diana Butler Bass might well be considered a theological positivist.

⁴⁴ N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

One subset of the positivist approach Wright calls “naïve realism.”⁴⁷ The naïve realist rather uncritically holds to the foundationalist assumptions without awareness. An example would be the person in the pew that simply holds that a biblical story such as the virginal conception of Jesus is just not tenable to modern people and thus must be rejected as “truth.” Such naïve realists are common in Episcopal congregations. Had Wright been familiar with Taylor’s work on modern social imaginaries and the process of secularization, he might have described this set of realists as those embedded in an imaginary from within the immanent frame. Non-scientific explanations of phenomena are ruled out of bounds a priori.

The positivist position has increasingly come under scrutiny and criticism. Those who have assumed access to the god’s-eye view of truth are really making statements about their own experience of knowing. Statements of truth are really the knower’s perception of what he or she is experiencing when speaking of sense data. Wright calls this “phenomenalism.”⁴⁸ While he avoids discussing the more hard edged and deconstructive elements of post-modernism, Wright suggests that phenomenism ultimately leaves the text of the Bible impenetrable: “when I seem to be looking at a text, or at an author’s mind with a text, or at events of which the texts seem to be speaking, all I am really doing is seeing the author’s view of events, or the texts view of authorial intent, or only my own thoughts in the presence of a text, or is it even a text?”⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 34.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 35.

Navigating between the two is an option Wright aligns with the philosophical view that is known as “critical realism.”⁵⁰ Critical realism, over and against various post-modernisms such as phenomenism, holds that there is a reality that can be truly known. Not all is a social construct that endlessly deconstructs. Nevertheless, the knower approaches that which known humbly, recognizing the subjects inherent limitations in knowing. There are no indubitable foundations that can provide the god’s-eye view. The knower is bound by position and perspective; by history and context. This does not mean that truth is unknowable, or that making truth claims are irrational, but that the act of knowing is also an act of faith, held humbly and open to critique.

This leads directly to Wright’s approach to reading the Scripture. A critical realist approach will receive the biblical text as it is received, neither as a repository for pristine facts within the text, nor as a hall of mirrors, but as it has been gathered, placed within a canon, and passed on by a living community of faith. It is received then as narrative, with the truths therein not able to be extracted as “bare facts” from the narrative itself.⁵¹ What is true in the text cannot be separated from the telling of the story itself, and, in fact, it could be said that that truth is only applied by committing to and continuing the story itself.

Stories themselves are expressive of what Wright calls “world-views.”⁵² A world-view is a matrix of story, praxis, symbol, and a set of significant questions.⁵³ These

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 38.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 124.

questions are “Who are we?” “Where are we?” “What went wrong?” and “What is the solution?”⁵⁴ While the questions are different from Taylor’s three questions asked by a social imaginary, there is a correspondence between Taylor’s thought and Wright’s here, and a divergence with Smith’s use of the term “worldview” as a theoretical construct.

It is from this perspective that Wright proposes that the Bible as a whole be received as a coherent narrative of God and the world. To do so he proposes a five act scheme that will be outlined here as it will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. Act 1 deals with the creation of the world in the first two chapters of Genesis. It culminates in the creation of humankind in the image of God. Act 2 deals with the question inherent in Wright’s understanding of world-views, “what went wrong?” This act begins with the original disobedience in the garden, and progresses through the fratricide of Cain, the frustrated attempt at redemption through saving only the remnant in the story of Noah and his family, and the hubris of humanity at the Tower of Babel. Act 3 is the long story of Israel, called both into covenant with God and into justice and mutuality within the covenant community that they might be a light to the nations. Although frustrated time and time again through the lack of covenant faithfulness by Israel, God does not abandon them, but fulfills Israel’s call by sending his son Jesus to be the faithful covenant partner of God in his life, death, and resurrection. This story of Jesus is the central Act 4 of the scriptural drama. Act 5 is the continuation of the story through the Church by the power of the Spirit. This final act is completed in the eschatological vision of the complete restoration of covenant community not only with Israel, but with all nations. Yet as

⁵⁴ Ibid., 132-133.

Wright points out, this act is unfinished. The biblical material that comprises Act 5 does not exhaust the act in question, but is completed by the story of the Church in mission through the ages. “The church would then live under the ‘authority’ of the extant story, being required to offer an improvisatory performance of the final act as it leads up to and anticipates the intended conclusion.”⁵⁵ This improvisational nature of Act 5 opens space for the mission and ministry of the Church.

This understanding of the Bible as narrative lends itself to the project at hand. At the heart of the concerns voiced here is that doctrine has become disconnected from the life of the church and its mission into the world. Bishop Wright gives us a way forward in suggesting that doctrine is not to be construed as discrete propositional statements, but rather as the narrative itself. Propositions exist within the narrative and serve merely as shorthand for the unfolding story of God’s redemption of the world.

David Bosch and *Transforming Mission*

Introducing the improvisatory nature of Wright’s Act 5 requires attention to what this might look like as the Church continues the mission revealed in Jesus Christ. Assessing this mission is crucial in the project of reintegration. It has been noted that mission has all too often been reduced in a number of congregations to engagement in social activism on the one hand and tactics of church growth under the rubric of evangelism on the other. Recapturing a more robust understanding of mission that flows from the doctrine and faith of the Church is a necessary exercise. One of the authors who

⁵⁵ Ibid., 142.

has addressed the issues of mission in a significant way is the late South African missiologist David Bosch.

In *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* Bosch addresses what he calls the contemporary crisis in the theology of mission.⁵⁶ The sources of this crisis are complex. Among them are the advance of secularism, Western Christian guilt about mission and colonialism, and religious pluralism in an ever shrinking world.⁵⁷ This crisis is manifested in three areas: mission's foundation, its motive and aims, and its nature.⁵⁸ Parts One and Two of the book are a biblical and historical overview of the meaning of mission and the paradigm shifts that have occurred in the understanding and practice of mission through time. Part Three outlines the emergence of a post-modern theology of mission and what Bosch calls an emerging ecumenical missionary paradigm.⁵⁹

At the heart of this new paradigm is the understanding that the mission of the Church is grounded in the *Missio Dei*, the mission of God.⁶⁰ "The *missio Dei* institutes the *missiones ecclesiae*."⁶¹ This divine mission is grounded in the new paradigm not in the areas of ecclesiology or soteriology, but in the theology of the Trinitarian

⁵⁶ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1991), 1.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 368.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 370.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

relationships: the Father sends the Son, and together the Father and Son send the Spirit.⁶² This is expanded to include the sending of the Church into the world.⁶³ The Church does not merely engage in mission as one of its many activities, it is missionary by its very nature. God's mission into the world constitutes the Church. Further, "our missionary activities are only authentic insofar as they reflect participation in the mission of God."⁶⁴

The implications of understanding the mission of the Church as being grounded in an emanating from the mission of God are far-reaching. The focus of mission is neither church growth nor the improvement of civil society, two particular tendencies in parish understanding of mission that can be the result of disintegration described here. Rather mission is the participation in the purposes of God in the creation, redemption, and consummation of the world. God is already active through Jesus and by the power of the Spirit. The Church announces God's work, anticipates its final consummation, and shares in its unfolding in the world.

Bosch's discussion of the aims of mission are thorough and far-reaching. He is not satisfied to entertain any reduction of mission to the evangelistic enterprise of the Church or engagement of social action. His approach is holistic and discussed under numerous headings, among which are the mediation of salvation, the quest for justice, as evangelism, as liberation, and as acting in light of the presence and promise of eschatological hope. Amid these discussions are also addressed issues of inter-religious

⁶² Ibid., 390.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 391.

dialogue, inculturation, and ecumenism. For the purposes here focus will be upon a few of them, while commending Bosch's entire discussion for pastors to read.

Mission as Mediating Salvation

Considering mission as mediating God's salvation of the world, Bosch states "the scope of salvation – however we define salvation – determines the scope of the missionary enterprise."⁶⁵ Although there are nuances within these positions, he categorizes understandings of salvation as either traditional or modern.⁶⁶ The traditional paradigm focuses upon the salvation of the individual, whether in the Eastern understanding of theosis or the more Western approach as the forgiveness and restoration of the sinner.⁶⁷ This focus has an effect upon Christology, where the salvific work of Christ is separated from his life and teaching. At the heart of the missionary enterprise in this paradigm is the "vertical" or "spiritual" work of preaching and the administration of the sacraments.⁶⁸ More horizontal activities of caring for the poor and marginalized and other ministries were clearly secondary, with their worth seen in their apologetic value.⁶⁹

The modern paradigm in contrast focuses christologically upon Jesus as teacher, especially in the Sermon on the Mount, with soteriology focusing on the horizontal aspect

⁶⁵ Ibid., 393.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 393-397.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 394.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 394-395.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 394.

of human progress and liberation informed by the life and teachings of Jesus.⁷⁰ Here the meaning of soteriology, with its etymological roots in the healing sciences, σωζω, concerns the healing of human society. Bosch critiques this position in terms of Christology; if Jesus is merely the teacher and exemplar, then he is ultimately superfluous to salvation.⁷¹

Bosch suggests a view of salvation within a comprehensive Christological framework, “which makes the *totus Christus* – his incarnation, earthly life, death, resurrection, and Parousia – indispensable for church and theology.” Salvation cannot be reduced to either the traditional or the modern, the salvation of individuals happens within “the context of human society en route to a whole and healed world.”⁷² Bosch encourages missionary practice to “find a way beyond every schizophrenic position and minister to people in their total need, that we should involve individual as well as social, soul and body, present and future in our ministry of salvation.”⁷³ This also means that care should be given not to align the social aspect of salvation with any particular specific political or social project.⁷⁴ As an eschatological reality the salvation proclaimed and shared by the Church is ultimately the work of God, and will not be completed in history.

Mission as Evangelism

⁷⁰ Ibid., 395.

⁷¹ Ibid., 399.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 400.

Questions raise in the discussion of individual versus social salvation touch on other issues Bosch wishes to cover, specifically the Church's work in extending justice⁷⁵ and mission as evangelism.⁷⁶ The section on justice deepens the conversation about the tension between the social and individual sides of salvation: "the 'spiritual Gospel' and the 'material Gospel' were in Jesus one Gospel."⁷⁷ Yet in addressing these issues, Bosch opines, leads directly to a discussion of evangelism as an aspect of mission.

Bosch expends much thought in charting a way through the question of what evangelism is, and how it is to be practiced and pursued. He notes that in some circles, noting especially evangelical Christians and among Roman Catholics who have given priority to the term "evangelization," the term mission is often collapsed into evangelism.⁷⁸ For Bosch, evangelism is a necessary part of the missionary task, yet it does not exhaust its meaning.⁷⁹ He is also acutely aware of misuses of the term, particularly as proselytism which "has been used as a means of reconquering lost ecclesiastical influence."⁸⁰ In response he explores in dialectical fashion a series eighteen theses delineating what evangelism is and is not. Among the things that evangelism is not together with not being proselytism, it is not the same as church extension or church growth, although one of the effects of authentic evangelism will be folding new members

⁷⁵ Ibid., 400-408.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 409-420.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 408.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 411.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 418

into congregations.⁸¹ It is not to be measured by its effectiveness in producing converts, but rather in its authenticity of witnessing “to what God has done, is doing, and will do.”⁸² Evangelism invites response, but as an invitation it is never given to coercion, scaring people into repentance on incurring feelings of guilt.⁸³ It is a modest activity of offering salvation to people as a present gift and an assurance of eternal bliss.⁸⁴ Nevertheless it is also a call to costly commitment to mission under Christ, both to those receiving the Good News and those who are offering it.⁸⁵ These issues, among others, congregations need to consider as they approach the practice of evangelism.

It is only through this dialectical process that Bosch is willing to entertain a definition of evangelism. "Evangelism is the proclamation of salvation in Christ to those who do not believe in him, calling them to repentance and conversion, announcing forgiveness of sins, and inviting them to become living members of Christ's earthly community and to begin a life of service to others in the power of the Holy Spirit."⁸⁶

Mission and Eschatology

In the final sections in Bosch’s proposal for a new missionary paradigm, he addresses mission in light of eschatological expectation. As with previous sections, he

⁸¹ Ibid., 415.

⁸² Ibid., 412.

⁸³ Ibid., 413.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 414.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 418

⁸⁶ Ibid., 11. While the definition is subsequent to Bosch’s dialectical considerations, it is actually presented earlier in the book in the preliminary discussion of the parameters of mission.

attempts to chart a middle way between two opposite tendencies. He begins with modernism attempt, quoting Troelsch, to close “the eschatological office.”⁸⁷ With teleology discarded by modernism as a means of understanding the world, the hope that Christians have professed gets collapsed into historical processes.⁸⁸ With the advent of the twentieth century various attempts are made to “reopen the eschatological office.”⁸⁹ Many of these options emanate from the theological ferment following the end of the First World War and the publication of Karl Barth’s *Epistle to the Romans*.⁹⁰ These options, which do not easily synthesize, include Barth’s sharp eschatological delineation of the otherness of the Word of God over and against all human history and systems and Rudolf Bultmann’s eschatology as the proclamation of existential event in the individual.⁹¹ Other options include those like C.H. Dodd who proposed a realized eschatology, with eschatological hope being fulfilled in the present.⁹² Another eschatological option Bosch calls the extreme eschatologicalization of mission, a pessimistic view that sees Christian hope as rescue of the individual from a hopelessly lost world.⁹³

⁸⁷ Ibid., 498.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 499.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 501.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 502.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 503.

⁹³ Ibid., 504.

Ultimately Bosch opts for a version of Oscar Cullmann's salvation-historical model.⁹⁴ In this understanding there is an "already, but not yet" character of the interplay between history and eschatology. In the resurrection of Jesus and the outpouring of the Spirit the eschatological promises have begun to be realized within history. Yet they are obviously not fully present. Through mission the Church moves through history proclaiming and embodying the "already" aspect of hope, while also pointing forward toward the final completion of God's redemptive work. Some form of this option will comport well with N.T. Wright's understanding of the improvisory nature of Act Four, and, together with the other aspects of Bosch's missionary paradigm, will assist in articulating a theology at the heart of a renewed Christian social imaginary.

Alan Roxburgh and *Missional Mapmaking*

The question arises from a review of these texts as to how they are to be synthesized together into the seeding of a renewed Christian imaginary. Smith has given the most attention to this, but writes not from a congregational standpoint, but of that of the Christian academic institution. Canadian pastor and missional thinker, Alan Roxburgh, has given much attention to this very question in regard specifically to congregations. This is particularly true of his book *Missional Mapmaking*.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Ibid., 503.

⁹⁵ Alan Roxburgh, *Missional Map Making: Skills for Leading in Times of Transition* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

Roxburgh uses the idea of a map as a metaphor for Charles Taylor's idea of a social imaginary.⁹⁶ He writes of maps using "metaphors, images, symbols, and stories that enable us to navigate the world."⁹⁷ These maps are so ingrained in a society that people are hardly aware that they have them. They are simply the way the world works. Difficulties ensue, however, when shifting times and conflict between maps reveal the inadequacy of a people's map. As an example of conflicting maps Roxburgh uses the expectation of the Bush administration in 2003 that Iraq would welcome the invading American army as liberators and move in the direction of liberal democracy.⁹⁸ In terms of maps in times of transition Roxburgh discusses at length the shift from the modern era to a post-modern one, focusing upon eight currents that mark this time of change: globalization, pluralism, rapid technological change, postmodernism itself as emerging philosophy, staggering global need, loss of confidence in primary structures, the democratization of knowledge, and a return to romanticism.⁹⁹ Old command and control strategies for Christian leaders, such as strategic planning, are failing.¹⁰⁰ Pastors must now lead in-between the times.

⁹⁶ In this book Roxburgh does not cite Taylor or use the term "social imaginary." Yet through personal acquaintance and conversation with Roxburgh, the author is aware that this is the concept behind the metaphor of the map. In fact, in a seminar Roxburgh taught in Spring 2010 the Doctor of Ministry program at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, Taylor's *Modern Social Imaginaries* was one of the assigned readings.

⁹⁷ Roxburgh, *Missional Map-making*, 6.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 89-110.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 79-84

The task now is to create new maps for the people of God as they navigate through this changed landscape. This forms the second part of the book, and involves, in the terminology used here, seeding a new Christian social imaginary. Roxburgh offers four steps in this map-making process. The beginning of this is cultivating a new core identity in the congregation. He notes that there was a time when congregations had a distinct and well defined identity out of which they operated with confidence, marked by such formal delineations as denominational branding, polity, rules, and roles within the congregation and the community.¹⁰¹ Churches now exist with a porous boundary, and the core identity of congregations has become muddled. In this situation he opines that “the world could no longer be framed in terms of a series of predictable, manageable categories that, if we got them right, would translate into new levels of effectiveness.”¹⁰²

The first step in cultivating a core identity is assessing how the environment has changed in the congregation’s context.¹⁰³ This is not merely a conversation about changes in church attendance or the rise of secularism, but a wide array of revolutions, big and small, that are present in daily life that have a collateral effect upon the life and ministry of churches. The task is to raise awareness of this changed context in the congregation. This is not only in terms of statistics and demographics, but through actual engagement in the neighborhoods and communities that form the congregational context.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 135.

¹⁰² Ibid., 134.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 127.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 133.

Having made an assessment of the changed context, the missional map-maker is to engage in Step 2: “cultivating environments that re-create a core identity among the people of a local church.”¹⁰⁵ Roxburgh’s terminology of redeveloping core identity is roughly the same as what is being called in this project “reseeding a renewed Christian social imaginary.” Roxburgh’s approach is for pastors to engage the congregation in processes of listening and discerning. This will entail calling forth the stories of parishioners, listening together for the Spirit in the hopes, dreams, and fears of the people.¹⁰⁶ Yet such stories do not stand alone. They are heard in the midst of the biblical narrative as it exists as a counter narrative to the stories the world imposes upon the churches. He describes the work of one pastor who listened “to the narratives of his people then introduce biblical narratives into the midst of their stories not as answers and solutions but as alternative stories that invited engagements with people’s stories.”¹⁰⁷

Roxburgh’s third step is for pastors to create a parallel culture in the church centered in “the resocializing of Christians into certain kinds of practices and habits of Christian life.”¹⁰⁸ These practices instill in congregations a the habits that have formed God’s people through history into distinct cultures in the midst of other cultures, such as when they were slaves in Egypt, exiles in Babylonia, or resident aliens in Imperial Rome. Practices also become lenses for discernment of the surrounding cultures. The rhythms of congregational practices rub up against the practices and culture of the surrounding

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 134.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 139.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 140.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 143.

community.¹⁰⁹ The specific practices he commends here praying the Daily Offices, hospitality, receiving the poor, and being a learning community.¹¹⁰

Roxburgh's fourth step is to encourage and cultivate conversations and partnerships with those in surrounding neighborhoods.¹¹¹ This requires real engagement between members of the church and their neighbors, whether in those neighbors in the vicinity of the church grounds themselves or those living in neighborhoods where the people dwell. Together people within and without the congregation can hear each other, and envision common experiments in their locales. This is not a bait and switch type of evangelism; people in the neighborhood are not reduced to targets for church growth. Nevertheless, people engage with the gospel as lived out as a parallel and life giving culture.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 151.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 151-161.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 164.

