COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AS A MEANS OF
CHRISTIAN BENEVOLENCE AND
SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

by

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This thesis argues for Christian involvement in community development as a means of holistic benevolence that embraces eucharistic living and rejects a separatist mentality damaging to Christian participation in social transformation. Community development, as a movement that works primarily in impoverished neighborhoods, strives to unite and empower community members with the purpose of seeking the dignifying, sustainable, and productive betterment of their communities through their own talents and assets. In large part, this task involves helping residents break free from a deterministic lifestyle hindering them from initiating change for a better future while maintaining a perspective that one’s own wellbeing is interconnected to that of one’s immediate neighbors and environment. Instilling hope for a better future aligns with the Christian gospel of hope in the resurrected Christ, making the task of combating determinism’s pervasive grip on humanity much a part of the church’s own vocation within global society.

In order to establish the Christian church’s role in and responsibility to pursue this global home’s flourishing, this thesis first challenges separatism as it manifests in the early works of Stanley Hauerwas. Since Hauerwas claims that the church is a social ethic, he structures the church’s identity in contrast to the world, which consequently allows the church to become disengaged with society, and thereby also desensitized and apathetic towards global suffering and matters of social and environmental justice. As an alternative to a contrastive church model, Emmanuel Levinas’ ethic of otherness and Jürgen Moltmann’s ethic of hope are employed to establish the church’s responsibility to seek the worldly other’s wellbeing. This vocational calling exemplifies eucharistic living through the insistence of an engaged benevolence that requires the presence, availability, and passion of the church for a suffering world. Thus, the final chapter of this thesis will incorporate the works of Daniela Augustine, Jonathan Sacks, Sallie McFague, William Cavanaugh, and others to argue for a theology of hospitality that relationally dispositions the church’s vocation as embodied lovers who consciously share life in prayerful relationship with the divine and intentional engagement with her worldly neighbor.
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INTRODUCTION

With increasing awareness, the world today is experiencing the effects of globalization in the interconnectedness of differing people groups with each other and the environment, temperamental political allegiances, and integrated world markets made available by technological advances and the ease of mobility. The development of this planetary consciousness of interconnectivity is accompanied by overwhelming sensation of the “speeding up of time and the shrinking of space” as new innovations and heightened visibility of diversity enter the social streams of the United States and the world at large. As a result, globalization enriches the human experience by way of diversifying encounters with socio-political, economic, religious, and environmental differences, and so enhances the opportunity to learn and collaborate. Globalization, however, likewise threatens cherished ways of living as the pace of change and cultural homogenization require quick adaptations to new paradigms of thinking and living to accommodate an increasingly pluralistic world. As any attempt to prevent globalization would prove futile and would mark a distinct and detrimental regression to global progress, many ethicists agree that the question currently being presented to humanity is not whether or not globalization should occur, as it already is, but rather how humanity should respond to its manifesting effects. Furthermore, the effects of globalization are far from being removed to a macro-level discussion amongst world leaders and the elite as ordinary persons are attempting to


answer the ethicist’s question throughout the rhythms of their daily lives – by way of the common interactions and experiences they entertain with the differences presented to their established routines. This question poses itself no less prominently to the church as her members filter the effects of globalization through their frameworks of faith into the practical task of daily living. Thus, as a major (and global) religion, Christian concern or lack of concern for the future of this globalized world will play a significant role in shaping the context of life for coming generations, but only if the shape of Christianity is capable of integrating and cultivating an engaged responsibility for this world into the lives of her adherents today.4

According to John Coleman, globalization presents Christian tradition with four predominant issues: global sustainability, polarization within and among cultures, the inability of the nation-state to meet basic needs, and an insensitivity to human suffering.5 In terms of global sustainability, a universal concern over environmental matters is rising in the awareness of life’s interdependent flourishing, thus producing an urgency for humanity’s installation of and participation in environmentally friendly practices.6 Furthermore, although for some the integration of cultures through media and travel has been a source of enrichment, for many individuals, groups, and nations this interconnectivity has become a source of anxiety as cultures clash, producing a xenophobic reaction to different lifestyles. Within this, many social justice movements have arisen out of heightening unease over the minimization of certain demographics’ experiences, whereby generating new paradigms of anthropological thought


regarding what it means to be a human being and calling into question societal practices that reduce or objectify these people groups.\(^7\) Likewise, as poverty continues into this era, there is growing concern over the nation-state’s inability to meet basic needs, producing a dissatisfaction surrounding existing economic systems and health care policies that continue to deepen the gulf between the rich and poor and ascribe many to dehumanizing standards of living.\(^8\) The common thread throughout Coleman’s list is the pervasive need for Christian attention to these very justice-oriented movements that effect not only the globalized world but also the church’s members who are identifying and interacting with these matters on a daily basis.\(^9\) Thus the church, herself, requires the formulation of a response to these justice issues lest she succumb to Coleman’s fourth category of an insensitivity to human and environmental suffering.