CHAPTER 4

THEOLOGY AS MISSIONAL NARRATIVE

The stated objective of this study is to reintegrate Christian doctrine with both the life of the Church and its mission in the world. What should be coming into greater focus is that the way that doctrine or theology functions in the proposed reintegration is as part of a renewed social imaginary that will envision a compelling *telos* for Christian existence. This end is apprehended by the intentions of the heart and formed by practices. As a part of this new social imaginary such a theology cannot merely be a download of cognitive theological data, but be congruent with the wide range of other, often pre-theoretical, aspects that comprise an imaginary, such as ritual, myth, cultural practice, and story. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this is akin to N.T. Wright's use of the term "worldview," a complex matrix of story, praxis, questions, and symbols.¹

So how does the church proceed? The way that the issue has been framed suggests the way forward. This is reframing doctrine or theology as narrative, or, more specifically, framed within the biblical narrative. The move toward theology grounded in

¹ Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 124.

narrative rather than proposition has gained ground in the last forty or fifty years commensurate with the discussion of epistemology and narrative amid philosophers. N.T.

Wright comments

Human life, then, can be seen as grounded in and constituted by the implicit or explicit stories that humans tell themselves and one another. This runs contrary to the popular belief that a story is there to “illustrate” some point or other which can in principle be stated without recourse to the clumsy vehicle of narrative. Stories are often wrongly regarded as a poor person’s substitute for the “real thing,” which is to be found either in some abstract truth or in statements about “bare facts.”²

This process has infected much of homiletics and Bible study, wherein the point is to trick out the idea or principle embedded within the narrative, and then applied anew, shorn from its original setting, to the lives of contemporary hearers. This renders the original narrative itself accidental. While certainly there are parables and fables that function as illustrations of something beyond themselves, even they exist within a larger narrative framework and world that gives them meaning. Wright continues “stories are a basic constituent of human life; they are, in fact, one key element within the total construction of a worldview.”³

It might be stated in the terms of this project of reintegration, that doctrine or theology is the explication of the narrative of God and God’s people as found in the narrative trajectory of the Bible, while both ecclesial life and practices together with the Church’s mission are extensions of this story by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is not primarily the story of the individual sinner receiving salvation by grace through faith, nor that of a person making sense of inchoate experiences of transcendence through biblical

² Ibid., 38.

³ Ibid.

story and symbol. It may contain both of those. But it is the grand story of a God of mission, whose intent is to restore a broken and rebellious creation to the fullness of holiness, peace, justice, and mercy through the formation of a covenant community in communion with God and each other.

Missio Dei

This leads to one of the primary motifs of the biblical narrative, that of the *Missio Dei*, the “Mission of God.” This idea of mission being grounded in the very being of God is one of the main theological insights of twentieth century theology. Bosch dates this focus from the early 1930s, when Karl Barth becomes one of the first to view mission as an activity of God.⁴ Previously mission was discussed primarily as an ecclesial activity, whether in a soteriological terms as saving individuals from damnation, cultural categories as “introducing people from the East and South to the blessings and privileges of the Christian West,” as expansion of the church or denomination, or as the process by which the world would be transformed into the Kingdom of God.⁵ The move that is seen is from an ecclesiocentric view of mission to a theocentric one.

There is, of course, an important theological antecedent in which it has always been appropriate to speak of the mission of God, but that was classically confined to discussions of intra-Trinitarian relationships: the Father sending the Son, and together, at

⁴ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 389.

⁵ *Ibid.*

least in the West, sending the Spirit.⁶ It is in Barth's renewal of Trinitarian theology that makes the expansion of the *missio Dei* possible. This process has been accelerated in recent decades with the Trinitarian theologies by the likes of Moltmann, Gunton, and La Cugna.⁷ In essence, the Trinitarian mission into the world in Christ and by the Spirit also forms and sends the Church as a people sharing in God's mission. "To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love."⁸ Or in the often quoted words of Jürgen Moltmann, "it is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church."⁹ In essence mission forms the church.

Van Gelder and Zscheile discuss the relationship of the Church to the *missio Dei* under two primary headings: those understandings which focus upon the centrality of the Church to God's mission and those in which God's Reign unfolds in human history, often irrespective of the mission of the Church.¹⁰ Van Gelder and Zscheile prefer an "integrated" view.¹¹ This view affirms that God is actively and redemptively in "secular"

⁶ Ibid., 390.

⁷ In this regard see Catherine Mowry La Cugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and the Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991); Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clarke, 1991; and Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981).

⁸ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390.

⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 64.

¹⁰ Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 56-57.

¹¹ Ibid.

history, but the reality of that activity is named, embodied, and signed in the life and mission of the Church. While the exact contours of the relationship of this “secular” activity and the Church’s mission is complex and often opaque, the Church is nevertheless important, if not crucial, to God’s mission, and yet is rescued from undue triumphalism. In the words of the authors of *Missional Church* the Church is sign, signpost, and signature of God’s reign in the world.¹² As sign of God’s reign the Church embodies in its concrete life aspects of this Reign, while as signpost it points beyond itself to God’s activity in the world. Signature refers to the Church’s verbal proclamation, “To refrain from proclamation leaves all else anonymous, and subject to misreading the situation. Such vocal signing makes explicit what is implicit in the other signs. Verbalizing the gospel of Jesus removes the ambiguity. It also renders the reign of God accessible.”¹³

The Five Act Model

In terms of the narrative of Scripture that is being advanced here, this indicates that the story is inherently a missional one, and that the primary agent within the story is God. The Bible is not primarily a source book for information about God, or religious precepts for human flourishing. This is not to say that all material in the Bible is narrative in genre. It encompasses a huge range of material, including story, poetry, wisdom

¹² Guder, *The Missional Church*, 106-107.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 107.

literature, parable, and apocalyptic. From a literary stand point it is not easy to harmonize the disparate part into a cohesive whole.

Yet, theologically the Church has historically brought the material together through the process of the development of the canon. The means of understanding this canon of Scripture as a five act drama, as outlined in the previous chapter, is N.T. Wright's contribution to reflecting upon Scripture as canon in light of the mission of God. It is this scheme that is proposed here as a cogent way to both understand the theological basis for the reintegration of doctrine, church practice, and mission as well as providing a compelling means of explicating doctrine as narrative rather than as a set of abstract principles or symbolic ways of speaking about human subjectivity.

There is, of course, nothing theologically necessary in the five act scheme. Wright himself notes that there have been a number of critiques and suggested modifications to his model.¹⁴ In fact, one could suggest that one correction would be that at face value having the subject of the final act, Act V, be the Church eclipses the eschatological dénouement that is so prevalent in so many of Wright's works.¹⁵ One suggestion in this regard would be to conflate Acts I and II into "Creation and Fall" and create a new eschatological Act V. Without an explicit eschatological finale the temptation is to return of ecclesiastical triumphalism, or a de-eschatologized mission that all too readily empties

¹⁴ N.T. Wright, *The Last Word* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 121.

¹⁵ See N.T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope* (New York: HarperOne, 2008).

itself into social action, rendering the practices of the Church accidental and ultimately unnecessary.¹⁶

As this project is explicitly making use of Wright's scheme, his five acts will be retained. However, it will also assert that within Act V there is an eschatological finale which on the one hand belongs to this last act, and yet forms its own unique scene within the act. If a possible parallel could be drawn, it is to the finale in the opera of *Don Giovanni*, when after the Don has been dragged into Hell, the other characters who had been so injured by Giovanni's depredations burst onto the scene to proclaim their redemption. This finale is best expressed by the final scenes of the Book of Revelation with the descent of the New Jerusalem and the Marriage Feast of the Lamb (Rev. 21 and 22), although there are antecedents throughout, such as material from Isaiah (Is. 11:6-9; 25:6-10; 60:17-22, among other passages) and in the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans (especially Rom 8: 19ff).

The directions to be taken below make no pretense to being a complete description of the five acts of the Biblical drama, or even that they are faithful entirely to Wright's vision. They represent a starting point, which explicitly encourages theologians, pastors, congregations, and individual Christians to flesh out both in word and deed.

¹⁶ See Fitch, *The End of Evangelicalism?*, 188-193.

Act I: Creation

As discussed in the previous chapter, according to N.T. Wright the first two questions asked of any “worldview” are “who are we?” and “where are we?”¹⁷ Genesis 1 and 2 begin the scriptural narrative by addressing those two questions. While the two chapters are literarily very different, coming from different times and contexts, they nevertheless correspond to each other well. In brief, they answer the first question that humans are beings created in community as the image of God defined by their relationship with their creator and the responsibilities given to them by God. The answer to the “where?” question is “we are in a good and beautiful, though transient, world, the creation of the god in whose image we are made.”¹⁸ It is neither a divine world, as in pantheism, nor intrinsically alien and flawed, as in Gnosticism.

In an important study of Genesis 1, John Walton suggests that this first chapter of the Bible is ancient Israelite cosmology that envisions the six days of creation as the creation the cosmos as a temple in which the creator will dwell.¹⁹ In this view creation here is not about material creation, which is assumed by the text, but as the creation of function and functionaries within the cosmological temple. Prior to the work of creation the earth is non-functional chaos. Through the wind or spirit of God and the divine utterance or word God creates in the first three days the three main functions of life: time, weather, and food. The next three days the primary cosmological functionaries are created: sun and moon, creatures of sky and water, animals of the land, and human kind.

¹⁷ Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 132.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ See John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009).

This creation is good and beautiful, ordered with the teleological purposes assigned to every aspect of creation for the glory of the creator. The seventh day, when the creator comes to rest in this cosmological temple is confirmation of the nature of creation as temple, reflecting language of the LORD dwelling in the temple in Jerusalem (Ex. 15:17).

At the summit of this cosmological temple is humankind created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). Both from the temple motif and from the text itself a three-fold call of humankind might be discerned. First, humanity is created to have a priestly function before their creator. They are to offer the praise of all creation in to God. Secondly, humanity is to function as God's steward before the rest of creation, the image of the steward being an ancient functionary for a king. The authority of the king is present in the steward as the steward oversees and administers in the realm.²⁰

The third aspect of the call is less a function such as a priest or steward, but is rather a relationship. To use Karl Barth's language, humankind is being-in-communion.²¹ The image of God is not a quality or possession of an individual, but of humanity in community, specifically in Genesis 1 the man and the woman (Gen 1:27). Yet, like the priestly and stewardship functions, being-in-communion is constituted by practices that sustain relationships marked by mutuality, mercy, justice and love. Hence it is not inappropriate to see the creational vocation of humankind in a three-fold sense of priest, steward, and community, able to be understood as upward, outward, and inward within the community itself.

²⁰ Douglas John Hall, *The Steward: a Biblical Symbol Come of Age* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 32.

²¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Volume III, Part 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clarke), 185.

This Temple motif together with the three-fold vocation of humankind in this first chapter of the Bible functions like a prologue to the whole scriptural narrative. The Temple imagery will serve not only in a literal sense in the Old Testament, it will function Christologically, ecclesiologically, anthropologically, and eschatologically, culminating in the full return of the motif in the final two chapters of the Book of Revelation with the descent of the New Jerusalem, and the dwelling of God in the redeemed cosmological temple of the New Creation.

Act II: The Fall

The beauty and order of the first act begs the question of what has gone wrong. Something is out of order as humanity relates to God, to each other in community, and in relationship to the world around them. These are the stories we find beginning with the temptation in the Garden through the murder of Abel by Cain, Noah and the flood, and concluding with the construction of the Tower of Babel. These vignettes tell of the universality of sin, touching humanity's relationship with God, the world, and each other. This three-fold brokenness is evident when God confronts the Man and the Woman in the Garden and the subsequent "curses" that ensue (Gen 3:14-19). The results are blame and shame, as well as alienation from God, from one another, and from the created order, both between the man the ground to be tilled and the woman and the serpent. Other vignettes in this act give other shadings to the human predicament. For instance the fratricide of Cain not only portrays jealousy that eventuates in murder, but the disordered priesthood in Cain withholding the required sacrifice.

What should be avoided in assessing the material in this second act is the development of a comprehensive doctrine of sin. Instead the stories result in recognition and correspondence with the stories told at other times and other places. Certain generalizations can be made, however. The problem is at its root one of human agency. It is not in the fabric of the creation, as in Gnosticism. It is a moral problem, rather than one of perception, as in the Hindu concept of *maya*, which suggests the problem is one of holding on to illusion. It is a problem that encompasses both relationships between individuals and social networks including nations. And it is a religious problem, expressing rebellion against the creator and the vocation given by him. It should also be noted that this act does not exhaust the concept of sin. The problem that vexes humanity continues throughout all of the narrative, and the expression of human sin finds new ways of being manifested.

Furthermore, the problem appears intractable. Even the appearance of the godly among the many characters, such as Noah, is unable to stop the progress of sin. Neither does it seem that saving the righteous remnant while destroying the culpable proves a successful means of intervention. Even the supposedly righteous remnant found in Noah and his family is infected, and begin the downward spiral almost immediately upon disembarking.

The second act ends with the collective hubris of the human race in the construction of the Tower of Babel. This final scene is a counterfeit of the prologue to the entire drama found in Genesis 1. A new temple is constructed based in human arrogance, seeking as one to ascend into God's place. The resulting judgment is the confusing of

languages and strife between people groups. A universal solution to the problem of human sin seems completely inaccessible.

Act III: Israel

One of the virtues of Wright's scheme is that it helps restore the crucial role of Israel as the covenant people, their history, practices, and symbols, into the story of God's mission. The perennial temptation to omit the Old Testament or to pit it over and against the New is not an option with this model. What is affirmed about God in the ministry and teaching of Jesus and the Apostolic church finds its antecedent in the history of Israel. There is not a god of wrath in the Old to be abolished by the god of love known in Christ.

This mission of God is revealed in this third act, wherein through election and covenant God chooses Israel not only to be his covenant partner, but also to be a light to the world, that the nations and peoples of the world might know the true Creator God as their king and lord. It is in this act that Newbigin's idea of the "narrowing" of the mission, which is the universal is reached through the particular, takes root.²² First it is seen in the election Abraham and Sarah, and will continue in various ways throughout the act. Even in the latter exile of the people this theme of narrowing seen in the remnant.

The nature of the mission was to have been accomplished not only through God's mighty acts seen in the story of the Exodus and the return to Canaan, but also through

²² Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978) 31. How this focus on the particular undermines metanarrative pretensions in the Bible see Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).

Israel's covenant faithfulness to God and the observance of Torah, the covenant laws and practices. In the midst of the story symbols, offices, and new practices emerge, forming a developing Israelite social imaginary. Among these are royal line of David and the building of the Temple with its attendant priesthood. The story, however, reveals a breakdown in the mission, as Israel continually breaks the covenant through unfaithfulness to God, injustice in their social life, and the loss of chastity. The result is the entry into exile, and the long waiting for God to vindicate his covenant people.

Another strand in act three emerges in the midst of unfaithfulness and exile, that of the prophets. They excoriating the people for their unfaithfulness, preaching against what Walter Brueggeman has called "the royal consciousness."²³ The prophets critique what is tantamount to a return to Egypt. The royal houses are committed to an economic of affluence, a politics of oppression, and a religion of God's immanence. Over and against this is the holy God establishing a commonwealth of Covenant. Nevertheless, neither the sin nor injustice of either the king or the priestly caste lead the prophets to call for their abolition, but for their redemption.

The prophets also make known the promise that God remains faithful to the covenant and will send the Messiah who will fulfill the covenant intentions of the LORD, defeat the enemies of God's people, draw the pagan nations to God, and usher in the Day of the LORD. This eschatological vision is not only accomplished by sending Messiah, but also through sending the creative Spirit of LORD. The same Spirit who hovered over the waters of creation is to be sent upon Israel, and indeed upon the whole world,

²³ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: The Fortress Press, 1978), 28-43.

establishing a new creation. In fact, this messianic figure is the one who bears the Spirit (Isaiah 61:1-4).

In the course of this act most the characters of this drama have entered into the story, or have been foreshadowed. This is meant not in the sense of individual characters; of course Pontius Pilate or Onesimus have not come on stage as of yet. The intent here is to point to various groups as corporate characters of the narrative, such as Israel and the nations. This is not to discount the importance of individuals, but they emerge from within these larger groupings. As the story wends its way forward the relationship between the actors, their antipathies, sympathies, ambiguities, and moral commitments to one another are worked out.

Israel itself is among the primary characters, primarily as being the covenant partner of the LORD, reflecting the holiness, justice, and peace of their God. This covenantal life is reflected in Israel's worship and social practices and commitments. Within Israel we can also recognize sub-characters; not only individuals such as David or Esther, but also sub-groupings such as Zion, Judah, or the Northern Kingdom of Israel, not to mention classes and other groupings: the poor, the prophets, the exiles, and the royalty, to name a few. As mentioned above, Israel is also the one with a specific vocation and mission, that of being a light to the nations.

Israel may well be said to be the hero of this act, if not, in some way, the hero of the entire scriptural narrative. But if so, Israel is at the same time a deeply ambiguous character. It is a tragic hero, capable of great holiness and devotion, yet deeply flawed.

Israel is the triumphant one like a Son of Man in Daniel ascending above the defeated empires, yet also is the unfaithful spouse of the prophet Hosea.

Also emerging as characters within the narrative are the Nations. In many instances they are seen as hostile forces aligned against both Israel and Israel's God. Yet as with Israel, the narrative has an ambiguous view of the Nations as well. While they are often the antagonists of the narrative in light of their idolatry and enmity against Israel, they are also the objects of Israel's mission, drawn to Zion and to the Holy One of Israel through the holiness and witness of the covenant people. This more positive aspect of the nations is reflected in prophetic texts such as the vision of Isaiah (Is. 2:2-4). It is also reflected in individual gentiles such as Rahab, Ruth, and Namaan the Syrian.

One subset of the Nations bears mention, because, with possibly one notable exception, that of the Persian Empire under Cyrus, they become the chief villains of the narrative. These are the empires that arise in antiquity which oppress Israel, and are portrayed in Daniel as "the Monsters" arising out of the sea to destroy God's chosen.²⁴ It is important to mention the monsters of empire as the Roman Empire and Caesar will emerge as significant antagonists of subsequent acts.

Finally, the LORD himself is the chief protagonist of the scriptural narrative. In this third act God is primarily the covenant partner of Israel, portrayed variously as a loving father and faithful spouse. Yet as Creator, the LORD also seeks to reconcile with the nations which may turn and enter into covenantal life. As with the other characters, there is an ambiguity to the LORD's presence in the narrative. This is not in terms of an ambiguous moral character. Rather it is an ambiguity of presence. God is present with

²⁴ N.T. Wright, *Simply Christian* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 79.

Israel through the Word and the Spirit, and will continue to be. Nevertheless there is a sense also of the LORD's absence from among the people. Ezekiel powerfully narrates the loss of the palpable presence of the LORD among the commonwealth of Israel by writing of dramatic departure of the glory of God from the Temple. This sense of God's absence reinforces the sense of exile experienced by the people, which also sets the tone for the next act.

Act IV: Jesus

At the end of Act III and at the opening of the pivotal fourth act many of the different aspects, practices, and symbols that have emerged have become like many loose strands seeking to be tied together. Among them are the hope for the restoration of Israel's monarchy, the importance of the Temple, and the longing for liberation from Roman occupation and domination. There is the expectation that God will finally act in gathering true Israel and fulfilling the promises of the prophets and usher in the promised Reign of God. Different groups approach these loose strands of salvation history differently, often emphasizing one aspect to the detriment of others. The priestly class associated with the Temple in Jerusalem will protect their security through accommodation with the Romans. Groups such as the Pharisees, on the other hand, grasp firmly onto the liberationist strand. Their strict adherence to the Law is a means of gathering the true and faithful remnant of Israel in the hope that God would bless them by sending the Messiah as warrior king to lead them against the Romans and other pagans. Meanwhile Herod and his minions capitalize on the hope for a restored monarchy,

cravenly supporting the might of Rome that underwrites their royal pretenses with all the attendant luxuries.

It is onto this stage that Jesus appears. In his words and actions he enacts and renews the story of Israel as the faithful covenant partner of the LORD. In this Jesus gathers the loose strands of the narrative. The Gospel narratives themselves are replete with symbols, actions, and words that indicate that he is gathering Israel at a critical juncture in history. Among them are his participation in the inherent exodus symbolism of John's baptism, Jesus' explicit choosing of twelve disciples, mirroring the twelve tribes, and well as his sending of the seventy in Luke 10 reflecting the seventy elders of the Book of Numbers. As affirmed in the Gospel according to John, Jesus is the True Vine (Jn. 15:1-11), an explicit reference to an important metaphor for Israel in the Old Testament (Is. 5:1-10; Ps. 80:8-13). This places him in points of contact with other Jewish groupings and also their inherent reduction of their common story with God.

With the Pharisees Jesus proclaims a liberationist message that the long expected Reign of God is breaking into the world. This Kingdom is one in which the LORD will once again rule as King over Israel with perfect holiness, justice, and peace. This reign will result in gathering exiled Israel into communion with their God and the vanquishing of their enemies. Jesus also is in agreement with the Pharisees that the promised Messiah will be the one to usher in this Reign.

Nevertheless, there are significant areas of divergence between Jesus' vision and that of the Pharisees. Central to the disagreement is the means of gathering this renewed Israel. For the Pharisees strict adherence to the strictures of the Law as interpreted by

their religious authorities is the diagnostic tool for discerning faithful Israel from the unfaithful. Jesus on the other hand gathers Israel through mercy and forgiveness, seeking those on the margins: the poor, the sinful, and the disabled.

Furthermore, Jesus and the Pharisees part company in both identifying the true enemies that need to be vanquished and the means of accomplishing this. For the Pharisees the enemy is the Roman Empire, and the means of dealing with the “monster” is armed revolt, led by the Messiah as warrior king. For Jesus the true foes are sin and death, which give power to the parade of empires that have oppressed Israel and usurped the authority of God. The use of violence to defeat their enemies is actually a form of defeat, as Israel will have come to mirror the very empire they seek to destroy, and thus perpetuating the power of the monsters. The messianic vision of Jesus employs not only the royal motif of the Son of David, but gathers up a strand neglected by the Pharisees, that of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah (Is 53), who will defeat the true enemies of sin and death through Jesus crucifixion and resurrection.

The connection with other significant strands of Israel’s story as embodied by various actors and groups of the first century Jewish community, as well as the inherent contradiction Jesus’ words and ministry represent, and be pursued at length in a number of directions. For the purposes here several are worth mentioning. Jesus does assert royal lineage and authority, particularly evidenced by the triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey and his disputations with his opponents in the environs of the Temple. And yet the nature of his kingship presents a stark contrast to Herod as well as other potentates. The reign Jesus embodies is reflective of the reign of God, and is expressed in

mercy and self-emptying servanthood. In terms of the Temple, N.T. Wright points out that in his Galilean ministry Jesus performs what the Temple is meant to provide, especially forgiveness and communion with God.²⁵ The Temple had served its purpose in the story of Israel, but in Jesus the eschatological Reign had broken in and the need for the Temple had come to an end. In the Gospel according to John Jesus himself replaces the Temple. In his incarnation he is the Tabernacle in pilgrimage with God's people (John 1:14). In the resurrection he becomes a new Temple in himself (John 2:19-22).

Another aspect of Jesus embodying the story of Israel is reflected in his being a light to the Nations (Luke 2:29-32). His life and teachings, while primarily focused upon the gathering of Israel, expresses the original mission of Israel before the Nations. Jesus' attraction of and encounters with a variety of Gentiles anticipates the eschatological Day of the Lord seen in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, after which the Nations will stream to Israel's God. Thus this ambiguous relationship between Israel and the Nations begins to move into a positive one of mission and reconciliation. There may be residual enmity, but in this fourth act of the scriptural drama the potential of reconciliation begins to become the guiding motif of the covenant people in relationship with the Nations.

What is important to keep in mind is that Jesus is neither merely the agent of reconciliation of the sinner with God through his death, as in Willard's warning about the gospel of sin management, nor the proto-liberal of the gospel of inclusion. While he does reconcile the sinner and gathers the outcasts, Jesus does so through being the climax to the story and mission of Israel, which itself is meant to be a foretaste of the restoration of

²⁵ N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 65.

the original creation of humanity in the image of God. Furthermore, as N.T. Wright suggests, Jesus not only enacts the role of Israel in this crucial turn in the narrative, he also in some significant ways is the return of the LORD to Zion.²⁶ This is reflected certainly in the Temple imagery applied to Jesus. He is the Good Shepherd of the Twenty Third Psalm. Thus all the characters are on stage as the redemptive drama comes to the most pivotal scene.

The importance of the narrative in understanding the meaning of Jesus continues when the subject of the significance of his crucifixion and resurrection are considered. While it is well beyond the scope of this study to wrestle with depth of debate on the meaning of Jesus' death, especially in regards to the question of penal substitution, several points need to be made. One of the central questions that needs to be addressed of any account of the meaning of the death of Christ is whether or not it can be adequately located within the narrative itself.²⁷ From this story based perspective it can be said that as Jesus as Israel fulfills in all respects the covenant relationship with God. Jesus is the faithful covenant partner of God in going to the cross without acquiescing to the ungodly powers of the state or the religious authorities to secure his safety. He is obedient even unto death (Phil. 2:10).

²⁶ Ibid., 121.

²⁷ It is worth mentioning at this juncture an overlooked aspect of Gustav Aulen's famous atonement typologies. One of the virtues he touts of his "classic" or "*Christus Victor*" type of soteriology he finds prevalent in the patristic writers, in which - rather than propitiating the wrath of God - the death of Christ is victory over the dominion of sin, death, and the devil, is that it is part of a larger narrative structure. In Aulen's view penal substitution occurs in a forensic transaction between the soul and God that is outside of the narrative structure. See Gustav Aulen, *Christus Victor*, trans. A.G. Hebert (1931; repr., Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003).

But Jesus is not the faithful covenant partner over and against Israel which had broken the covenant time and time again. He also on the cross is in absolute solidarity in his suffering with unfaithful Israel, experiencing the absolute exile of death. Through Jesus' absolute union with God in covenant faithfulness and total connection with exiles from covenant life, he becomes in himself a place of mercy and reconciliation.

Similarly, other narrative strands can be connected with Jesus' death on the cross and its soteriological significance. John Howard Yoder, drawing on the work of Dutch Reformed scholar, Hendrikus Berghof, connects the collusion between imperial and Jewish religious authorities in Jesus' death with Paul's theology of the Powers. For Yoder, the Principalities and Powers said by Paul to be unmasked and defeated in Christ's death are not merely spiritual entities, but systems and norms that are created by God to assist in the ordering of the world.²⁸ They are not merely reducible to human social structures. They have a spiritual existence which is more than the sum of such social norms and customs. As necessary to human flourishing as they are, the Powers are fallen, with an arrogation of authority above that of their Creator. In terms of the narrative of Scripture suggested here, the powers find their concrescence in the totalizing ideologies of empire, viz. the Monsters.

Jesus defeats the Monsters through neither acquiescing to the Empire's demand in person of Pilate to renounce any claim to Lordship, nor resorting to violence, and thus perpetuating the reign of sin and death. Jesus' willingness to go to his death unmasks the Powers, defeating them by putting to death their stratagems, and trusting in God to

²⁸ John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 144.

vindicate him in the Resurrection. Arguably this comports with Aulen's *Christus Victor* soteriology, with the focus upon the Cross defeating the demonic powers aligned against the Reign of God. What is envisioned, however, is a more porous boundary between spiritual realities and their political and systemic historical manifestations than our modern theological imaginaries, whether conservative or liberal, are usually able to admit.

And finally, for the purposes here, one can consider the significance of the crucifixion from the perspective of the LORD as the primary protagonist, whether as the Father watching his beloved murdered, or with Jesus, the embodiment of the LORD, as the Crucified God. A rebellious world is gathered in the various characters assembled in Jerusalem and put to death the Son of God. And yet divine response is not one of retribution, but of mercy and reconciling love. This is not only clear from the words Luke records from the Cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing" (Luke 23:34), but moreover through the work of the risen Jesus. Rowan Williams points that the expectation of the story's trajectory should result in the return of the aggrieved in order to seek revenge. Rather, Jesus returns with mercy, breaking the power of sin.²⁹

These suggestions hardly exhaust the possibilities in seeking theologies of the Cross based upon the narrative of Scripture first and foremost. There could be fruitful pursuit in considering the centurion at the Cross proclaiming Jesus God's Son over and against the Emperor in Rome who would claim such a title for himself. Similarly, the cowardice of Peter and the other disciples could play a role in constructing a narrative soteriology. Neither should the importance of the theory of penal substitution, especially

²⁹ Rowan Williams, *Resurrection* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1982), 15.

in light of its importance in the development of Christian doctrine in the West, necessarily be omitted from consideration. The point here is simply that any recourse to this Latin view of atonement needs to be reframed from within the story. Further the object of mercy, the individual sinful person, needs to be located within the story as well, not merely as a naked soul before the holiness of God without context, community, or covenant.

The resurrection of Jesus is the vindication of his life and ministry. It is not merely that God reverses the tragic death of his beloved Son through resuscitation of his dead body. Jesus is raised into a transformed human existence, incorporating the spiritual and material in to a perfect and incorruptible union. In this God has inaugurated the eschatological Day of the Lord spoken by the prophets. What we see in the risen Jesus is the beginning of the New Creation, the renewal of the original creation first heard in the prologue of the narrative. In Jesus and the apostolic community he gathers the original vocation of humanity as being created in the image of God finds a new power and expression.

Further, it needs to be pointed out that the continuity between the crucified Jesus and the risen Lord, as evinced by the scars he bears, is also a raising up of his entire pattern of life as now the way of God's future reign. There is a three-fold pattern of life which is self-emptying of prerogative and power (Phil. 2:6), empowered by the Holy Spirit for the sake of others, especially the marginalized (Luke 4:18-12), which is offered to the reign and glory of God (John 17:1-2). This now becomes the way of life for all who turn to Jesus in faith and follow and obey him as Lord.

The final scene of this fourth act is the Ascension of Jesus. This aspect of the story is often overlooked or merely collapsed into the resurrection. Nevertheless, a few salient points on the subject need to be stipulated before considering the final act and dénouement of the narrative. First, the ascension is the fulfillment of a prominent motif in the story. Whether Moses on Sinai, David dancing before the Ark on the Temple Mount, or the promise of the Nations in pilgrimage to Zion on the Day of the Lord, the idea of ascending into the LORD's presence is prominent. The story of the ascension itself has an immediate antecedent in the ascension of Israel as the Son of Man in triumph over the empires into the glory of God (Dan. 7:13-14). This motif will also prove important in the pilgrimage and worship of the Church, as shall be shown.

Furthermore, the ascension enacts the direction and end of Christ's life and ministry. Over and against a gospel of social action and inclusion, as identified by Dallas Willard concerning much of the Christian left, the purpose of Jesus' ministry and teaching is not merely for human flourishing or the right ordering of human society, but directed to the glory of God. The work of Christ cannot be reduced to being an example of just life within the immanent frame. The missional is also inherently doxological in purpose and direction.

Reviewing the story of Jesus three particular aspects that emerge as constitutive of the character of his mission and ministry. First, his ministry is Spirit-filled. This is emphasized in different ways in Gospels. Luke and Matthew, for instance, see the Holy Spirit active as an agent of New Creation in the very conception of Jesus. All four evangelists portray the activity of the Spirit in Christ's baptism, anointing him for his

messianic ministry. Perhaps the Spirit-filled character of the messianic mission is best underscored in Jesus's inaugural homily at Nazareth in quoting from the Prophet Isaiah: "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news for the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Lk 4:18-19).

The character of the mission of Jesus Christ is also kenotic or self-emptying. Although he is the beloved Son of God and the bearer of the Holy Spirit, Jesus divests himself of privilege and prerogative, and takes the form of a servant. Certainly the most powerful statement of this is found not in the Gospels, but in the majestic words of Paul's letter to the Philippians (Phil 2:5-11). The kenotic character of Jesus's ministry is not absent from the Gospel texts, however. There are explicit references to him assuming the role of the servant and as the shepherd giving his life for the sheep. Yet the whole tenor of the narrative is one of him not assuming power, but ceding it to the point of allowing himself to be handed over to death.

The third aspect of the character of Jesus mission is that it is doxological, that is it is offered in obedience to and for the glory of the One he called Father. This would seem to be obvious, but, in fact, it needs to be underlined. This point is particularly relevant in late modernity when there is a real temptation to turn Jesus into an early prophet of democratic liberalism, whether in its right or left wing manifestations, seeking human flourishing above all, and often expressed as justice, inclusivity, and peace. But he pursues justice, reconciliation, and peace for God's glory in his priestly role.

Together the Spirit-filled nature of Jesus mission and ministry, his self-emptying and servanthood, and his oblation of his entire ministry to God forms a Trinitarian character for this particular act. While less explicit, such Trinitarian contours can be discerned within the previous acts as well. It will be in the following act that the interaction of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit becomes the matrix in which the Church lives and moves and has its being.

Act V: The Church in Mission

Obviously the redemptive drama does not end with the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. It continues with the ascended Jesus sending the Holy Spirit upon the gathered apostles who empowers them and the church that forms around them to continue the mission of Jesus. Thus the basic contours and themes of the narrative are extended toward their dénouement in the return of Christ and the fullness of God's Reign.

Biblically, this act is represented by the remainder of the New Testament, from the Acts of the Apostles, the letters to the early churches and individuals, and the majority of the Revelation to John, while Revelation chapters 20 and 21 form a sort of coda to the entire narrative. Act V, as discussed in a previous chapter, is not limited to the scriptural material, however. The Church in history is the continuation of the drama, and is thus called to live in continuity and integrity with the narrative that has preceded it. Both in its manifestations as local congregation and as a global communion, the Church's call is to reflect the original vocation to be a royal priesthood gathered in mutual and

abiding fellowship charged with the mission to be stewards and witnesses before the world of God's creativity, justice, mercy, and redemptive love.

Yet this participation in the story is also continuous with the rest of the narrative. Certainly this is evident in terms of continuing the story of Jesus in Act IV as the Body of Christ (I Cor. 12:12-13), extending the mercy, love, and passion for reconciliation and justice of the Lord. Nevertheless, just as Jesus recapitulated and embodied the story of Israel in his ministry, so the Church is called to embody, in the light of the ministry of Christ, Old Testament contours, including ideas such as being a people in pilgrimage as the Israelites in the wilderness, being in covenant with God, and exploring the prophetic imagination.

If there is something new that comes into particular focus in this act, it is the promise of the inclusion of non-Jewish people, the nations, into the covenant people. Prophecies such as those of Isaiah (Is. 2:2-4), which envision that the nations will be drawn to Israel and Israel's God in the eschatological "Day of the Lord" now come to fruition. The resurrection and ascension of Jesus constitute this eschatological event. People of the nations can now hear and receive the Good News of the Reign of Israel's God through the victory of Jesus. They may now be grafted onto the tree of Israel (Romans 11:17-24), not through adoption of Jewish identity and customs, but through faith in Jesus Christ and the power of the Spirit. It is given to this act to reveal the full intent of God's mission to the world: one communion of many peoples in Christ.

The mission of the Church can be seen as "*incarnatus prolongatus*," a continuation of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The risen and ascended Christ has

inaugurated his reign of God's holiness, justice, mercy, and peace. This reign can be known in part now, and in its fullness when Christ returns. In this inaugurated Kingdom the Church functions as heralds and stewards of Jesus' reign, pursuing the work of reconciliation of all peoples within the covenant community through engaging in Spirit-filled practices either received or derived by the story itself. Such practices are many, and will be discussed more completely in a subsequent chapter. Among these practices are what Anglicans consider the two dominical sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, as well as evangelism, reconciliation in conflict, hospitality, inhabiting local contexts humbly bringing peace as well as others.³⁰

As the Body of Christ, the practicing Church participates in the continuing mission of Jesus into the world. It pursues this participation having "the same mind" as Jesus, which is the three-fold pattern of being Spirit-filled, self-emptying, and doxological as discussed in the previous act (cf. Phil. 2:1-11). This Christological character, if faithfully pursued, is a corrective to the temptation of either the Church becoming triumphalistic or merely emptying itself into the political processes of the world. In becoming kenotic, the Church seeks to live not for itself but for God and God's world. In being doxological, the proper end of the mission is not reduced to human flourishing, but rather in the mission being an oblation of praise and thanksgiving to the God who reigns as King. This end is the eschatological goal portrayed in the return of Christ and the descent of the New Jerusalem, which signals the final ascent of the nations up Mt. Zion.

³⁰ This particular list of practices is derived from David Fitch from a D.Min. seminar at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena California, on June 29, 2011.

This mission itself, constituted by ecclesial practices both interior and exterior to the boundaries of the Church, and made redemptive by the Spirit, have their own narrative arc, which recapitulates each week the story as seen in Jesus. The Church reclaims its baptismal identity each Sunday either through the actual practice of baptism, or through the baptismal echoes in the Eucharistic celebration. The Spirit-filled Church follows Jesus Christ into the practices that build up the Body of Christ and join with Christ in embodying God's reign in each local context. The end of this weekly entry into fellowship and mission is neither the health of the parish nor the wellbeing of the city. It is found in a return to the altar in the subsequent Eucharist, an ascent with the risen Jesus as the celebrant enjoins the congregations to lift up their hearts. It is also an anticipation of the Church's final ascent up the eschatological New Mt. Zion and a foretaste of the Marriage Feast of the Lamb, the final end of the Church in mission.