Part of this process of responding entails the recognition and confrontation of doctrines and practices that result in the anesthetization of Christians to the suffering and burdens of those both in and outside of the church. One such doctrine that will receive particular attention in this thesis is that of separatism which promotes the formation of a Christian community distinct from and contrastive to worldly society. As part of the separatist mindset, global efforts to alleviate suffering and injustice themselves become sources of contrast, enabling both the prioritization of the church’s wellbeing over that of the world’s and a removal of concern for matters of social


\(^8\) Volf, *Flourishing*, 35-36.

and environmental justice. Thus, a large portion of this thesis will be dedicated toward establishing the church’s presence and active attention to the world’s suffering as part of her identity and vocation. Additionally, as many religious workers and global relief organizations are coming to recognize, the methods and means in which one attempts to assist persons is just as important as the desire to do so. Thus, alongside the hopes of encouraging the church’s invested responsibility for the world, this thesis will also seek to animate Christian benevolence toward a method of assistance that is dignifying, sustainable, and productive.

In light of this, I will argue for Christian participation in community development as a movement that rejects the desensitizing effects of separatism and embraces eucharistic living, which extends a hope for the flourishing of all life in a manner that empowers persons to abandon deterministic living. In order to support this conclusion, the first chapter will provide a brief introduction to community development as a global movement that operates within local contexts with the intention of bringing holistic and sustainable betterment of communities through the strengths of their own assets and talents. The second chapter will proceed with a criticism of separatism as found within the early works of Stanley Hauerwas who sources the

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church’s identity as an alternative social and ethical reality upon that of the world’s corruption. In opposition to an exclusivism that permits Christian negligence toward the suffering neighbor, I will dialogue with Jürgen Moltmann’s criteria of hope as being crucial to a Christian ethical presence within the global context as it insists upon an engaged benevolence for the sake of world’s today and tomorrow. The subsequent chapter will indulge upon the works of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks and Daniela C. Augustine in order to underscore an ethic of responsibility within a theology of hospitality and prayer to develop a basis for eucharistic living relevant for a pluralistic world. I will argue that a theology of hospitality relationally dispositions eucharistic living as the church’s vocation as hospitality’s invitation of sharing life with the other becomes the external expression of prayer’s internal expression of hospitality between the believer and the divine. Finally, the concluding chapter will merge this ethical responsibility and hope for inclusive societal betterment in a globalized world by encouraging participation in the holistic practices of community development for the sake of Christian action toward social transformation and the flourishing of all life.

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CHAPTER ONE:
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT UNDER THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Introduction

For the past half century or so, community development has gained attention in the global sphere for its grassroots devotion toward alleviating neighborhood poverty. Operating under the impression that top-down approaches to poverty’s eradication, such as Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty in the 1960s, are largely ineffective, community development recognizes that solutions to poverty rarely fit within cookie-cutter formulas and quite often result in a greater dependency upon governmental and charitable assistance, which consequently produce either a sense of entitlement or loss of dignity.20 As such, community development’s primary purpose aims toward the empowerment of a community’s own residents to seek personal and communal transformation in a comprehensive and holistic manner that also enhances human dignity and global sustainability.21

As this thesis seeks to encourage Christian participation in community development, this chapter will present an interlocking of Christian theological and ethical considerations with that of community development’s most basic and fundamental principles. Much of this discussion will dwell on its theory rather than on its practices as community development manifests

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differently depending on the needs of each specific community. Still, with the careful intention of restoring human dignity and creating a world of flourishing, the theoretical is easily translatable into the practice of daily living no matter the community in which a person lives. Therefore, this chapter will seek to promote community development’s approach to poverty alleviation by calling for the replacement of deterministic living for that of a holistic and empowered lifestyle and by delineating the detrimental effects of approaching poverty in a paternalistic and consumeristic manner.