As a bookend to the Prologue found in the first chapter of Genesis, the final two chapters of the Book of Revelation form a coda not only to the story of the Church in Act V, but also as the conclusion of the entire redemptive drama. Amid the rich imagery is the end or *telos* of the scriptural narrative. Theological leitmotifs that first emerged in the Prologue, and developed in the subsequent acts, return now. The cosmic temple of Genesis 1 is now the New Jerusalem, with redeemed humanity present as the bride of the Lamb, the apotheosis of humankind as being-in-communion. The God of all creation now resides with humanity, dwelling within them as a temple, becoming the light to the peoples, with Christ the Lamb as the lamp (Rev. 21:3, 23). Included in this eschatological

vision are the nations, which now stream into the New Jerusalem, the completion of the mission of the Church to graft the nations into the Covenant.

In terms of Charles Taylor's questions posed by social imaginaries, that of the people's relationship with the gods, the right ordering of human society, and the meaning of human flourishing, each find expression within this scriptural coda. The relationship with God is, as has been noted, reflects nuptial imagery, which is common to both the prophets of the Old Testament and in various texts in the Gospels and in the Letter to the Ephesians (Hos. 2:16-20; Mt. 22:1-14; Eph. 5:21-33). The right ordering of human society is the fullness of the reign of God through Christ the Lamb, who together will share the throne (Rev. 22:3-4). Of human flourishing, these final chapters of the scriptural narrative envision a fully human commonwealth of various peoples beyond death and corruptibility, where God's peace will wipe away every tear and all things are made new. Earthly justice and divine holiness imbue this final state. Certainly the imagery in these final chapters do not express the fullness of the way that the redemptive narrative addresses Taylor's three questions; yet ultimately the stories and images that portray the social imaginary of the Bible point in the direction of these chapters in Revelation, and help fill out the larger picture of the intent of the narrative.

Concluding Thoughts on the Narrative

Obviously this is only a brief outline of a narrative theology based upon the Bible. Many of the various themes and motifs have not been discussed or adequately addressed. Also left without adequate discussion is the issue of the Church's improvisation of the

missing section of Act V. Of this latter issue, there will be more discussion further within the proposals being made here. Of the former, it is hoped that this outline will provide fodder for enlargement by pastors and teachers.

It should also be pointed out that as a theology, many significant topics and doctrines have not been addressed at all. Among these may be noted are the doctrine of the Trinity, Christology, and that of the revelation and the Bible. The intention is that such issues would be discussed not as abstract topics for theological reflection, but rather developed within their relationship to the entire narrative. This sort of approach was attempted in these pages in the brief discussion on the theology of atonement as it appears within the story of Jesus in Act IV.

Similarly, the deity of Jesus Christ could well be considered in the context of Jesus enacting the return of the God to Israel, and his exaltation as Lord in his resurrection and ascension. Such doctrines become meaningful as they emerge from the narrative itself, and become indispensable factors in telling the story coherently. While some theological pronouncements may go well beyond both the vocabulary and affirmations of the Bible, such as the statement in the Nicene Creed of Jesus being consubstantial with the Father, they should be assessed in light of the integrity they have with the narrative itself, and not merely their comportment with isolated quotes and proof texts.

Finally, a form of the narrative theology presented here will play a significant role in the reintegration of doctrine, church life, and mission. It does so by providing the story that can animate a renewed Christian social imaginary. In Willard's parlance, the story is

the vision that is pursued by the intentions of the heart and by means of spiritual disciplines. It is the *telos* which can be loved. It is to these matters that this proposal now turns.

CHAPTER 5

END, INTENTION, AND PRACTICE

At this juncture all the basic pieces to aid the reintegration of doctrine with church life and mission have now been brought into the conversation. The task now is to assemble them into a workable strategy for use in congregations. At the heart of this proposal is that pastors and leaders, rather than either inculcating a set of rational propositions or acquiescing to the priority of personal experience, are to seed a new Christian social imaginary among their congregations. Following the insights of Charles Taylor, doctrine now is first and foremost a deep narrative of God and God's people that answers the three questions of the world's relationship to God, the right ordering of human society, and the meaning of human flourishing. This narrative is expressed in the biblical story, and is recounted in preaching and teaching, liturgy and the arts, as well as the more speculative work of theologians. It is not that mere assent is given to doctrine. Doctrine is formative of a type of life lived together in the church with God, sharing in Christ's life and mission by the power of the Holy Spirit. The problem of disintegration has been that the multifaceted life and mission has not cohered into a large imaginary, and thus have been subverted by other imaginaries. Doctrine as propositions or principles

may be affirmed, but all too often such affirmation can pertain to the "religious" sphere of life, such as in Willard's "Gospel of Sin Management," or can serve secular political ends with little left of the Christian faith but a façade.

Ultimately a renewed social imaginary offers not something merely to be believed, but to be trusted and loved, engaging the intentions of the heart through worship and allegiance. In turn, the content of the imaginary cannot be reduced to a symbolic framework for articulating discrete individual spiritual experiences. It is a social imaginary in that it constitutive of a people with a shared story and *telos*.

There are three core aspects for leaders in congregations to pursue in order to fold individual members of the congregation into it: the need to cast a vision of the end or *telos*, assist congregants in expressing the intentions of their hearts toward that end, and then encourage a set of basic practices that will steel the heart in these intentions. Of course, the use of such concepts in Christian discipleship and formation is nothing new. Anglican use arguably begins with St. Benedict and his Rule, whose vision was carried over into Anglicanism through the early Benedictine evangelists in England and simplified by the English reformers for use by all Christian people. More significantly yet, this pattern is intrinsic to baptismal formation and life, and is particularly evident in the 1970 Book of Common Prayer in its baptismal liturgy.

Benedictine Antecedents

Dom Robert Hale, O.S.B Cam. asserts that Anglicanism exhibits a “Monastic-Benedictine Spirit.”¹ Historically this is clear from the significance of the Benedictine mission to Anglo-Saxon Britain beginning in 597 which bequeathed monastic spirituality and order upon the newly converted pagan Kingdoms. The centerpiece of this Benedictine patrimony is the liturgical spirituality of the Book of Common Prayer, with its Eucharistic center and round of daily offices, the latter of which are a simplification of the monastic Liturgy of the Hours. Anglican spiritual writer Martin Thornton sees that the balanced life of the monastery, joining work and prayer, as well as affective and speculative spirituality, is reflected in the balance of life in the Anglican tradition.²

The Benedictine task was not dissimilar to the one that is under consideration here; that is to embed a uniquely Christian social imaginary among those living in the chaos of the end of the Western Roman Empire, as well as those who later they would reach in far off pagan lands, such as England. The Benedictines were able seed this renewed Christian imaginary through three crucial aspects: the *telos* or goal of the community, the vows, and *regula* or rule of life.

Telos in Benedictinism

The community which St. Benedict envisioned in his rule is formed by the end for which it was created. The stated end for the rule is quite simply “to establish a school for

¹ Robert Hale, *Canterbury and Rome: Sister Churches* (London: Dartman, Longman, and Todd, 1982), 80.

² Martin Thornton, *English Spirituality* (Boston: Cowley Publications, 1986), p. 81.

the Lord's service."³ This, however, does not exhaust the *telos* that has animated the Benedictine vision. The word picture that Benedict puts forward in the Prologue to the rule combines the image of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-24) combined with the supplication of Psalm 15, "O Lord, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell upon your holy hill?" (Psalm 15:1). The formation of "those who walk blamelessly" (Psalm 51:2) is seen as the transformational journey the Prodigal takes from the pig sty to the Father's tent of celebration. It is a journey grounded in grace, as each person is already counted as a son,⁴ although the inheritance has been squandered. The Word of God rouses the Prodigal from sleep and awakens the desire to return home.⁵ The end is not merely a reward after a process of return to God and spiritual transformation. The end is known and is present in the process itself.

Monastic Vows

The term "vow" denotes a solemn promise or intention grounded in the will of an individual to the purposes and common life of the community. The emphasis upon the will here is significant, as the promise is thought not to be grounded in ephemeral affections and passions which are subject to change, but an ongoing life-long profession, regardless of the changing subjective state of the one making the promise.

³ Timothy Fry, O.S.B. *The Rule of St. Benedict in English* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1982), 18.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

Most are familiar with the common Augustinian vows of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, made by many religious orders. These vows function in a similar fashion to the renunciations in Baptism of the Devil, the world, and the flesh, marking the difference between the adherent and the surrounding culture. Benedictine vows, while still having this differentiating character, also state more affirmatively a connection with the life one is joining. The three Benedictine vows are of stability, *conversatio morum*, and obedience.

Stability differentiates the Benedictine from wandering monks Benedict encountered who never settled into a particular community or follow consistently one rule of life.⁶ The monk makes a commitment to be stable for life in a particular community, obedient to a specific rule. Stability is a call to patience and perseverance. Ultimately this is an expression of stability in Christ, reflecting the old monastic saying “The reason for stability? God is not elsewhere.”⁷

Conversatio morum is often translated as commitment to the monastic life, the general thrust is conversational or transformational. It denotes a dynamic of change from the estranged Prodigal into a beloved child of God. It does differentiate the monks from other monks living by themselves without an abbot or a rule. These latter make a rule of their own passions and preferences,⁸ and thus inhibit the transformative work of the community. The Benedictine, however, vows to seek the transforming grace of Christ

⁶ Ibid., 20.

⁷ De Waal, *A Life-giving Way*, 65.

⁸ Fry, 20.

each day, both as an individual and in the case of communities, such as in the great Benedictine missions of the Medieval era, when monasteries had to transform themselves in to engage in mission in differing social contexts.

The vow of obedience draws its meaning from the call to listen, which forms the very beginning of the rule: “listen carefully, my son, to the master’s instructions, and listen to them with the ear of your heart.”⁹ As Esther de Waal points out, the root of the Latin *obaudiens*, to listen intently, is a cognate of the word to obey.¹⁰ Thus obedience comes from a spiritual conversation with God as expressed in Scripture, the rule, the Abbot and other monastic superiors. This vow is also pursued in listening to one’s peers and even the poor stranger at the gate.¹¹ What we find in the Rule is a web of relationships which mediate the voice of God.

Esther de Waal in her commentary on the Rule of Benedict, *A Life Giving Way*, sees these three as intrinsically transformational.¹² Obedience points to the listening which awakens the slothful soul, which then begins the process of repentance as suggested by the *conversatio morum*. This process eventuates in stability in the dwelling of God. De Waal suggests that Benedict has more than his monks in mind with this progression of the three vows, addressing them to “whoever hears these words of mine”¹³ in fact, “the prologue may well be based on a catechetical or a teaching homily given at

⁹ Ibid, 15.

¹⁰ Esther de Waal, *A Life-giving Way* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995), p. 8.

¹¹ Fry, *The Rule of St. Benedict in English*, 73-74.

¹² De Waal, *A Life-giving Way*, 8.

¹³ Ibid., 8.

baptism. For then in fact we see here teaching that applies to all Christians living out their faith under their baptismal vows.”¹⁴ Of the vows, she writes, “they all speak to me of Christ, Stability: Christ the Rock; *Conversatio morum*: Christ the Way; Obedience: Christ the Word.”¹⁵

Rule of Life

The intention of the monastery is put into practice through the *regula*, or rule of life. This encompasses the majority of the Rule of St. Benedict, and covers such diverse topics as the method of praying the Liturgy of the Hours, the duties of the Abbot, rules pertaining to food, drink, and clothing, the pattern of work in the monastery, and hospitality offered to guests, among many others. Nothing of their common life seems to be omitted from Benedict’s attention. While contemporary readers may find the Rule onerous, those from Benedict’s context found it balanced. Indeed, balance is a hallmark of Benedictine spirituality, with attention given to both prayer and work, corporate liturgy and private spirituality.

What marks the Benedictine Rule is a life structured around a set of practices that enable the community to fulfill their vows and pursue their *telos*. The community’s Rule is the commitment to a set of core practices to be pursued together, and may be, in fact, constitutive of its identity. Furthermore, such practices emerge from the core narrative of the community and are expressive of it. For Benedict, the practices that constitute his Rule are grounded in the biblical narrative of the Christian faith.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 199.

Baptismal Foundations

If this proposal finds antecedents in the Benedictine experience, there are also profound foundations to be discovered in the theology and liturgy of baptism. Indeed the biblical texts concerning baptism envision the sacrament as initiation and emersion into a new narrative and social imaginary. For instance, Paul uses various images and metaphors to understand what is occurring in baptism. In the Epistle to the Romans baptism is a participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Romans 6:3-4.). The First Epistle to the Corinthians envisions a new social reality for Christians, whereby they become organically joined to one another members or organs of the Body of Christ, comprised of people from a variety of peoples and socio-economic situations (I Cor. 12:12-13).

Yet the other aspects of this proposal, namely the expression of a vision or end, the intentions of the heart, and the means of living into that end and embodying those intentions, are present as well in the theology and liturgy of baptism. This is particularly true of the baptismal liturgy in the 1979 American *Book of Common Prayer*.

The end envisioned in the baptismal rite is embedded especially in the use of the Apostles' Creed in the Baptismal Covenant¹⁶ and in the Blessing of the Water.¹⁷ In light of the scriptural story outlined in the previous chapter, the Creed can be taken as shorthand for the entire narrative. Assenting to the Creed places one's heart on this story

¹⁶ The Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer*, 304.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 306.

as the true narrative of the world, and a commitment to participate in the story as the proper end of Christian existence. David deSilva in this regard cites *The Whole Duty of Man*, a seventeenth century Anglican work, in this regard: “believing does not only mean consenting to the truth of the Creed, but also living like people who believe.”¹⁸ DeSilva further sees this end reflected in the sevenfold prayer for the baptismal candidates, in which supplication is made to God to

Deliver them from the way of sin and death.
Open their hearts to your grace and truth.
Fill them with your holy and life-giving Spirit.
Keep them in the faith and communion of your holy Church.
Teach them to love others in the power of the Spirit.
Send them into the world in witness to your love.
Bring them to the fullness of your peace and glory.¹⁹

The end is God’s work in both the individual Christian and the larger community of faith, with the prayers of the faithful gathered to baptize both adhering to this end and praying for its extension to the candidate.

The intentions of the heart are expressed implicitly through the classic threefold renunciations of the devil, the world, and the flesh.²⁰ These renunciations have been rendered in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer as renouncing “Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness which rebel against God,” “the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God,” and “sinful desires which draw us from the love of God.”²¹ As with the monastic vows, these serve a differentiating purpose for both

¹⁸ David A. deSilva, *Sacramental Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008), 60.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 68.

²⁰ The renunciations have been variously expressed through the history of the church.

²¹ The Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer*, 102.

the candidate being baptized and the congregation which reaffirms its own baptismal character. The intention is to pursue another social imaginary than the prevalent imaginaries in the surrounding culture. Interestingly, these three renunciations can be read in light of Charles Taylor's three questions raised by an imaginary, that of the relationship with God or the gods, the right ordering of human society, and the meaning of human flourishing.

In the *Book of Common Prayer*, the intentions are strengthened with the addition of the Act of Adherence, the threefold promise to "turn and accept" Jesus Christ as Savior, to trust in his grace and love, and to follow and obey him as Lord.²² This act of adherence, a feature of some Eastern liturgies since the fourth century, represented a transfer of allegiance from forces in opposition to God and God's reign to Jesus.²³ Again, in the terminology being employed here, this act represents the intention to adhere to a new imaginary which is centered in the person of Jesus Christ.

A particular feature of the 1979 Prayer Book has been the addition of a series of promises to the Apostles' Creed.²⁴ They include a commitment to the life and worship of the Church, resisting evil and penitence, being a witness to Christ in word and deed, seeking and serving Christ in everyone, and striving for justice and peace. Baptism thus entails a set of practices or disciplines in pursuit of the end envisioned in the rite. This

²² Ibid., 102-103.

²³ Marion J. Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer Book* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980), 270.

²⁴ The Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer*, 303-304.

commitment to a set of practices is not made merely by those to be baptized, but by the entire congregation as it is invited to renew their own baptismal covenant.²⁵

What is interesting to note is the specific liturgical response made in reference to these promises by both baptismal candidates and the congregation. Rather than simple assent, such as “I do,” the answer is “I will with God’s help.” The use of “I will” grounds the Christian engagement in these practices in the will of the individual. Liturgically, the word “will” here derives not from the future tense of the verb “to be,” but the present indicative of the verb “volare,” to will. The promise to engage in these practices is not merely assent a set of activities, but a commitment of the will to engage in them. Following Willard’s locating of the will in the heart, such practices shape the heart and its intentions.

Furthermore, the pursuit of these practices, while engaging the individual’s heart, is dependent upon the help of God to accomplish them. The pursuit of Christian practices, particularly with the eschatological and sanctifying ends they embody, can never be merely human practices. They are a participation in the divine practice that precedes them. Baptismal practices are responses to the grace conferred in the sacrament and are dependent upon the invocation of the Holy Spirit.

Apprehending the End

Critical to the work of reintegration explored here is to apprehend the end that animates and lures the life of both the Church as a whole and each Christian within it. Such an end or *telos*, however, is not merely the conclusion of the narrative of the

²⁵ Ibid., 302.

Christian faith as explored in the previous chapter. The pastor cannot merely refer the congregation to the final two chapters of Revelation as an adequate expression of this *telos*. The end is present to some degree or another throughout the entire narrative. Thus in Isaiah, for instance, there are soaring visions of the peaceable Kingdom of God where the nations "beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks" (Is. 2:4), as well as the *telos* being expressed, albeit negatively, in the judgement against the leadership of Judah for writing oppressive laws against the poor (Is. 10:1-2).

Yet while the end is present throughout the narrative, and can be gleaned from discrete passages, as evident in the citations from Isaiah, it is ultimately apprehended from looking at the totality of the narrative itself. In essence, the suggestion here is that the five act narrative of Scripture as discussed in the previous chapter provides the means of discussing the end that lures the intentions of the heart. The *telos* is revealed in both the trajectory of the narrative as well as the eventual denouement.

This focus upon the whole narrative as the source of the *telos* prevents the privileging of one aspect or one era as being normative for Christian existence, and avoids the lapsarian mindset. Apprehending the end is not a matter of a nostalgic turn to a bygone era, attempting to replicate the precise forms of Christian life, such as the congregation which proclaims it has returned to the form of life practiced in Acts of the Apostles or privileges the theological insights of the Reformation era. As suggested in a previous chapter, this is unhistorical, as it pristinates a moment in the past into an ideal that is not subjected to the vicissitudes of time. The point of Christian life is not to get back to some idealized past, whether the end is understood explicitly as getting back to a

specific era, or implicitly, and even perhaps subconsciously, as embedded in the teaching and discourse of the congregation.

The *telos* is thus both received through the tradition and understood contextually within the present moment in which the Church exists, both in a local and a catholic sense. Within this dialectic the Church is in a continuing process of discerning and embodying the end of Christian existence. It could be said that discernment is on the basis of Scripture, tradition, and contextualization. Or to state it in another way, the Church, both as a global community of faith and in its local expressions, is grounded in the Scriptures, receives the tradition with respect and gratitude to the Church through the ages, and prayerfully discerns the ends of God's mission for the world and their local communities.

Several other aspects need be considered when discerning the *telos*. First, beyond being grounded in Scripture and received from tradition, both of which are expressive of the five act drama, the narrative which is the basis of discerning the end is focused upon Jesus Christ as the center and hermeneutical lens of the whole. In the words of Irenaeus, Jesus is the recapitulation of the whole of the narrative. Thus Paul can express the *telos* with Christological language. The end is known in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and in the Church's participation in him by the Spirit. Yet, it must be mentioned that the privileging of Jesus in the discernment of the end does not mean that first century Palestine, or even the specific practices of Jesus within his specific context are imperative for contemporary Christians. Although the eternal Son of the Father, Jesus in his incarnation becomes a man of his times. It might be thought that the self-emptying of his

incarnation is not only taking human flesh, but an entry into the practices of First Century Judaism. Yet by the power of the Holy Spirit, engagement in these practices by Jesus transforms them. They become eschatological practices, linking the narrative with the final purposes of God. In this way Jesus' Passover meal with his disciples becomes the Eucharist, which not only recalls the past faithfulness of God, but communion with the risen Jesus, as well as a foretaste of the wedding feast of the Lamb.

The Christological focus leads to two other constitutive aspects of the matrix from which the Church discerns its *telos* and vision. One is that the Church apprehends its proper end through the power of the Holy Spirit. Prayerful invocation of the Spirit is a required. It is only through the Spirit that the Scripture and received tradition, as well as the engagement in the contemporary context in ministry and mission are rescued from either being exercises in nostalgia or bound to the current moment, and thus become invested with eschatological, and thus also teleological, significance.

The final point flows directly from the Christological and pneumatological emphases; that is that discerning the end is eschatological in focus as well. It is directed to God's final purposes in history, as discussed in the previous chapter. Inquiring after those final purposes, whether discovered in Scripture or in the experience of those ends in the common practices of the congregation, such as around the Eucharistic table together, is integral to discerning the animating vision for the reintegration proposed here. The eschatological focus also rescues the Church from too readily equating the purposes of God with human progress and the idolization of political processes. There is remaining the issue of articulating the vision or *telos* for congregations. Specific ideas of how that

might be engaged will wait for the subsequent chapter. What is important is for pastors and leaders to recognize the importance of discerning the end merely from the task of developing a parish vision statement, although that may be one outcome, but from a holistic look at the entire narrative of faith, known in Scripture and tradition, and pursued in the contemporary contexts in which congregations are called to serve and minister. The inquiry is grounded in Christ and in union with him, as the Church continually invokes the Holy Spirit. Finally, this process of discernment is aimed in time eschatologically, always seeking the final purposes of God beyond both nostalgia and human progress.

Intentions of the Heart

Diana Butler Bass in her discussion of the Apostles' Creed emphasizes that the original meaning of "credo," "I believe," is to set one's heart upon. While it has been argued that Bass deemphasizes the objective content of what is believed, the sense that believing is more than intellectual assent, and indeed points to a personal intention in regard to what is affirmed. The particular articles of the Creed are trusted as the truthful outline of God and his creating, redeeming, and sanctifying relationship to the world, which is apprehended by the heart. Thus it becomes formative for Christian life. Similarly, the *telos* or vision of Christian life is pursued through the intentions of the heart, which the will seeks to enact.

This "setting one's heart upon" is the intention found both in Willard's VIM and Smith's Christian anthropology of human being as *homo liturgicus*. It is also reflected in both the sacrament of baptism and the tradition of the Church, especially as embodied in

the monastic tradition. In these two instances intention is expressed specifically as “vows” that are made before God and the community of faith, solemn promises to embody the end which is affirmed in faith.

New Monastic writer Jon Stock understands the nature of Christian vows as being grounded in and expressing the Old Testament *hesed* of God, the unbreakable covenant loyalty of God to his people, and reinforced in the New Testament idea of *agape*.²⁶ God is the God of intention, promise, and vow; a character to which he is true even in the covenant disloyalty of the chosen people. Such divine faithfulness and intention knows no bounds, to the extent that God sends Jesus, his own son, to be the faithful covenant partner, returning the *hesed* of God. The resurrection of Jesus as the faithful covenant partner can thus be seen as a covenant action, the fulfillment of the vows made to Israel, and through Israel to the whole world.

God as a vow keeping Lord also has a differentiating effect. Over and against the capricious nature of pagan gods, the God of Israel and of Jesus Christ is the God of unbreakable intention and promise. This differentiating aspect of the covenant loyalty of God is not merely relevant in ancient settings. Within the immanent frame the universe itself or a process such as evolution become spiritualized into replacements for God as that which is ultimate. Yet neither the universe itself nor any process within it can exhibit an intentionality which can imbue the world with meaning and promise. To affirm the God of Israel as the God who has made a vow is to place one’s heart on a meaning and purpose to life which can be known and lived.

²⁶ Jon Stock, “Vows,” in *Inhabiting the Church* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2007), 26.

As those created in the image of God, human beings are called to be intentional beings, committing to God and his ends and purposes through making vows and solemn promises. God's covenant loyalty and intentionality is reflected in the human action of making vows. For James K.A. Smith such intentions are the means by which the loves of the heart is aimed to their proper ends.²⁷ They are means of apprehending and participating in those ends.

The seat of these intentions or vows is the heart, and are expressed as acts of the will. Intentionality is not grounded primarily in changing affections or passions. It is a commitment of one's being irrespective of one's emotional state. Neither is intentionality mere intellectual assent to a set of principles or beliefs. One's very being is staked on the intention; to break a vow is to in some sense break oneself. While some beliefs or opinions are so deeply held, changing such beliefs constitutes a breach in one's identity, many opinions or ideas can change without the fundamental sense of loss or change experienced when a core promise or vow is abrogated.

A further aspect of the intentions of the heart in what is being proposed here is that they should be expressed as public vows within community. In neither Willard's or Smith's consideration of the role of intention in Christian life is the issue of how such intentions are articulated or shared. The experience of both the monastic experience and the baptismal liturgy underscores the importance of the public and communal nature of the vows that form Christian life. The importance is at least three-fold. First is the issue of accountability. By making public promises the support of the community of faith and accountability to it. Within the baptismal liturgy this is asked explicitly of the

²⁷ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 47.

congregations: “will you who witness these vows support these persons in their life in Christ?”²⁸ Yet the promises made are also mutual. They are made among those who are also making, or have already made, the same promises. Thus the pursuit of these intentions is a mutual and communal one.

In addition to the accountability and mutuality inherent in public vows, the outward expression of such promises serves to reinforce and express that such inward intentions are to be lived in external expression. Intentions of the heart are never merely inward dispositions or attitudes, but are to be lived out in practice. Vows are speech acts that by the very public nature of them change the status of the person who makes the vows, and makes a claim on the entire life, both inwardly and outwardly. The action of making a vow publically is itself a practice of the Christian faith, and forms the basis for other practices as well.

As has been mentioned, the expression of the intentions of the heart through public vows has a differentiating effect. God as a promise making deity differentiates him from other gods or none. The vows of the first Benedictines differentiated the monk from both the dissipation of the surrounding culture at the beginning of the Dark Ages and from those pursuing extreme and unbalanced spiritualities. Similarly, vows such as the three renunciations of the baptismal liturgy have the potential to differentiate those making the vows from their surrounding culture in terms of spirituality, social relationships, and the meaning of human flourishing. In this way the public expression of intention can become a source for congregational and personal discernment and self-examination.

²⁸ The Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer*, 303.

While it is possible for a group or congregation to craft their own statement of intention or vows, Episcopalians and Anglicans may well be attracted to those vows that they have received through the tradition of the Church, especially those found in baptism or those derived from the monastic tradition. One ecumenical group with a historical connection with roots in an Anglican parish and a Baptist church in Sheffield, England, The Order of Mission, for example, has retooled the ancient monastic vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience into simplicity, purity, and accountability.²⁹ The virtue of these received traditions is that the congregation's expression of intention is not merely bound by the present moment and context, but draws encouragement and guidance from Christians throughout history. Nevertheless, even statements of vows received from history were forged in particular contexts, and are not timeless statements. St. Benedict's context formed the situation in which Benedictine vows were crafted. The task for congregations that employ the tradition will be the need to reframe their vows or promises within their context.

If the language employed is identical, for instance using the Prayer Book baptismal vows, conversation about how they are to be understood in within their specific situation. For instance, the renunciation of Satan cannot merely be reduced an avoidance to occult practices.³⁰ While this may be pertinent in some settings, this it probably not a major problem in the average Episcopal or Anglican congregation. Perhaps this

²⁹ The Order of Mission, "The Vows," <http://www.missionorder.org/tom-life/the-vows/> (accessed April 18, 2015).

³⁰ DeSilva, *The Sacramental Life*, 48.

renunciation can be understood as turning from the functional deism that pervades congregations.

Practices

The importance of practices lie in the how they link people in a participatory way to the narrative of faith and the end that is embedded in it. In the words of *Missional Church*, practices are “the social embodiment of the Reign of God.”³¹ While there are many ways of defining a practice for the purposes here a practice can be thought as a communally recognized craft of Christian living, derived from Jesus and the apostolic church, in which Christians must be apprenticed, the pursuit of which, by the power of the Spirit and the application of Christian virtue, they become increasingly conformed to the likeness of Christ.

Not all that Christians do together as Christians qualifies as a practice. Engaging in conflict management under the rubrics of Matthew 18:15-20 constitutes a significant Christian practice. It is derived directly from Jesus’ express command, expressed through the virtues of love, forbearance, and courage, and empowered by the Spirit who “knits together the elect in one communion and fellowship.” On the other hand, riding bicycles together as part of Christian cyclists’ club is not a practice. Cycling itself may be a practice, but it is not in any way derived from the scriptural narrative. What is to be guarded against is the propensity to simply baptize non-Christian practices and programs, such as Christian aerobics or the softball team, and place them at the center of the congregation’s life and participation. While there is nothing wrong with such activities,

³¹Guder, *The Missional Church* 158.

they do not of themselves connect the participants to the narrative of faith and the end embodied in it, nor become the means in which the intentions of the heart are expressed.³²

This raises the issue of identifying a specific set of practices. Here the literature will both find many common elements and points of divergence. John Howard Yoder identifies five central New Testament practices for congregations: binding and loosing, baptism, eucharist, the multiplicity of the gifts of the Spirit in the congregation, and the open congregational meeting as the basis of polity.³³ Richard Foster in *Celebration of Discipline* identifies twelve different disciplines divided into three groups: Inward Disciplines, Outward Disciplines, and Corporate Disciplines.³⁴ *Missional Church* does not specifically enumerate what is referred to as “ecclesial practices,”³⁵ but does place them under several headings such as those derived from Baptism and Eucharist, cultivating reconciled and reconciling communities, engaging in spiritual discernment, and cultivating communities of peace through hospitality.³⁶ This approach of finding a means of categorizing groups of practices as the authors of *Missional Church* have done, whether their groupings are accepted or others are suggested, will assist in the identification and pursuit of ecclesial practices.

³² It is true, however, that practices and programs not specifically Christian may be imbued with authentic Christian practices, and may become the context for their expression.

³³ John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992).

³⁴ Foster, *A Celebration of Discipline*, passim.

³⁵ Guder, ed., *Missional Church*, 153

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 159-180

What is being proposed here as a means of seeding a new Christian social imaginary among the members of the congregation is identifying a set of basic practices to be seeded with the community of faith. What is meant by “basic practice” is a set that forms the basic participation in ecclesial practices that both the most seasoned Christian and the new believer can participate, albeit in perhaps differing degrees of depth and appreciation. Basic practices form a sort of common spiritual vocabulary and a springboard into other practices as well. The basic set is meant to be broad enough to build upon, but not so comprehensive so as to be a disincentive to members of the congregation. As Todd Hunter writes that being a Christian, what he calls being a “cooperative friend of Jesus,” is not a matter of adding “a bunch of religious stuff to an already busy life.”³⁷ Identifying a set of basic practices would help to ameliorate this possibility.

In identifying his own basic spiritual practices for pastors, Eugene Peterson employs the metaphor gardening, identifying certain practices as the necessary “soil” for spiritual growth.³⁸ He focuses upon three in particular: common weekly worship with the people of God, praying the psalms, and recollected prayer throughout the day. Other spiritual disciplines, of which he offers a list of fourteen including spiritual reading, fasting, confession, and Sabbath keeping, are considered tools for use in the metaphorical spiritual garden.³⁹ As tools they are not employed regularly, but as needed to care for the

³⁷ Hunter, *Christianity Beyond Belief*, 90.

³⁸ Eugene H. Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 110.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 108.

soil. They are left in the shed until such time as they prove helpful. Avoided here is the possibility of overwhelming a person with a myriad of obligatory practices. While the practices suggested here as basic diverge in some respects from Peterson's, the metaphors of the soil and the toolshed are helpful for engaging in the practices in congregations.

To ascertain the basic practices it is helpful to view Christian spirituality from the perspective of a grid plotting spiritual typologies.⁴⁰ The grid is formed by two perpendicular axes. One axis ranges from an exterior and active focus of the spiritual life on one end to a focus on the interior and contemplative on the other. This axis can be characterized by the finding God primarily in service and ministry to others on one end, while knowing God in primarily in the interiority of prayer and contemplation is on the other. The other axis is between what on one side is characterized by mystery and ineffable, while the other is more comfortable with spiritualities that can be well defined and explicated. These axes form four quadrants. People who fall into the external and well defined quadrant are drawn to spirituality activities centered on programs for serving the poor and those in need. Those who tend toward the external and mysterious are still drawn toward seeking God in live with others, but here less programed and more open to listening for God in knowing the other, such as hospitality. The quadrant that is both interior and mysterious is characterized by spiritual practices such as centering prayer and is comfortable with contemplative silence. The last quadrant, the well-defined and interior, is marked by practices such as the Daily Office and the rosary.

⁴⁰ Suggested by a spiritual typology being beta tested by CREDO, a program of wellness and health for participants in the Church Pension Fund of the Episcopal Church.

In developing a set of basic practices a balance should be sought between these four quadrants. While each individual may be drawn toward one quadrant, the balanced Christian life will have experience in all four. While each quadrant can be represented by a number of practices, identifying one that is indicative not only of each type, but of the received tradition of the churches. The following set are indicative of an Anglican response to developing a basic set of practices. No pretense is made that this set is somehow canonical or required. Other Anglicans may suggest another set. And those of other denominations may come up with a very different set.

Representing the well-defined and the interior are the Daily Offices, particularly of Morning and Evening Prayer, yet also understood to incorporate Midday Prayer and Compline as found in the Book of Common Prayer 1979. Certainly much can be said about the spirituality and theology of the Offices.⁴¹ Martin Thornton considers the Offices to be at the very heart of Anglican Spirituality, occupying a central place akin to how the rosary functions among Roman Catholics.⁴² Certainly the use of the Offices are deeply rooted in the tradition of the Church, with antecedents in synagogue worship and the daily prayer services of the early Christians before they come to full flower in the early monastic movement.⁴³

Central to the practice of the Offices is the prayerful hearing of the Scriptures as the word of God. It is a hearing that draws forth a response from the people reflected in

⁴¹ See R.R. Reno, *In the Ruins of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2002), 149-164.

⁴² Thornton, *English Spirituality*, 143.

⁴³ Marion J. Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer Book* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980), 89.

both the canticles sung or recited and the prayers and collects recited. It is thus formed by the classic understanding of liturgy as call and response, with the proper response to the proclamation of the Word is reflecting the Word back in doxology. Embedded in this call and response form is the heart of the scriptural narrative; God calls a people to be in covenant with him who respond in worship, in love within the covenant community, and through mission into the world. The Offices thus require the development of both the ability to listen and to learn the language of prayer. These skills will be transferable between other practices as well, where listening and an appropriate response in light of God's grace is required.

The quadrant of mystery and interior is marked by a less formal and discursive form of prayer than the Daily Offices. Here the basic practice is the ancient monastic practice of *lectio divina*, divine reading, developed in the western churches especially among the Benedictines, but with roots much earlier, reflected especially in the Virgin Mary "treasuring things up and pondering them in her heart" (Lk. 2:19, 51).⁴⁴ The classical practice is one of listening prayerfully to a portion of Scripture and asking the Holy Spirit to open up the meaning of the reading to the heart of the one praying. Traditionally *lectio divina* has had four movements. First, and most simply, there is *lectio*, the simple reading of the text, listening for words or images that catch the reader off guard, or awaken her to God's presence in their lives. The second movement is *meditatio*, actively ruminating upon what was received in the reading; how is it reflected in the world or in the person's life? What implications does this have for the believer's life? After a time is spent in meditation, gleaning insights and wisdom, those things

⁴⁴ A helpful guide is Thelma Hall, *Too Deep For Words* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1988).

received are offered back to God in the third movement, *oratio*, prayer, what was gleaned becomes the material for a time of prayer. Finally, the one engaged in *lectio divina* moves into *contemplatio*, a simple resting in the love and light of God without words or thoughts.

While learning the practice of *lectio divina* the four movements are important to observe. As one gains a proficiency and comfort with the practice the movements become less precise, with one movement flowing into another without clear demarcation. Interestingly, learning lectio often begins in a less precise place as well, where the learner is asked merely to dwell in the Word, asking the Spirit to speak. When comfort in silence is achieved the specific movements are then introduced.

Like the Daily Office, call and response is at the heart of *lectio divina*, however in a less specific way. Listening in this practice requires the development of further skills. Among them is the virtue of patience and the ability to submit one's self to the Spirit. The sovereignty of God is recognized in *lectio*; the voice of the Lord cannot be invoked like a cheap conjuror's trick. The Christian comes before God in humble supplication calling upon the Lord as did the boy Samuel in the Temple, "speak Lord, for your servant listens" (I Sam. 3:10). Humility, patience, and submissiveness are thus developed; all virtues within a renewed Christian social imaginary.