Foundations of Community Development through a Christian Lens

Determinism and a Gospel of Hope

Community development’s primary concern is to combat deterministic mindsets as they restrict persons to the inevitability of impoverished living by reinforcing the ideology that human beings cannot control or change the course of their lives. This is not to say that all persons living in poverty do not wish for nor seek opportunity to change their circumstances, but more that society itself is designed to preserve well-accustomed ways of living and modes of thinking despite their capacity for generating oppressive conditions for some. Although it is unnecessarily stereotypical to assume that all people living in low socio-economic communities


23 C. Margaret Hall, Identity, Religion, and Values: Implications for Practitioners (Bristol, PA: Taylor & Francis, 1996), 105.

24 Myers, Walking with the Poor, 112; Ann E. Cudd, Analyzing Oppression (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 80.
are deterministic, Ann Cudd in her work, *Analyzing Oppression*, argues that economic systems reinforce oppression by creating incentives for the oppressed to behave according to their stereotypical roles. With such reinforcement it is easy for the economically oppressed to accept their situations by either believing in their inferiority or by accepting defeat to a system that does not allow them to move out of their current situations.\(^\text{25}\) As such, many persons in impoverished communities despair for a better life, becoming trapped in situations less than hospitable to basic human need, and resulting in an apathetic approach to change as persons become anesthetized to their circumstances. Sustainable poverty alleviation thus requires hope as a prerequisite to changing one’s circumstances and also the responsibility to enact upon these things hoped for.\(^\text{26}\)

Hope enables persons to foresee a new reality that clings to the possibility of life’s restoration or renewal. With such vision, responsibility then compels persons forward by making them accountable for how things currently stand and by ensuring that they take active measures toward this better future (for oneself, but also for the interdependent other).\(^\text{35}\) As the Christian tradition is rooted in the hope of the resurrected Christ, the fight against determinism is as much a Christian task as it is one for community developers; and yet for many faith communities, this resurrection hope remains disconnected from how one lives in the present and is limited in its implications for the current condition of the world.\(^\text{36}\) Christian determinism often surfaces in the

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\(^\text{25}\) Cudd, *Analyzing Oppression*, 80; Myers also comments on this topic noting that, “The poor are no more lazy, fatalistic, improvident, stupid, or arrogant than anyone else. All people suffer from these problems, poor and non-poor alike. But only the non-poor can afford to indulge in these behaviors” [Walking with the Poor, 112].


\(^\text{36}\) Ibid., 5.
form of eschatological escapism, which projects the actualization of the hope for new life to the after-life – reachable only when one leaves this world through death. This perspective becomes deterministic predominantly in that the concerns, trials, and suffering of this world become a matter of spiritual perseverance and endurance, and thereby restricting the Christian vocation to matters of personal sanctification. This position has an effect both on the believer’s own life as one faithfully (but passively) awaits the time of sin’s defeat, but it also effects the state of the world as, apart from evangelistic measures, not much can be done for a world overcome by evil (especially not for a world destined to be destroyed and replaced). Jürgen Moltmann labels this form of Christian living as being disturbingly “accustomed to death” as it exposes an indifference to pain and apathy to suffering akin to living in destruction and captivity. Rather, as Moltmann describes, Christian hope has little room for this acquiescence to worldly suffering as hope is:

[not] the yearning of the soul for a life free of pain in heaven, but the love for the kingdom of God in this world. Jesus’ life is inspired not just by the wish for a life after death, but by the will for life before death, yes, even against death. Where the sick are healed, lepers are accepted, and sins are not punished but forgiven, there life is present. Freed life, redeemed life, divine life is there, in this world, in our times, in the midst of us. Where Jesus is, there is life (italics in original).

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37 Myers, *Walking with the Poor*, 7.

38 This privatization of Christian spirituality is also highly exclusionary, as the believer’s salvation becomes equated to the abandonment of the world (apart from what is labelled as “Christian”). Miroslav Volf recognizes this when he argues that if Christ died for the ungodly (Rom 5:6) then the church’s “self-donation” to the world is expected, as “to claim the comfort of the Crucified while rejecting his way is to advocate not only cheap grace but a deceitful ideology” [*Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 24].


As such, the gospel of Christ affords no room for determinism as it is a gospel characterized by the availability of new life in the present that hopes against death and maintains a responsibility for the continuance and flourishing of life’s future. In fact, the Christian vocation is much related to the task of awakening, enlivening, and restoring persons to life, that does not necessarily entail a change in circumstances (or location), but a change in response that works towards creating an environment in which the world can ultimately flourish.  

Interdependent and Contextually Relational Beings

In terms of community development, claiming hope in impoverished communities directly relates to overcoming determinism by bringing local residents into relationship under the common goal of creating a space of flourishing. This goal of flourishing, however, has little to do with the American Dream’s possession of stuff, the perfect family, net worth, and prestige; but more to do with creating a hospitable environment between family members and neighbors. John Perkins, the founder of the Christian Community Development Association, noticed after years of practicing community development that, even despite obvious economic need, the three most common needs voiced by the people with whom he worked were a sense of belonging, a sense of acceptance for who one is, and a sense of security. Thus, if human flourishing correlates to the extent in which these needs are met, then flourishing, itself, is unattainable.

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41 Again Jürgen Moltman beautifully captures this sentiment in his statement: “[Is] the true church of Jesus Christ not the reality of a return to God and the reality of the experience of rebirth to a living hope and in the unity of conversion and rebirth the sacrament of God’s future and the future of the world? I find that that is even more true. I do not know any reason for being a Christian other than this divine experience of conversion, rebirth to a living hope and the presence of the kingdom of God in the Spirit of God” [Creating a Just Future: The Politics of Peace and the Ethics of Creation in a Threatened World, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989), 5].

without community (the presence of the other), making community health and wellbeing a concern of all who live within.

It is no secret that all things live in relation to each other, particularly in today’s globalized climate. The interdependency of all things highlights the orchestral nature of the interactive relationships between humans with each other and nature, and on a larger scale the relationships between nations, politically and economically.\(^{50}\) This interdependence not only engenders the consciousness that a single person’s true flourishing is contingent on the true flourishing of all others, encouraging an ethic that extends beyond one’s own interests, but also that a single person’s wellbeing is contextualized to the setting of one’s life.\(^{51}\) Both interdependence and contextualization demonstrate person’s social dependency, which contradicts the American value of an individual pursuit of happiness, but also refocuses persons to their immediate contexts as places to which their wellbeing is inevitably linked.\(^{52}\) Thus, community development operates under the premise that human beings are fundamentally persons-in-relationship who rely on the wellbeing of their environments and the people therein in order to survive (and thrive).\(^{53}\) It becomes the purpose of community development to instill

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within neighborhoods a hope for their own, their children’s, and their neighbors’ future by taking responsible steps to create and cultivate environments of belonging, acceptance, and security.

In relation to Christian doctrine, James K.A. Smith, in his work *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, shows how the relationality of human beings provides the groundwork for an Augustinian conceptualization of human persons as embodied agents of desire or love.\(^6^0\) Borrowing from Heidegger, Smith states, “The world is the environment in which we swim, not a picture that we look at as distanced observers. Thus, rather than suggesting that perception or mere cognition is the fundamental mode of intentional consciousness, Heidegger argued that *care* is the most primordial way that we ‘intend’ the world” (italics in original).\(^6^1\) In other words, it is through this intentional consciousness that human persons feel and love their way through their life by directing caring responses to the lives of those around them. Smith further notes that as embodied agents of love, what one ultimately loves constitutes one’s identity as it shapes a person’s vision of the good life and molds a person’s “being-in-the-world”.\(^6^2\) Smith’s work helps demonstrate that Christians consciously live by loving intentionally and relationally the Triune God as their ultimate love, through which they are shaped into the purpose or *telos* of being-in-the-world as embodied lovers who seek the world’s flourishing. Smith explains, “Our ultimate love moves and motivates us because we are lured by this picture of human flourishing. Rather than being pushed by beliefs, we are pulled by a *telos* that we desire.”\(^6^3\) In other words, Christian relationship with

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\(^6^0\) James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, vol. 1 of *Cultural Liturgies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 47.

\(^6^1\) Ibid., 49.

\(^6^2\) Ibid., 50-51.

\(^6^3\) Ibid., 54.
the divine sources both Christian identity and vocation, which aims itself toward worldly flourishing merely because it is the world that the divine loves, further merging one’s love for God with love for one’s neighbor (John 3:16-17; Matt. 22:35-40). Thus, the Christian vocation is one that yearns, as does community development, for the flourishing of the world by taking active measures to reclaim human dignity and secure global sustainability as ones beloved by the Triune God.  