Into the external and well-defined quadrant one would find those who most powerfully know the presence of God in a soup kitchen or visiting those in the hospital, among other places. This is the spirituality of Matthew 25:31-40, ministry among "the least of these that are members of my family." As a basic practice the call is to engage in

ministry to and with those on the margins: the poor, the sick and suffering, the unemployed and destitute. Certainly the outward and missional aspect is apparent here. Such engagements are also well known as they are most often organized either within the church or civic community. Tasks are relatively well defined, and rules and regulations delineate the parameters of what can be done. Although there are precedents of individual Christians who take it upon themselves to pass out sack lunches to the homeless in the park, these are the exceptions.

What is important is personal engagement in ministries and service to those in need. This places Christians squarely within the scriptural narrative, especially Jesus himself, seeking those on the margins. As a practice it is informed by the other practices discussed. God is present among those in need calling to Christians to respond. As it is grounded in call and response, Christian ministry to those in need moves beyond paternalism into relationship and mutuality.

The final quadrant is that which is both external and mysterious, or at least much less defined. Here the suggestion is that a rather new, or perhaps rediscovered, practice be identified here. The idea is to indwell local spaces and neighborhoods as the place where the Spirit is at work and the Kingdom of God is at hand. Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon have called “the art of Neighboring.”⁴⁵ This practice is grounded in the sending of the Seventy into the neighborhoods of Galilee as found in Luke 10:1-12.⁴⁶ Neighboring is less well defined in the sense that it is not attached to a program, as would a soup kitchen, but a commitment to remain in relationship with those in the neighborhood in mutuality

⁴⁵ Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012)

⁴⁶ See particularly Alan Roxbough *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*.

and support. It is not mere neighborliness, however, in that it is done in the expectation that God is working and revealing himself in the neighborhood, and that the Christian is to humbly respond in love to that work of the Lord, especially among those who have those in need and those who remain in anonymity behind closed doors and in back yards.

It might be said that neighboring as a practice is union of two practices. First is the practice of hospitality. It is found in opening homes to the other with the expectation that in hospitable action God will be known. It is reflected in the story of Abraham and Sarah receiving the three men by the Oaks of Mamre (Gen. 18:1-15), as well as other texts. Hospitality is expressed in openness and servanthood. The other practice is to be a good guest in the neighborhood, what Pathak and Runyon call the Act of Receiving.⁴⁷ It is an act of being open and vulnerable in the neighborhood. Being a good guest is reflected in the sending of the Seventy in Luke's Gospel when they are admonished to eat what is put before them (Lk. 10:7) and Jesus' admonitions at the sending of the Twelve in Matthew that when they are received Jesus is received, as is the Father (Mt. 10:40). They become Jesus as guest, over and against any hint of triumphalism or arrogance that, rightly or wrongly, Christians are often accused of.

The basic practices suggested by the four quadrants of spirituality are the Daily Office, *lectio divina*, ministry to and with those on the margins, and the practice of neighboring. These four, while being distinct, are mutually supportive of each other, with overlapping sets of skills deepening each. The call and response performed each day in Morning and Evening Prayer is experienced in more subtle ways in ministry among the poor. The vulnerability learned from living as a guest in the neighborhood enlivens the

⁴⁷ Pathak and Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring*, 127.

humility required before God in *lectio divina*. Certainly other connections can be made as well.

There is, however, one other basic practice that must be mentioned. In terms of the four quadrants discussed, this practice stands at the junction of all four. The practice that not only completes the set of basic spiritual practices, but is the font and end of them is the Holy Eucharist. In the celebration of the Eucharist the call and response of the Offices are present, as is the humble communion with Christ as would be known in *lectio*. Mission to those in need forms the heart of intercession, is offered as an offering of praise and thanksgiving upon the altar. The other known in the neighborhood is the other in the pew, towards whom the communicant is to respond with openness and mutuality. The interesting interplay of hospitality and being a good guest is reflected in the fellowship around the table, and reflected in the hymn: “Come risen Lord and deign to be our guest. Nay, let us be thy guests, the feast is thine.” The Eucharist further embodies the *telos* of the narrative of faith.

Concluding Thoughts

The task of reintegration of doctrine, church life, and mission into a comprehensive whole has turned out to hinge upon developing a renewed Christian social imaginary among the other modern social imaginaries that seek to subvert Christian thought and life. This task is a multifaceted one, but it is focused in apprehending the end of the Christian faith as embedded in the great narrative of Scripture and making that known in congregations. The call is then to make a public commitment to pursue that end

through promises and vows that are made to God and one another. As the means of living out these promises, the members of the congregation pursue the received ecclesial practices of faith and spirituality. Yet, so as not to overwhelm contemporary Christians, a set of five basic practices have been offered as a means of living into the promises and vows, and as a springboard into a deeper Christian existence. Through these means this new imaginary can begin to take root. Doctrine ceases to be abstractions and becomes instead a living story to be experienced, church life and practice becomes a participation in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and mission is the invitation to share in the redeeming work of God in Christ.

PART THREE

RETEGRATING DOCTRINE WITH LIFE AND MISSION

CHAPTER 6

SEEDING A RENEWED CHRISTIAN IMAGINARY

What began as an attempt to develop, both in individuals and whole congregations, vital connections between the faith that is affirmed in the Creed, the church's life and fellowship, and its mission and ministry beyond its boundaries, has resulted in becoming a far more ambitious project than first imagined. Examination of the sources of disconnect have uncovered that the response required will need to be more than an easily implemented program for parish renewal. Vision, intention, and means are not merely programmatic bases to touch on the way to the home plate of parish revitalization and reintegration. The struggle pastors and congregations have is with the inescapable embeddedness in the modern social imaginaries that subvert Christian existence on a deep and profound level.

The challenge for pastors and other Christian leaders will be to seed among both individuals and the congregations a new Christian social imaginary. This will of necessity happen often in terms of engaging people imaginatively through story, practice, and ritual, many times on a pre-theoretical level. Rarely will the seeding of this new imaginary follow an easily followed script or blueprint. The contention here has been that

the correlation of the end or vision of Christian existence with the intentions of the believers' heart, shaped by practices that embody that end, no specific canonical order is suggested for implementation. However, as an imaginary is complex, attempting to develop one among a group of people with their own complex history and context will by necessity be messy business, and the process may start in many different places.

Casting the Vision, Knowing the Story

Vision casting has become a frequently heard term among those exploring questions of leadership in congregations. Here it is meant to be taken as keeping before the congregation the end or *telos* of the narrative of the Scripture as discussed previously in terms of N.T. Wright's five act scheme, and the three issues addressed by Charles Taylor's understanding of a social imaginary: relationship to God, the proper ordering of human society, and the meaning of human flourishing. This end is discerned in a rich matrix of Christology, pneumatology, eschatology, ecclesiology, and context. It is present throughout the narrative of faith, and is not easily reducible to one vignette of Scripture or a simply expressed phrase. The task is to keep this end within the purview of preaching, teaching, and pastoral work.

This is not to say however, that simple phrases cannot be used to act as shorthand for the meaning of the entire narrative. Thus Dallas Willard can speak of "transformation into Christlikeness," and James Smith can write of the end being "the Kingdom of God." Care needs to be taken, however, to keep such phrases firmly rooted within the larger narrative, so as not to become subverted by secular imaginaries. The equation of the

Kingdom of God with human progress, prevalent among theologians of the nineteenth century would be an example of this dynamic at work.

The vision can be expressed as a restoration of the original vocation of human creation first gleaned from the Prologue of Act One of the biblical drama (Gen. 1:27-28). This can be encapsulated as a three-fold call to be a priestly people of God, offering praise, thanksgiving, and intercession to the Creator, a people created for mutual and loving community with one another, and sent into the world to be stewards of God's creative goodness and mercy. This call is thus doxological and priestly, communal and ecclesial, and the missional. Directionality can be applied: the upward call worship, the inward call of *koinonia*, and the outward call of mission. This can even be explored graphically: a community of people with arrows designating upward, inward, and outward.¹

This three-fold vocation is lived out and enriched through the course of the narrative, and can become a leitmotif throughout the entire story. The various contours and themes of Israel's history can be described through this same vocation, with themes such as exodus, Torah, covenant, and justice, among many others, deepening the meaning of the upward, the inward, and the outward. The story finds its pivotal moment in Jesus Christ as the full expression and restoration of the original creation. Thus he is the New Creation which the church proclaims and reflects.

As Act Five of the scriptural drama includes not only the biblical material but also the story as it continues through the history of the Church, this graphic means of

¹ Just such a graphic was prepared by graphic designer, Alan Rellaford, of Chico State University for use at St. John's, Chico.

expressing the vision or end being the restoration of the three-fold vocation can become the lens for understanding the continuing mission and ministry of God's people. Certainly this would include any overview of Christian or Anglican history, perhaps in an inquirer's class. History is here seen as faithfulness to or violation of this vocation. Yet even discussions of such mundane subjects as the purpose of the Vestry can be seen in this light. Nevertheless, this leitmotif becomes most relevant in assisting Christians in the pews see this as their continuing vocation, not only in attending to church duties and functions, but more importantly in their neighborhoods, their workplaces, and homes.

Making Vows, Committing to God's Story

Of vision, intention, and practice, the idea of intention as making promises or vows is probably the difficult for parishioners to grasp. While vows are regularly made in congregations both at weddings and at baptisms, the thought of them as binding promises entailing lifelong commitments seems often tenuous at best. Reasons for this it may be assumed are many. For the purposes here, however, it is suggested that one of the significant reasons for the apparent fragility of vows and promises is that they are often grounded in either a person's affections or opinion, rather than in the will. The promise to love a spouse until parted by death is meaningless if love is defined as an emotion first and foremost. More accurate in that case would be to say a spouse promises to love as long as he or she feels the love.

Nevertheless, it is incumbent upon pastors to impress upon members of the congregation the importance of making binding commitments to the *telos* of the narrative

of faith. Certainly, as has already been suggested, that the very concept of a vow as a commitment of the will is inherent to the narrative itself, present as covenant and God's *hesed* toward his Covenant people. It is strengthened in Jesus as the covenant partner of the Father. While a discussion of the nature of the will may fall upon deaf ears among the parish, stories of covenant faithfulness can be told.

As previously discussed, the vows of a particular congregation may be derived directly from their own context. Nevertheless, those from the Anglican tradition may well want to explore vows as they have been received through the Christian tradition. Anglicans, with their connections to the Benedictine tradition may want to reflect upon the Benedictine vows of stability, conversion, and obedience.² Others may take the approach and reappropriate the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience in a similar fashion as the Order of Mission did in rendering them as "simplicity, purity, and accountability."

Perhaps most helpful would be to engage a congregation in vows that they have already taken, those made at baptism. The renunciations of spiritual wickedness, corrupt and evil power, and sinful desires of the flesh can serve to focus the intentions of the people. There are several valuable aspects of utilizing these particular vows. First, the vows are grounded in the sacrament of baptism. Through baptism intention is continually remembered by the people and embodied in the very action of the sacrament. Secondly, these vows are shared with the greater tradition of the Church through time. The renunciations are reflected in numerous baptismal liturgies in several Christian traditions,

² See New Monastic writers Jon Stock, Tim Otto, and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove for a discussion of Benedictine vows outside of the monastery. Jon Stock, Tim Otto, and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *Inhabiting the Church* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2007).

albeit worded in different ways. Their use binds congregations to a large catholic community of Christians through time and space.

The task is not merely to recite these vows, but to understand them within the context they are made and lived out. One writer's suggestion that people ask themselves when reflecting upon the renunciation of Satan and spiritual evil what occult or alien spiritualities, such as Ouija or Wicca, they may consult has little relevance among many, if not most, of the Anglican or Episcopal congregations.³ More helpful might be to reflect upon the siren call first heard in the Garden to eat of the fruit and become like God (Gen. 3:5). While there may be instances of people actively aligning with malignant spiritual forces, on the whole the temptation is to live disembedded from God. Even though God's existence may be affirmed, he is view in a more deistic fashion, separate from most of life. Similar contextual questions should be asked of the other two renunciations as well.

A case in point were several conversations with some students from California State University about the meaning of their baptismal renunciations. The renunciation of Satan was addressed from the perspective of the explicit disembedding from God in a secular university setting, with issues of faith at best to be sequestered into the private lives of the students. The vow in light of their context was to seek the intersection of their studies and their faith. The goal was not only to get a degree and a career, but ask how God might be glorified through what they were learning. For instance, the civil engineering student gave thought to improving the infrastructure of poorer communities. Similar work was done with the other vows. In terms of renouncing evil social power, discussion centered on the role of fraternities in light of hazing and alcohol related deaths

³ DeSilva, *The Sacramental Life*, 48.

on Frat Row, and the fraternities' participation in disorderly conduct and the perpetuation of racist stereotypes on Cinco de Mayo. Conversation also focused on being a different sort of social gathering together centered in Christ. The question of sinful desires was framed in light the bar and party culture of their college town.

Of course, such vows cannot be reduced to context. Those students will not always be in that particular setting. The temptation to become disembedded from the Christian faith pertains not only to their studies. One of the virtues of contextualizing the vows is that practicing them in one context can translate into their observance in another.

Were the baptismal vows to be used as the means of articulating the intentions of the heart in a congregation, the Christian calendar itself provides an opportunity to teach and discuss them among parishioners. Lent as a time of preparation for catechumens can easily be a time to reflect upon the vows in community. In fact, the Gospel reading for the First Sunday in Lent, the three temptations of Jesus in the Wilderness, can become the entry into discernment and discussion.

Practicing the Faith, Sharing God's Story

In regard to the need to have both individuals and congregations engage in practices of Christian life and spirituality most, if not all, pastors already have experience in this area. Perhaps one of the first challenges in discussing how a particular set of practices are seeded in a congregation is the need to focus upon defining and maintaining that set. There are a myriad of practices in which groups and individuals can engage. Depending upon the practice and its relationship to the faith and tradition of the Church,

there are many that would edify Christians in their life in Christ. Yet one potential unintended consequence is to reduce engagement in Christian practices into a set of Christian hobbies that a person can try out or discard at will. One week the Daily Office is used, followed by a quiet day walking the Stations of the Cross or a labyrinth, and then centering prayer is practiced at another time. As long as a person is “fed” or has the expected experience in the practice it might be maintained. Further, this tends to make pursuit of practices an individualist one.

Another issue is that the very range of possible practices can set in motion what social observers have called “the tyranny of choice.”⁴ The large number of practices to choose from overwhelm a person, and inhibits commitment. On an anecdotal level, this certainly has been observed among the members of a men’s group reading through Richard Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline*. The men who were relatively new to spiritual practices were overwhelmed. The twelve disciplines were discussed, but far little was done to implement them.

This is not to suggest that other practices are discouraged or banished. Peterson’s image of the toolshed is helpful here. There will be those drawn to journaling, and others to the rosary and other opportunities as well. But they are tools that are brought out when needed. These others draw their efficacy, at least in part, by engagement in the basic practices. Journaling might be an extension of the work of *lectio divina*. The person who works with the homeless and the suffering in an urban landscape might see deeper meaning in the Stations of the Cross than she otherwise might have observed before.

⁴ “The Tyranny of Choice,” *The Economist*, December 16, 2010
<http://www.economist.com/node/17723028> (accessed April 12, 2015).

What having a common set of basic practices provides is a community spirituality that provides more than just growth in the individual, but becomes a sort of spiritual *lingua franca*, a common language of Christian praxis. The vestry that practices *lectio divina* together will be able to transfer the skill of listening to the Holy Spirit to listening to one another and to God at times for discernment and decision making. People who have lived as both guests in their neighborhoods and have extended hospitality to others will engage in evangelism less as a marketing strategy for church growth and more as an extension of God's hospitality in Christ.

Some of these practices suggested here as the basic practices are most likely already present in the congregation to some extent. The Eucharist certainly is at the center of every Episcopal or Anglican congregation, for instance. Others may be known, but underutilized, such as the Daily Offices. What follows are recommendations for thinking about seeding practices in congregations. No pretense is made that these are fool-proof methods.

The Daily Offices

The Daily Offices are probably familiar to some extent to many members of an Episcopal or Anglican congregation. Some will remember regular Morning Prayer as the main service at their Episcopal Church in their childhood. Others with experience in some smaller rural congregations will have lay readers leading Morning Prayer on the Sundays when the services of a supply priest cannot be found to be celebrant.

What is less true, however, is that many, even if familiar with the Offices, actually pray them on a regular basis. Some of the reasons can be readily identified. Certainly there is the issue of a lack of knowledge of how to navigate the many rubrics and options in canticles and prayers. But perhaps more significant is the difficulty in fitting the services into the rhythms of life. There is a saying attributed to Chesterton that saying Morning Prayer ended with the invention of the morning newspaper. Part of the task is then introduce the Offices in ways that can more readily be introduced into the warp and woof of life.

At St. John's in Chico, California, the introduction of the Offices has been focused upon the production of simplified office books prepared for the seasons of the Church Year. The booklets are a one week cycle of brief services based upon the shortened offices of "Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families" found in the Prayer Book.⁵ Each service has an opening preces, psalm, reading, canticle, the Lord's Prayer, and a collect. The psalm, canticle, and collect vary for each of the fourteen services, while one brief passage of Scripture is given for each morning, and a different one for the evening. Published in the back of the booklet are the Daily Office Lectionary for those who would wish to enrich their use of the Offices, and other resources that can be added, such as a confession of sin and the Apostles' Creed. Developed along seasonal lines, psalms and collects reflect the Prayer Book resources for the year. The booklet for the Season after Pentecost is specifically contextualized for the community and the congregation, using collects that reflect the concerns of an area known for farming and the University. There are also collects used for those in need in our community.

⁵ The Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer*, 136-140.

The booklets were first introduced during Lent, with the encouragement of the Spiritual Life Team that they be used in Lenten Covenant Groups who would pray the offices together through the season. Some existing small groups used them as part of their regular gatherings, while a few groups of “spiritual friends” formed around the booklets to share their spiritual journeys together. Many of the new “covenant groups” turned out to be husbands and wives praying one or both of the services together, which for some was the first time they had prayed together as couples. Some of these groups have continued. Yet even for some of those which have not continued, some of the individuals involved have continued use of the booklets, in a number of cases taking a copy to use at work.

Other strategies of introducing the Offices into parish life have been employed as well. Information for online resources such as Mission St. Clare and smart phone apps has been disseminated. Another strategy has been the development of brief forms of the Office to be prepared for parish meetings. One has been developed for the vestry as well as others for study groups and the outreach team. The intent is to habituate parishioners to the rhythms and forms of the Office, thus making the use of the liturgies as second nature. Congregations should be creative in discovering how the Offices can fit into their particular contexts. Of course, at the heart of any strategy of inculcating the use of the Daily Offices into a congregation is the public use of the full services themselves in the life of the parish, whether by the clergy or a committed cadre of laypeople.

Lectio Divina

Introducing a practice such as *lectio divina* into the life of a congregation can be more difficult than introducing the Daily Offices. For some the difficulty will be lack of familiarity with the practice itself. But more daunting is the cultural issue of inviting people into prayerful and receptive silence for long periods of time. In a society of iPods and surround sound television, entering into silence can be daunting. This coupled with the mystical nature and the possible complexity of the four movements of *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio* can make this practice seem esoteric.