Relational Poverty

If humans are essentially persons-in-relationship, poverty and its methods of alleviation must likewise be relationally defined and directed. The essential characteristic of relational poverty is the recognition that it is specific to each person as it stems from a cocktail of social, religious, psychological, economic, environmental, and political factors. This specificity correlates to the Christian doctrine of the fall in reference to the four broken relationships now hindering persons from full life – the relationships being those of humanity with God, humanity with each other, persons with themselves, and humanity with nature. As such, persons contextually interact within these relationships to differing degrees of lack, dysfunction, or remediation, giving poverty a more comprehensive definition by extending to any area in which persons are prevented from living fully (flourishing). Thus it is important to understand that

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66 Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor...and Yourself (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2012), 57.

67 Ibid., 55; Myers, Walking with the Poor, 15. Included in the broken relationship of humanity with each other is a person’s relationship with their socio-political and economic situations, e.g. how a person relates to his/her country’s rule of law; how women are perceived within society; etc.
relational poverty is first never a neat package of predictable causes and symptoms, but much more an interwoven complexity tied to a person’s web of relationships; and second, that it is not just the materially poor who suffer poverty, but all people. 68 This is why it is possible for John Perkins (who has worked in economically impoverished communities for decades) to contend that humanity’s greatest needs are to belong, be accepted, and to have security rather than point solely to the need for increased governmental assistance, the creation of more jobs, or better taxation policies since financial security is merely one facet of poverty’s grip on humanity. 69

Poverty alleviation tactics are reoriented to a more relational approach when they become a means of holistically mediating and reconciling relationships, painting a vision that is ultimately one of communal wellbeing and furthering the notion that true flourishing relies on persons being in community. 70 This operates under the assumption that poverty alleviation will be ineffective if it decontextualizes persons from their embodied existences, implying that poverty alleviation is a global mission that must learn to become community specific in order to avoid poverty alleviation programs that have impersonal, oversimplified, or dehumanizing solutions to poverty, and also that communities and their needs relate directly to local and national cultures and governments, and indirectly to global affairs. 71 In large part, this has

68 Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 61; O’Connell, *Compassion*, 69; Myers importantly highlights the fact that “the poor are poor largely because they live in networks of relationships that do not work for their well-being” [*Walking with the Poor*, 15].

69 Perkins, *Beyond Charity*, 35-36. The need to belong and be accepted, of course, relates directly to person’s specific relationships, but it also entails the sense of belonging to and be accepted by society at large. Quite often, impoverished persons are ostracized, avoided, or removed to the outskirts of society because of their situations.

70 Moltmann, *Creating a Just Future*, 8; Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 57.

71 Myers, *Walking with the Poor*, 62-63; 84; McFague, “Epilogue,” 203-204. For example, deforestation causes drought that may then cause farmers in Brazil to fall into desperate poverty, yet national governments often support deforestation programs as they supply a need in the global market. See Gilvan R. Guedes, “Poverty Dynamics, Ecological Endowments, and Land Use among Smallholders in the Brazilian Amazon” in *Social Science Research* 43 (January 2014): 74-76.
contributed to community development’s firm belief in empowering grassroots, local initiatives toward poverty alleviation as it avoids the outsider’s removed solutions and enables community members to find sustainable answers to their specific needs. Local initiatives give face and voice to residents, which borrows from their local know-how and experience, targets the needs that matter most to them, and benefits the community by drawing members together under a common goal of sharing life.

**Community Development as Benevolence**

Community developers recognize that not all approaches to poverty alleviation are effective and can, in fact, produce more lasting damage to the cause despite one’s best intentions. Historically within the United States, benevolent action towards poverty eradication has operated within economic terms, seeking its solutions materialistically but with very little evidence of permanent change in the lives of the recipients. Generally, there are two consequences for addressing poverty economically instead of relationally: the first is paternalism, which enables a hierarchal attitude neglectful of the benefactor’s own broken/ relationally-impoverished status; and the second is dependency, which limits a person’s ability to move beyond assistance. Thus, the following section will address these issues and suggest two alternative approaches that enable benevolent practice to attend to neighborhood restoration more holistically.

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72 Block, *Community*, 26.