A way of beginning is not to introduce the movements of *lectio*, but to introduce silence more and more into congregational life, particularly in the liturgy itself. Even the most cursory reading of the rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer will be struck by the call for silence to be kept at critical moments of the service. Most prominent are after the readings themselves, before the confession, and at the breaking of the bread. There are other opportunities as well, such as the practice of observing a lengthy time for reflection after the sermon. Such times of silence in both liturgy and other times of prayer can begin to make people comfortable with silence.

Lectio can be introduced to people in a congregation also through simple reading of a passage of Scripture and sitting prayerfully in silence. Those who participate are asked to listen for words or phrases that catch their attention or bring them up short and to meditate or focus about that. When performed in a group, insights gleaned from this “dwelling in the Word” can be shared together.

Certainly a straightforward quiet day, retreat, or small group can be convened to teach *lectio* itself, including the four movements. A surprising number of resources can

be found to introduce the practice to youth and their families.⁶ The materials produced by Fuller Youth Institute can easily be used as an intergenerational Lenten discipline.

Ministry on the Margins

Of the five basic practices proposed here, ministry to and with those on the margins, the poor, the sick, and others suffering, is one that is most likely already being practiced in many, if not most, congregations. Some of these ministries have been generated by congregations themselves, such as a food pantry at the church, a parish which distributes bag lunches to the homeless in a local park, or a cadre of parishioners sent into assisted living facilities to visit and support the residents. Other such opportunities to minister to and with those on the margins happens when members of congregations participate in ministries and programs that serve others within the larger community, whether secular or Christian. Among these might be serving meals at the soup kitchen, being honorary grandparents to the teens at a group home for at risk teens, building homes with lower income families through Habitat for Humanity, and other such programs. Although most likely a minority, there are those in congregations whose occupations constitute ministry among the poor and marginalized.

The challenge is to enable people to see such ministries as Christian practices embodying God's reign, rather than merely being an expression of good citizenship within the immanent frame. David Fitch writes,

Intransigent to modern day Christians is the idea that Mission is primarily about individuals doing good works/helping people in the world. I contend this just isn't

⁶ Kara Powell and Brad M. Griffin, *Sticky Faith Every Day Curriculum*, <http://stickyfaith.org/leader/everyday> (accessed January 29, 2013).

how Christians are to engage the world/ approach our neighbors. It breeds a "good works" in our own efforts [and] exhaustion [and] disappointment Christianity. Instead, we are called to tend to Christ's presence among us, as we have been restored to relationship with God through Christ. In this space of His presence God is renewing all things. Then we are to tend to His presence at work in the world, amidst our neighbors. Out of this space, we are to witness, reconcile, share goods, proclaim gospel, reinvigorate economy, break down racial sin, etc, etc. In this way a new world is born. This is the way God works.⁷

Ministry among the marginalized is empowered by the other basic practices where attentiveness to the presence of Christ is learned and nurtured. Making vital connections between both *lectio* and the Daily Offices and ministry to those in need or trouble will assist in this task. For instance, a form of the Office can be prayed before a group of parishioners serves a hot meal to the residents of the homeless shelter. Scriptural texts concerning such ministries of compassion can be used for *lectio divina*.

Ultimately ministry to and with the marginalized and poor is integrated as a Christian practice rather than an act of citizenship as it is brought to the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. What has been done in mission is brought to the altar both as an occasion for intercession and as an offering of praise and thanksgiving. Like the five loaves and two fish (cf. Mark 6:30-44) acts of ministry are offered to Christ with the elements of bread and wine, which are then taken, blessed, broken, and given back to the communicants as empowerment for continued ministry in the world. Eucharist becomes the end and source of such ministries.

The Act of Neighboring

⁷ David Fitch, Facebook status, May 2, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/fitchest?fref=ts> (accessed May 2, 2015).

The practice of indwelling our neighborhoods as the place where God's Reign is breaking in has been discussed as the union of two practices, hospitality and the openness and receptivity of being a guest. The question often arises when it is mentioned about what is meant by neighborhood. Is it merely a metaphor for everything beyond the boundary of the church? The danger here is that the neighborhood can become an abstraction. If it is merely a metaphor, then the specificity of what is intended is blunted, and neighboring becomes reduced to a general civil benevolence in the places people live, work, and play.

Neighborhoods are first and foremost the actual places that people live on the one hand, and the actual neighborhood in which the church is set. It is here that neighboring is primarily learned and focused. Yet the neighborhood can also be the "third spaces" that are present within or near neighborhoods, the coffee house or the bowling alley, for instance. There are also businesses, events, and public spaces that are shared by perhaps a number of neighborhoods, the park or a farmers' market.

Pathak and Runyon invite people into neighboring through a simple exercise. Church members are asked to graph their block.⁸ In each space the participants are asked to write the names of the people who live there. The second step is to write some pertinent information about them gleaned from talking to them; plays golf, originally from Laos, works at the local elementary school, and the like. The third step is to note something of significance that would come from getting to know someone, such as their career plans, or whether they belong to a community of faith. Pathak and Runyon opine

⁸ Pathak and Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring*, 37-40.

that few will be even able to answer the first question, with decreasing percentages with the latter two.

This assessment forms the impetus to move into the neighborhood. The call is simply to take the effort to get to know the people on the block or in the apartment building. It may mean taking walks on Saturday mornings, striking up a conversation over the fence, or sharing vegetables from a garden with neighbors. As relationships grow reciprocity of hospitality may ensue, both welcoming people into houses and backyards, and being received into theirs. Neighboring continues as Christians become responsive to the needs around them.

Another helpful means of entering into such settings, whether down the block or in the local market or coffee house is Todd Hunter's idea of "The Golden Triangle of Presence."⁹In his book *Christianity Beyond Belief*, Hunter calls Christians to be cooperative friends of Jesus, living in creative goodness, for the sake of others, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Although he does not explicitly write of what here is called neighboring, Hunter's concern that Christians be present to others applies in this context. In traditional parlance he is calling people to actual recollection of being aware of self, God, and events and people as they are encountered. As actual recollection, the Christian stops and pays attention to all three points of the triangle. Rather than reacting to people or gliding by them unaware, one pays attention. Such recollection can be practiced both in the neighborhood and in other public spaces, such as the supermarket. The recollected person responds with simple prayerfulness, responding to others as the Spirit leads.

⁹ Hunter, *Christianity Beyond Belief*, 105.

A word needs to be said about motives in the act of neighboring. This may be taken as a means of evangelism, where neighbors are seen as prospective members of one's congregation. While certainly the possibility of a neighbor coming to faith and joining the church is welcomed, it is a by-product of the act of neighboring and not its intent. If this were the intent, neighboring would not be a practice itself, but merely a means to a further end. Also, this transforms the person down the street from being a neighbor, known, loved and cared for her own sake, to a target for church membership. While the Christian would perhaps perceive this as appropriate, the neighbor would possibly see this in a similar light as the person who is friendly as long as there is a possibility that one might join his Amway network.

Pathak and Runyon differentiate between ulterior motives in this regard versus the ultimate motive.¹⁰ An ulterior motive "means something is intentionally kept secret."¹¹ It is manipulative, in that it hides the intent, in this situation, of being neighborly. On the other hand the ultimate motive is synonymous with *telos*, the end that animates all of Christian existence. As the end apprehended in sharing in the story of God through Christ by the Spirit, then there will be an intentional Christian aspect of the act of neighboring, not manipulative, but open and inviting.

Eucharist as Practice

For Episcopalians and Anglicans, discussion of the celebration of the Eucharist as a basic practice of the Church would seem to be unnecessary. Nevertheless, the call here

¹⁰ Pathak and Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring*, 102.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

is to both understand the Eucharistic liturgy as a central element in a renewed imaginary. The task is to craft the service in light of the *telos* of narrative of faith, offer opportunity to express the intentions of the heart, and touch upon the basic practices of Christian life.

The celebration is by definition an expression of the *telos* of the scriptural narrative as a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. The task is to be attentive to the ways the liturgy already embodies various aspects of the Christian vision and highlight them in crafting and executing Eucharistic worship. One means of approaching this is to use the three-fold vocation, the doxological, the communal, and the missional, as a template to view the various aspects of the liturgy. Certainly the doxological aspect is inherent in the liturgy itself, but is it all too often obscured by the drive to be relevant to peoples' felt needs or focused upon entertaining those gathered, whether through an emotional praise chorus or a beautifully sung motet? Is the congregation an aggregate of strangers in a common religious service, or is there an experience of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit present and enabled by the liturgy? Is worship insulated away from the needs and concerns of the world, "an island of calm in the stormy seas of life," or are the pains and brokenness of the world given authentic expression in the intercessions? Are the missional moments the people have experienced in the week that is past received as an oblation on the altar? Are the people empowered and sent out to continue in their participation in the *missio Dei*? Whether in crafting the Prayers of the People, preparing the sermon, or leading the people in the passing of the Peace, among so many other opportunities, it is incumbent upon pastors to be attentive to liturgy as the foretaste of the

restoration of God's intention from humanity as discovered in the scriptural narrative and centered upon Jesus Christ.

Crafting of the Eucharistic liturgy also should be done in light of the other basic practices. Some opportunities have already been touched upon, particularly in reference to the external or missional practices of ministry among the marginalized and the act of neighboring. These practices inform writing of prayers and the crafting of sermons, among other possible options. The more internal practices of the Daily Office and *lectio divina* can also be embodied in the way the rhythms and movements of the liturgy are observed. For instance, in terms of *lectio*, do congregations observe a healthy amount of silence that the voice of the Spirit might be heard?

If attention is given to the crafting of the liturgy in light of the *telos* of Christian life and the other basic practices that are set forth, then the intentions of the heart, no matter how they have been articulated in a particular congregation, will find a venue for their expression and affirmation. Some may find the opportunity to rehearse their vows regularly within the liturgy itself. If the vows made are grounded in the baptismal vows, then they can be regularly recited on baptismal Sundays. Or perhaps they are printed each week in the bulletin for personal reflection. In any event, the Eucharist as the heart of the practices of the Church is at the heart of seeding a new Christian imaginary and reintegrating faith, life, and mission.

CHAPTER 7

THE PRACTICES AMONG THE PRACTICES

The call to seed a new Christian social imaginary which can reintegrate the faith with church life, and mission into a transforming way of life has proven to be a multifaceted task. The temptation for pastors in ecclesiastical leadership culture so inundated with “how to” books on parish ministry, conferences teaching new methods of attracting people to church, and programs to implement among parishioners is that the tendency will be to take what has been presented here and turn it into a program. “If over the course of a year our parish has a preaching series on the five act divine drama, writes a set of vows based on the vows of baptism, and have most everyone engaged in the five practices, then we should expect to see these measurable results.” Such expectations themselves are derived from a modernist social imaginary enthralled with the power of technique that succeeds irrespective of context. By such thinking the number of copies of *The Purpose Driven Church* should have resulted in a nation filled with Saddleback-like parishes, and the wide use of the Alpha program should have ushered in a golden era of evangelism. This is not to say that there have not been insights gleaned, nor lives changed, by such programs. But much of their success is derived from other factors not

easily distilled down into easily implemented programs. Among these factors are the singular set of gifts by men like Rick Warren or Nicky Gumbel.¹

Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk point out that the churches have entered into a time of discontinuous change.² Change both in the wider culture and in congregations is now rapid and a clear break with past expectations. It often cannot be anticipated. Dealing with the challenges parishes are facing is not a matter building upon an existing skill set, or better applying the proper techniques for parish revitalization. Youth will not flock back to the church if parishes just hire the right youth leader and play praise music. Young parents outside of the church do not for the most part spend time pondering where the best Sunday School is for their children. From the perspective of those outside of the church, it is as if parishes are spending much energy trying to produce and market the best mimeograph machine possible for a culture that has moved on to laser printers in each home.

Part of the reason for this time of discontinuous change is that the culture has reached the tipping point where the ascendant modern social imaginary, which for several centuries existed in a sort of dialectical tension with the residual Christian imaginaries bequeathed by Christendom, has reached a point of hegemony that the Christian imaginaries have become either superfluous or subsumed into the larger cultural narrative. While there will be those who seek transcendence within this immanent frame

¹ On Rick Warren and his gifts see Malcolm Gladwell, "The Cellular Church: How Rick Warren Grew His Congregation." *The New Yorker*, September 12, 2005, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2005/09/12/the-cellular-church> (accessed November 3, 2014).

² Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*, 6.

of the secular imaginary, the older institutions of the church are not the default setting for those inquirers any more than a young adult seeks out Rotary to find social connection.

The point that is being made here in terms of the larger secular community is that congregations have to embody a distinctively Christian social imaginary that has an inner coherence between the faith that is affirmed, the inner life of the covenant community, and their relationship with the context and culture around them. This, frankly, cannot be reduced to a set program for parish renewal. While the intent has included some recommendations for action on the part of pastors and leaders in facing the challenges as they have been framed here, the realization must be that mere implementation of the proposals is not sufficient. They exist with wider circles of context and practice both within the congregation and the wider community.

Leadership

Episcopalians and Anglicans of a certain age were socialized into an understanding of parish leadership based upon simple role competency. If the rector had a basic competency in preaching and liturgy, pastoral care, and administration, then she or he could count on attracting and retaining the 2 percent of the population that would be naturally Episcopalian, and all would be well. If the rector was above average in these basic competencies, then growth would be anticipated. Those formed in that leadership tradition are struggling to deal with present realities in congregations and communities. Others have turned more recent models of leadership culled often from secular sources;

church leader as entrepreneurial vision caster, for instance.³ Congregations, both grieving over the lost world of the stable parish and anxious about the future sustainability of the congregation, often desire, perhaps subconsciously, that both models of leadership be practiced, resulting often in stress, conflict, and possible clergy burnout.

The subject of leadership in the church has become such a thoroughly discussed subject, that it is fair to ask if anything more of worth can be offered here. A quick search for books on “church leadership” on Amazon elicits 9,520 volumes from which to choose. What can be said here is merely supplemental to other more comprehensive studies, and will echo what has already been mentioned in regard to the writings of Dallas Willard and Alan Roxburgh in Chapter Three. Regardless of the pastor’s personal leadership orientation and style, in light of this proposal among the important roles of leadership will be seeding the practices within the congregation, casting the vision of the Reign of God, and inviting the congregation to live into the vows and intentions of the heart.

Roxburgh and Romanuk in *The Missional Leader* describe what this sort of leadership might look like. The work begins with cultivating missional imagination in the congregation “by listening to and engaging their congregation’s collective stories, fears, concerns, and dreams about who they are and where God is leading them. [Leaders] then connect the people with biblical stories that that invite new questions about themselves.”⁴ Leadership is thus grounded in narrative. But this is not simply in terms of the pastor

³ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 153

⁴ Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*, 149-150.

telling the story through preaching and teaching. It is in listening to the stories of the parishioners and locating them in the biblical narrative. The pastor is not narrating or writing the gap in act five between the apostolic age and the dénouement of the biblical narrative, but rather listens to and helps articulate how the Spirit is shaping the story through the lives of the people. In this sense, leadership has more in common with literary criticism, helping the people understand their stories in light of the whole narrative, including their fears and failures.⁵

Roxburgh and Romanuk go on to describe how Roxburgh embodied this sort of leadership in a Canadian congregation. Cultivating missional imagination turned to inviting groups of people into some basic practices of Christian life, particularly the Daily Office and *lectio divina*. The impetus for engagement in mission and ministry that emerged in time came not from Roxburgh's initiative, but from perceiving the call of God heard through the stories and practices in which they are engaged. The task of leadership in such instances is to open up the space and permission for people to engage in this calling. What Roxburgh realized he was doing in this situation was

Painting word pictures of the possible meanings of the kingdom in their context;
Creating spaces of permission where people could experiment;
Joining experiments without directing;
Forming groups built around basic Christian practices and rooted in neighborhoods;
Continually showing people how God's imagination is fostered as they enter simple, normal, human relationships with their neighbors free of manipulation and the need to market the Gospel.⁶

⁵ In regard to leadership as literary criticism, see the fascinating study of John Hopewell, *Congregation: Stories and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987). Hopewell employs Northrop Frye's typologies of Western narrative, comedic, romantic, tragic, and ironic, to help pastors exegete the stories of the congregation.

⁶ Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*, 150-151.

They write that the people

sensed it was a place where their imagination, gifts, and dreams would be welcomed, blessed, and encouraged. There was no five year plan or three-phase strategy. The plan was to invite the people into the practices of Christian life, listen to one another's stories, dialogue about the biblical narratives in light of the neighborhood and the changes they were experiencing, and release people into Spirit-shaped experiments.⁷

The task of leadership is to foster among the people of the congregation an imagination evoked by the new social imaginary being seeded, and then empowering and releasing the people for mission and ministry. There must also be room for risk and failure as the people engage these experiments in mission, requiring the pastoral skills of dealing with anger, guilt, and grief when plans do not work out as they might.

Having noted that leaders need to give room for risk and failure, leaders and pastors need also to help the people assess the feasibility and desirability of these experiments. Fostering a renewed imagination does not guarantee that all ideas are “Spirit-shaped.” People inhabit a number of stories and imaginaries that vie for allegiance. Nostalgia as well shapes what parishioners see as possible and profitable courses of action. Are proponents of certain experiments announcing solutions to problems that may not exist? Have missional engagements been envisioned in listening to the stories and hopes of those dwelling in the neighborhood? A case in point here would be the proposed after school computer lab in a new parish hall, envisioned without inquiring of the parents and schools in the neighborhood whether this would be something that is a need for their children. In such instances the role of the leader is not simply to quash such ideas, but to bring the thoughts and passions underlying them into

⁷ Ibid.

conversation with the vision of God's Reign, the hopes and fears of the neighborhood, and engagement in prayerful discernment.

All of this will require the skills of conflict management among pastors and other leaders of the congregation. As different social imaginaries vie for allegiance, risk results in both success and failure, and old ways of parish life are challenged, tensions will arise within the congregation. Leaders will need to develop "self-awareness, maturity, and the capacity to understand their own role in issues of conflict."⁸ Engaging in conflict management is itself not only a managerial skill, it is a deep ecclesial practice, reflected in Jesus' admonition (Mt. 18:18-20) and is grounded in the call to be engaged in the work of reconciliation (Jn. 20:23, 2 Cor. 5:17-21).⁹

Engagement in conflict management is itself suggestive of a key role of the pastor in seeding a new imaginary. It is, as a co-apprentice of Christ together with the entire congregation, modeling participation in the practices themselves. In some instances the pastor will have to take direct initiative in planting a practice, while in other situations letting parishioners lead the way. The pastor may initiate the practice of *lectio divina* in congregation by beginning vestry meetings with the practice as a part of their opening devotions, while letting members of the congregation serve as officiants and readers at the public services of the Daily Offices day in and day out with the pastor as a member of the congregation. Such modeling also should entail the willingness of those in leadership to share both the joys and struggles of living into the practices, articulating both where

⁸ Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 137.