Paternalism and Dependency

Paternalism

If not careful, benefactors can easily assume an attitude of paternalism when seeking to assist those living in impoverished circumstances. Paternalism generally manifests as a disposition of superiority in which the benefactor presumes that he/she is more capable than the recipient to diagnose and enact the solutions to the recipient’s problems. ⁸⁴ Robert Lupton describes this in terms of “fixing people.” He states, “When I presume to fix someone, I shape that person with my value, doctrine, hygiene, parenting, vocabulary, housekeeping, nutrition and a whole host of things.”⁸⁵ This, unfortunately, is precisely the attitude that dominates much of what passes for American benevolence today in the impersonal systemizing and imposing of top-down poverty alleviation programs on communities.

Paternalism manifests in benefactors in a variety of ways, but most typically when they dispense resources into situations where the real need is for locals to utilize the resources already available to them (resource paternalism) or likewise, do the work that the locals could easily do for themselves (labor paternalism). Still, paternalism can also present itself when benefactors assume they possess the best ideas about how to do thing (knowledge paternalism) or take a managerial role over a project because they think they know how to complete task more efficiently (managerial paternalism). Lastly, and more particularly in reference to the church, benefactors are capable of a spiritual paternalism that manifests under the assumption that

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economic poverty is indicative of a spiritual deficiency. Paternalistic approaches often neglect listening to the real needs of the community and either adopt strategies or projects that are not needed or wanted, or exclude locals from participating in the project’s process. When poverty alleviation is paternalistic, it serves to reinforcing the stereotype that impoverished people are in some sense inferior and incapable, resulting in few sustainable and lasting changes that also dehumanizes people into projects, products, and problems rather than restoring them to lives characterized by wellbeing and dignity.

Dependency

Paternalism can also lead to a community’s dependency on external assistance. The usual culprit for developing dependency is undisciplined acts of charity, particularly in form of gifting money and labor. These acts of charity cause dual harm: for the benefactor, undisciplined giving provides an immediate sense of self-gratification that satisfies obligation but discourages more creative and long-term development strategies; and as recipients become accustomed to the aid, it demotivates them to change their circumstances and even creates a sense of entitlement.

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86 Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 109-112. See also Perkins, *Beyond Charity*, 30-31. Spiritual paternalism is unfortunately very characteristic of mission trips and other church-organized benevolent programs (food kitchen, etc.).

87 Block, *Community*, 24; Robert D. Lupton, *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (And How to Reverse It)* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011), 129. Lasting and sustainable change bears heavily upon whether or not the persons needing the change participate in the process. Having ownership by providing the resources and working towards its actualization not only produces a sense of accomplishment, it also produces a desire to maintain it and the knowledge that they can do the same for other areas of their lives.


89 Lupton, *Toxic Charity*, 34-35.

Unfortunately, these acts of charity are typical of Americans and indicative of the manner in which they view poverty – through the lens of consumerism.

Consumerism, as one of the major contributors to American poverty, teaches persons to consume and discard without developing a sense of enough, which reinforces the concept that having more possessions is indicative of wealth and that one can buy oneself (or be bought) out of poverty.\(^9\) This mindset invests in cheap, temporary, or replaceable solutions that lack the quality and sustainability necessary for persons to move from their impoverished circumstances.\(^9\) Consumerism also detaches well-meaning Americans from their charitable gifts, once again turning people into impersonal products, projects, and problems.\(^9\) Quite often undisciplined giving is the result of obligation, whether it be sourced by religious beliefs, public opinion, or tax breaks. Donating money is quite possibly the fastest way to alleviate one’s conscience or fulfill one’s obligation; however, depending on the organization or situation, such gifting can cause more harm than good to the task of poverty alleviation.\(^9\)

Restoring Neighborhoods

In a criticism against consumerism, Maureen O’Connell notes that:

[Americans] increasingly equate human ‘being’ with ‘having,’ we fail to appreciate that gifts of talent are frequently more valuable and effective in interrupting structural injustices than gifts of ‘treasure’…Therefore, canned goods, coats, bottled water, and even cows, for example, trump more personally demanding and intangible resources such as physical presence, friendship,


\(^9\) Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed*, 57-58.

\(^9\) Block, *Community*, 56-57.

\(^9\) Ibid., 26.
accompaniment, and moral imagination. These resources are equally necessary for ensuring the flourishing of all persons.\textsuperscript{108}

O’Connell touches precisely on the reversal in thinking that community developers envision for the future of poverty alleviation, namely that of the holistic restoration of persons to life in community. Admittedly, the transformation of neighborhoods is slow and laborious work; but, it is in the slowness that real needs come to light and in the labor that the community builds relationships in a shared life together.

\textit{Empowerment}

The alternative to paternalism is empowerment as it shifts the attention from the benefactor doing things \textit{for} the community, to doing things \textit{with}, or even better, by equipping the community to do things by themselves.\textsuperscript{109} It is with this final aim in mind that community developers enter a neighborhood with the hopes of empowering the residents to take steps toward their own wellbeing by addressing the issues in their community and seeking solutions that benefit the entire neighborhood. If this task is to succeed, community developers, aware of the ease of slipping into a paternalistic attitude, enter neighborhoods with the primary intent of listening and learning.\textsuperscript{110} Instead of presenting diagnostic solutions to generalized problems, community developers seek to direct the community’s attention to their needs and the solutions that are readily available to them.\textsuperscript{111} Empowering also suggests the impartation of hope and


\textsuperscript{109} Many community developers live by an old Chinese poem (typically attributed to Lao-Tzu) that reads: “Go to the people/ Live among them/ Learn from them/ Love them/ Start with what you know/ Build on what they have:/ But of the best leaders/ When their task is done/ The people will remark/ ‘We have done it ourselves.’” As found in Perkins, \textit{Beyond Charity}, 35.

\textsuperscript{110} Lupton, \textit{Toxic Charity}, 147.

\textsuperscript{111} Block, \textit{Community}, 24.
responsibility as the community gradually realizes that they do not need to remain victims of poverty, but have the ability, even responsibility, to actualize that change themselves. This entails the dismantling of a deterministic lifestyles and its replacement with the dignity found in community involvement, belonging, acceptance, and security.\textsuperscript{112} The eventual goal of community development is to become unnecessary as the neighborhood grows into their ability to address and assist each other in their shared space.

\textit{Assets: People, Environment, Resources}

In order to reduce a community’s dependency upon external resources, community developers often utilize an asset-based approach not only to help residents realize that they already possess solutions to their problems, but to also show them that neighborhood flourishing is communal business.\textsuperscript{113} One of the greatest assets to a community is its own people as it is through people that communities find friendships, knowledge, creativity, skills, talents, and imaginations. Another asset that is often overlooked is the community’s surrounding environment, whether urban or rural, as the environment sources both sustenance and pleasure (gardens/farms and parks). In addition to the environment’s natural resources, materials such as personal possessions and even one’s trash (for compost and recycling old/broken things into new) become an asset to the neighborhood by keeping expenses lower and avoiding consumerism’s beckoning to purchase unneeded things. With this perspective, it becomes difficult to see how exactly communities are impoverished.\textsuperscript{114} For as Peter Block says:


\textsuperscript{113} Vanier, \textit{Community and Growth}, 6.

\textsuperscript{114} Lupton, \textit{Toxic Charity}, 177-160.
“Communities are built from the assets and gifts of their citizens, not from the citizens’ needs or deficiencies. Organized, professionalized systems are capable of delivering services, but only associational life is capable of delivering care. Sustainable transformation is constructed in those places where citizens choose to come together to produce a desired future.”

**Concluding Remarks**

Economic poverty alleviation is, of course, a central purpose of neighborhood restoration; however, making people rich is not. Rather neighborhood restoration’s aim is to draw people back into the richness of life in community where financial security is supported by a sense of belonging and a common vision of community wellbeing. This is a task that may involve large corporations and non-profits, but mostly it requires the simple presence and availability of persons to each other. For the church and her members it means living consciously and curiously amongst one’s immediate neighbors, seeing and hearing the needs of the broken, and responding in compassionate love that not only pursues remedial care, but also labors after the lasting and sustainable wellbeing of all. Thus, the undertaking of the Christian is to become embodied lovers of the divine who live with hope’s purpose for one’s neighbor, which begins exactly where one is as relational poverty touches every neighborhood. Albeit, this thesis is also a call for Christians and churches to not avoid or escape low socio-economic communities, but rather be drawn to them with the simple purpose of being neighborly and/or starting community development initiatives. Regardless of locality, however, the intentionality of neighboring becomes the incarnational demonstration of the divine’s love that aches with the pain and

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115 Block, Community, 14.
suffering of the world, and responds with active and dignifying steps of bringing holistic restoration to all aspects of life.
CHAPTER TWO:
AN ETHIC OF HOPE IN RESPONSE TO THE DAMAGING EFFECTS OF SEPARATISM