⁹ Yoder, *Body Politics*, 1-13.

God has been present in them and honest and candid about difficulties in engaging and maintaining them.

Mutual participation in the practices is not limited to the basic practices that have been enumerated, although special attention should be given to them. The basic practices draw their significance not only from the *telos* from which they are derived, but also from their embeddness among wide range of practices in which the parish is engaged. The openness to the other developed in the act of neighboring, for instance, imparts a similar set of virtues and skills needed for conflict management. Using Peterson's metaphor of the toolshed, but enlarging it beyond specifically spiritual practices to the whole panoply of ecclesial practices, part of the pastor's role is to maintain and keep accessible the shed for congregational use. Whether it be evangelism, stewardship, Christian formation, or a myriad of other practices, the leadership needs to be aware of the constellation of practices, and intentional about bringing them out for the use of God's people and the building up of Christ's Body.

Preaching and Teaching

These reflections began by the author expressing frustration over the inadequacy of preaching and teaching to invest the congregation with a depth of understanding of the Christian faith and its effect upon congregational life and mission. This begs the question as to the role of preaching and teaching in the proposals made here. Are these practices of proclaiming and teaching rendered obsolete in the new reality that churches find themselves in? Some from within the Emergent movement have questioned the adequacy

and appropriateness of the traditional model of pedagogy and have experimented with dialogue in place of the sermon.¹⁰ Others have doubled down on the older model of expository preaching as an antidote both to the self-help sermons of the church growth movement and the dialogical preaching of the Emergent leaders.¹¹

Yet from within the task of leadership as reseeding a new social imaginary through vision, intention, and practice, both preaching and teaching can reemerge as important tasks. Their importance is derived not from their pedagogical adequacy in transmitting the proper content for Christian's to believe, but from how they draw forth the various strands of the often inchoate social imaginary that is being embedded in the life of the congregation. Preaching and teaching, perhaps in ways that are subtle, are always telling the story. They awaken the intentions of the heart by evoking a vision of the relationship of the people with God, of a new social ordering through the Spirit, and an understanding of human flourishing as embodied in Jesus Christ. Whether implicit or explicit, preaching and teaching invite people into Christian practice as disciples and participants in God's story.

What emerges now is the importance of narrative in speaking of the Christian faith. Speaking specifically of preaching, David Fitch writes,

in contrast to the presentation of information to be consumed, [narrative-based preaching] seeks to renarrate for us the world as it is according to Scripture and call us into that reality.... Its task is description and the shaping of a new

¹⁰ Tony Jones, *The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 216.

¹¹ Fitch, *The Great Giveaway*, 140.

imagination for all of us who have had our imaginations held captive by the foreign forces of North American, post-Christian life.¹²

Such narration has in mind, at least, the narrative context of the text being preached upon, its location within the larger narrative of Scripture, and the ongoing narrative of the congregation in the world. Preaching is an invitation into the ongoing story, an envisioning of the life of the congregation and the individuals in it as a part of “Act V” over and often against the other countervailing narratives that would subsume the people.

William Willimon offers a helpful phrase for what the pastor is to be about. In a sermon on the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch and Philip in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 8:26-40), Willimon notes that when the Eunuch is reading Isaiah and is struck by the image of the Suffering Servant, a mysterious figure who has been rejected as was the Eunuch in the Temple, that the Eunuch was “looking for his [own] name in the Bible.”¹³ The task of the preacher and teacher is to help the people find their names in the Bible, to locate them in the narrative.

What this does not mean is to engage in the common practice of abstracting an idea or principle out of the text and then apply it to the life situations of those in the pew. An example of this would be addressing the problem that people might have in various areas of life, perhaps on the job or with financial stresses, by looking at Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and applying his tactics for dealing with anxiety in their lives.¹⁴ This has the effect of rendering Jesus as a metaphor for individuals’ situations in their

¹² Ibid., 141.

¹³ William H. Willimon, *Peculiar Speech: Preaching to the Baptized* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 121.

¹⁴ This is the subject of an actual sermon heard by the author at a Foursquare church in Honolulu, Hawaii, in November of 2008.

lives. It places the story of the individual at the center and then uses the story of Jesus as a means of improving that person's story. This approach raises a myriad of questions, one of which is "why this particular metaphor?" If the intent is to improve or repair the story of the individual, then does it matter if the story is about Jesus or any other character, historical or fictional?

More significantly, this sort of preaching as life application does not address the deeper issue of the social imaginary in which the person is embedded. The anxiety itself that the sermon seeks to address could stem from the modern consumeristic social imaginary that envisions the good life in endless production and the acquisition of consumer goods. The idea of human flourishing is uncritically assumed when congregants are asked to identify a time they were anxious, afraid, or in distress. Such emotions are assumed to be universal, and yet their meaning is derived from prevailing social imaginaries, such as late modern capitalism or American nationalism.

Using the example of anxiety and Gethsemane, a more appropriate approach would be to ask the listener to consider anxiety he or she might have had in facing the challenges and risks of responding to the call of the mission of God. This locates the person within the story of Jesus and sees cross-bearing discipleship as a source of anxiety. Calling upon the Spirit of Jesus, the believer can practice the same obedience to the will of God evinced by Christ in the garden.

Another aspect of preaching as storytelling is connecting both the biblical story and the congregation's or individual's story with the story of the communion of saints. The task here is to include the Act V material from the five-act schema that happens after

the apostolic church until the present moment. This will include mention of the great saints of past eras. Moreover, these stories will also concern saints closer to home, telling of acts of faithfulness in settings more similar to those people in the pews will find themselves. Alan Roxburgh refers to this latter sort of narration as becoming “poets of the ordinary,” which can foster the imagination for mission and ministry in the specific contexts in which members of the congregation dwell.¹⁵

David Fitch stresses that sermons are formed by the classic understanding of worship as call and response, similar to what was discussed in an earlier chapter concerning the Daily Office.¹⁶ The sermon should evoke a response, not only in the sense of giving direction or praxis for life after the service, but one that is embodied within the liturgy itself. This may be in confession, intercession, or in the reception of communion. This call and response can become the synthesis of all the stories that have been drawn together in preaching. Using the example of anxiety, mission, and Gethsemane, the preacher might invite the people to confess when they have turned from the call of mission, or offer audibly in the Prayers of the People thanksgiving for the “saints closer to home” who have lived into the call. The offertory becomes an invitation to offer in prayer all the missional moments in the week that is past, and to join them to Christ’s singular oblation of himself as a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

Catechesis

¹⁵ Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*, 173.

¹⁶ Fitch, *The Great Giveaway*, 148.

One obvious means of employing these proposals that have been discussed in terms of embedding vision, intention, and practices is fold them into the further practices of baptism and confirmation through a process of catechesis. In fact, if a pastor was looking for an effective way to introduce these ideas into a congregation, preparation for baptism or confirmation, the latter practice both with adults and youth. Such preparation would be over a matter of months rather than weeks. Such formation might even be framed by the classic structure beginning in Advent and culminating at Easter or Pentecost. Included might be a formal liturgical enrollment of catechumens and candidates, thus at least tacitly involving the entire congregation in their formation.

While options for using these ideas in a catechumenal process are many, consideration might be given to ordering the elements as practices, vision, and intentions. Whether in Advent, or even prior perhaps with beginning with the start of autumn, the practices can be introduced among the participants.¹⁷ The virtue of beginning with practice is that when later in the process, perhaps in the season after Epiphany, when the vision is unfolded in the five act drama of Scripture the practices form a springboard for reflection.¹⁸ Act II, the Fall, for instance, can be introduced in light of the brokenness observed when the entire group of candidates and catechumens served meals at the local homeless shelter. Similarly, when the subject of the Babylonian exile arises, together with the issue of the Jewish people maintaining their identity, the Daily Offices as a

¹⁷ At St. John's in Chico, California, the practice of the Daily Office was introduced with very simple Morning and Evening Prayer printed on a bookmark which could be kept in the candidates' Bibles. They were also given a simplified lectionary which lead them through the Gospel according to Luke. In respect to the reading of Luke, a teenager who had grown up faithfully in the parish and had heard the Scriptures each Sunday remarked "I had no idea it was a story."

¹⁸ On reflecting on existing praxis as the basis for theological reflection see Thomas Groome, *Sharing Faith* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

means of Christians recalling their identity in a changing social context can be discussed. The discussion of intention can be the focus of Lent. Here the baptismal vows come into prominence, becoming the basis for self-examination and reflection upon the commitment intrinsic to both baptism and confirmation.

The Sanctification of Time

Consideration of catechesis and its historical context of practice within the Christian year raises the question of how the Church marks time and its possible importance to the reintegration of doctrine, church life, and mission. A significant element in Charles Taylor's theory of secularization, or the Great Disembedding, is that a central part of the process was when Western society disembedded from an understanding of sacred time as the transcendent impinging upon the immanent to a construal of time that is purely immanent and self-referential.¹⁹ For instance, marking moments of origin or founding move from divine initiative in Passover or Pentecost, or perhaps origin at Advent as the final causation of eschatological hope, to the celebration of Independence Day in the United States, or even something as insignificant as New Year's Day.

The understanding and engagement of vision, intention, and practices is lived in time through the practice of the seasons of the Christian or Church Year. This connection may be quite explicit, as seen with the catechumenal process, or in the seasonal variations within the Daily Office. Preaching the Sunday Lectionary through the year also provides

¹⁹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 55.

a way of making the story known. Act IV, the story of Jesus, frames the year from Advent to Pentecost.²⁰ The thoughtful preacher will make connections between the paradigmatic story of Christ and the other acts of the story, whether explicit in the lectionary or not.

As has already been discussed previously, this sanctification of time as a significant practice concerns not only the rhythms and rounds of the year, but also frames Christians' experience of the week as well. The week begins with a new Easter, as the risen Jesus reveals himself in the bread to his gathered disciples (Luke 24:30-31) and sends them forth into God's mission. The week becomes the time of mission, with the following Sunday becoming the eschatological Day of the Lord, where the acts of mission are offered to God in the Eucharist. In light of this, pastors should make every effort to reinforce this sacred framing of the week. This, of course, has become increasingly difficult in the modern social imaginary which envisions the week as five days of work with the weekend as time for recreation. This further frames the week as that of ownership. The works days are owed to the employer in return for fair compensation, while the weekend belongs to the employees, where they are to free to follow whatever pursuit they desire. This has the effect of making time a commodity to be owned and used. A Christian understanding of time, however, would be better understood as participation rather than ownership; a sharing in Christ's incarnation, his mission, and his resurrection and ascension. Part of the reason for the decline in worship

²⁰ This obviously counts the season after Epiphany as the observance of Jesus manifesting his identity and mission in this period, culminating in the Transfiguration on the Last Sunday after Epiphany, rather than simply as "Ordinary Time."

attendance can be attributed to a tacit understanding of time as a commodity.²¹ Sunday morning worship simply does not fare well as a commodity to be sold and traded within such an understanding of time, nor does responding to this with a call to duty among parishioners to the due observance of the Lord's Day. For some this may mean an abandonment of Sunday as the specific day for worship.

The temptation for many congregations will be, at least implicitly, to go head to head with the surrounding culture and present a worship service that is worthy of being traded with parishioners and others for the precious commodity of time. While attention should be given to crafting and performing liturgy well, focus needs to be placed upon making worship the *telos* of the life and mission of the congregation itself in its specific context, as well as the font of ongoing discipleship in the week to come. Several suggestions have already been made in this regard. Another is to find opportunities within the liturgy to connect with the concrete moments and events in the lives of parishioners in light of the ongoing participation of the congregation in the story of God. Public prayers for catechumens, congregational laying on of hands for those preparing for surgery, prayers for those engaging in new ministries both within the parish and in the surrounding community are just a few of the opportunities that present themselves in the congregation. Utilize resources such as *The Book of Occasional Services* in crafting these liturgical moments, but also paying attention to context and the narrative of the faith expressed in the lectionary in offering specific prayers at these times.²²

²¹ See Lovett H. Weems, "No Shows," *Christian Century* September 22, 2010, <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2010-09/no-shows> (accessed October 5, 2014).

²² The Episcopal Church, *The Book of Occasional Services* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979). Subsequent editions have added helpful liturgical materials.

None of this is to suggest that members of congregations will live through time as conceived through the lens of a Christian imaginary to the exclusion of secular ones. Christians will have to be amphibious in regard to social imaginaries. The hope is that through increased attention to seeding a renewed Christian social imaginary, including attention to the sanctification of time, people will be more aware of the different imaginaries in which they are embedded, and will have the attentiveness and the skills to live into their Christian vocation.

CONCLUSION

The proposal put forth in these pages has been a call for pastors and congregational leaders to seed a new Christian social imaginary among the people that can foster integrity in Christian existence, overcoming the disconnection between doctrine, church life, and mission. One means of articulating the root of the problem has been to suggest that the Christian imaginary has been subverted by secular ones.

The process of seeding this new Christian imaginary will prove to be a complex set of activities including presenting doctrine as the story of God and his mission in the world, making vows to live into this story, and engage in practices that pursue the ends of the gospel. Yet the question will remain as to the effectiveness of this proposal. How would congregational leaders know if they had been successful in accomplishing what they had set out to do? Were this a proposal for numerical growth, effectiveness would be measured in increased average Sunday attendance or numbers of communicants in the parish register. Pastors have been trained to apply techniques that should result in changed metrics. There will always be a need for metrics to assess some aspects of parish life. Other critical aspects, such as how a renewed Christian social imaginary has taken root in a congregation, will not easily be assessed by easily measurable results.

Parish leaders pursuing the suggestions made herein will be bringing a deeply engrained hypotheses about the vitality of parish life, and will seek means to measure the reintegration of doctrine, life, and mission. Should a parishioner be able to write an essay on the idea of kenosis in Philippians 2:5-11 and its implications for vestry meetings? Will the connections between the resurrection of Jesus and ministry at the local soup kitchen

be readily understood and articulated? The temptation will be to seek confirmation in such ways. Yet the real "data" in these respects will be far more subtle to detect and understand.

As the response to disintegration is to be found amid the interplay of social imaginaries, those complex, usually pre-theoretical, matrices of narrative, ritual, custom, and habit, the evidence of effectiveness will be found in similar fashion as well. Assessment will be discovered in listening to stories and observing subtle ways the congregation responds to each other and the world around them.

Among these stories might be the time when after a burglary at the church with considerable damage the vestry was asked by the District Attorney's office to file for monetary restitution from the perpetrator. Being Easter Week, the vestry began their meeting with *lectio divina* on John's story of the resurrection and Jesus' charge to forgive sins (Jn. 20:19-23). The discussion moved directly into being witnesses of Jesus' resurrection through forgiving the burglar and conveying that through the D.A.

There are also stories parishioners indwelling their neighborhoods as the place where God is active and being surprised by unseen opportunities for ministry and unexpected grace. One woman felt compelled to invite an unfriendly neighbor out for an evening at a local wine and tapas bar. The hope was that when the parishioner went to the neighbor's home to make the invitation that she wouldn't be home, thus fulfilling the obligation to attempt the invitation without having to actually go through it. As turned out, the erstwhile hostile neighbor gladly accepted, saying it would be fun. Praying for the presence of the Spirit, and intent on doing more listening than anything else, the

parishioner as able to be present to the neighbor as the latter shared the many pains her family life.

One might notice subtle changes in the way certain things are described. A middle aged man discussed his father's recent death not with the usual cultural bromides of "being in a better place" or having been rejoined with loved ones, but as given new life by the resurrected Jesus. The director of Vacation Bible School describing their task as extending God's hospitality to the children of the neighborhood, rather than as a way of recruiting young families. The older stolid gentleman explaining the passing of the peace to someone in the congregation in light of the impartation of peace by the seventy sent by Jesus to the neighborhoods to which they were sent (Lk. 10:5-6), thus connecting liturgy and mission in a profound way. The owner of a store downtown explains his business model through reference to the congregational graphic of the human vocation being upward in prayer and worship, inward in covenantal community, and outward in mission to the community, and then explaining to other merchants that this business model of upward, inward, and outward will help them with the homeless problem downtown.

Pastors should also observe new habits take place, both within the life of the congregation and in the community beyond. The business owner previously focused upon the bottom line looks for the opportunity to give young men in a halfway house the opportunity for a second chance when hiring, irrespective of efficiency. The Women's Bible Study invites a man grieving over a recent divorce to join them to keep him from becoming hardened and cynical.

Ultimately, leaders assess the progress in seeding this new social imaginary by employing the same skills and pursuing the same virtues as encouraged in the basic

practices. As fellow apprentices with members of the congregation pastors and leaders learn to discern the presence of God and signs of the new imaginary. New life will be perceived to the extent the leaders are themselves re-embedded. Of the virtues formed through the basic practices for pastors perhaps the most important is that of gratitude. It is formed through offering such stories just mentioned through the oblation of the Eucharist, giving thanks for what God is doing. Eucharist becomes the lens for perceiving this new imaginary.

Of course, what has been described in these pages is not a problem that is simply solved. There is no final point in which doctrine, church life, and the call of mission are irrevocably reintegrated into one another. Congregations cannot be sealed off from the competing imaginaries that tend to subvert the Christian social imaginary conceived in this essay.

Ultimately whatever insights have been offered here belong to a larger conversation about Christian existence in post-Christendom North America. In the author's opinion, this larger conversation will follow along the lines described by James Davison Hunter in his important work *To Change the World*. Hunter envisions a way forward for Christian churches which find themselves as exiles in a secular society.¹ Over and against those who would seek to change the world by aligning with either conservative or liberal political groups, churches should become covenant communities living an explicit Christian life, while seeking the well-being of the place that they are exiled (cf. Jer. 29:7). This Jeremiah Option is grounded both in confidence in the God of the covenant, and realistic as to the challenges of living among competing social

¹ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 197ff.

imaginaries. While there is something distinctively new about this secular age that has emerged, God's people have had through the centuries dealt with being strangers in strange lands, whether in the Babylonian exile, the time of St. Benedict, or today. By the grace and providence of God, the covenant people have been sustained and maintained integrity of life in the past, and they shall be now.

In J.R.R. Tolkien's epic *The Lord of the Rings*, the hobbit Frodo opines that he wishes the evil Ring of Power, which is in his possession, had never been found, and that the crisis of Middle Earth had not come upon them. Gandalf the Wizard responds to Frodo with a wisdom that pertains to the present moment: "So do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."

What began as the musings of a frustrated Episcopal priest when this work was first envisioned has instead inquired into a profound shift that has been happening for some time, but in recent years has accelerated. What has been offered has not been the answer, but rather a modest offering to sisters and brothers struggling with the same questions and issues. It is in that spirit that it is offered.

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