Introduction

Christian benevolence takes shape within the church’s understanding of her vocation as a disposition and response to a faith in the Triune God and to her shared existence with the world. The matter of establishing an understanding of the Christian vocation is essentially a matter of describing the church’s existential purpose within the worldly context, implying that the Christian vocation is the manifestation of her identity in its visible and practical format. As such, the articulation of the Christian identity has global ramifications as it sources the manner in which Christians interact and participate in the significant tasks of daily living and world shaping. Thus, living consciously as a Christian is the effective filtration of the Christian identity into one’s actions and dispositions toward life, which has the consequence of making identity a site for ethical consideration. The conceptual link between identity and ethics is not foreign to theological and ethical studies as throughout history the human race has sought answers to the questions of who humanity is in relation to the divine, each other, and the environment; but more specifically to Christianity, the question of identity includes defining who the church is in relation to the world. It is the latter question that this chapter will primarily address.


engage as it is its answer that contains either beneficial or detrimental implications for Christian benevolent action within the worldly context.

One of the most detrimental positions held by the church in regards to the world is an attitude of separatism that removes and disengages Christians from involvement in matters of global betterment. Essentially, separatism nurtures the church’s identity as being an “other-worldly” or countercultural society that calls for a withdrawal from the workings of society in order to provide an alternative option that contrasts the pervasive evil characteristic of the global sphere.\(^{118}\) Separatism’s contrastive model results in an unbecoming good vs. evil dualism between the church and world that more often than not produces the vocational calling of living privately virtuous lives and places benevolent action into the spiritual realm of rescuing persons from the snares of this world.\(^ {119}\) As a result, separatism often produces a desensitized and apathetic response toward worldly oppression and becomes neglectful of holistic and redemptive measures in the Christian approach to benevolent care.

In view of this, the course this chapter will take is to first examine Emmanuel Levinas’ ethical theory of otherness in order to establish the sanctity of the other as requiring an ethical response of respect and responsibility despite differences in identity. The chapter will continue by presenting Stanley Hauerwas’ characterization of the church being a contrastive alternative to society for the purpose of demonstrating to the world its corruption by embracing a countercultural social ethic. The drive here is to reveal how contrastive church models engender separatism (whether intentional or not) with detrimental effects to both the Christian community


and Christian incarnated presence in the world. Therefore, as an alternative to Hauerwas, I will present Jürgen Moltmann’s ethic of hope which embraces an engaged benevolent hope for the world’s today and tomorrow and rejects deterministic thinking for the sake of living consciously in an embodiment of love.

**Emmanuel Levinas: An Ethic of Otherness**

The relational nature of persons as inescapably interdependent and contextually-grounded corresponds to Emmanuel Levinas’ ethic of otherness who contends that sociability is not a part of ontology. Rather, Levinas links the sociability of persons to the awareness that one shares existence *with* other beings and things in a maintained relationship.¹²⁰ As such, it is the sociability of persons – the shared, relational existence – that reveals and necessitates ethical behavior instead of it being intelligible from within a person’s ontology. Although the relationally communal basis for ethics is evident, the manner in which one acts ethically toward another does rest upon the sanctity of the other’s ontological existence. Levinas contends that the fact of being, or existing, is the sole uncommunicable and privatized aspect to a person’s existence, which first recognizes that a person’s being is incapable of being shared or taken, or in other words, objectified as a knowable and controllable entity; and second, that all others enjoy a similarly distinct and incomprehensible nature.¹²¹ Levinas thus describes persons as being *transcendence-in-immanence*, which essentially recognizes that the other’s being is both beyond


¹²¹ Ibid.
comprehension, in so far as it cannot be reduced to sensory input, and that the other’s being is beyond possession, in so far as a person can only lay claim to one’s own existence.\textsuperscript{122}

Ethics, then, stems from the solitary self’s escape from isolation into the world of relational face-to-face encounters with others.\textsuperscript{123} These encounters revere the face of the other in a non-exploitative sharing of life, and as such infer that ethics consists of a response of respect and responsibility for the other.\textsuperscript{124} This response develops in the affirmation of the other’s existence which must admit the other’s external value as it is impossible to deny the noumenal glory of the other’s existence.\textsuperscript{125} Levinas’ language of face-encounters discloses a series of implications for the ethical considerations of this paper: first, respect (which Levinas also refers to as love) for the other is the beginning of justice as it identifies the sanctity of the other’s existence; second, justice is taking responsibility for the other without waiting for reciprocity; and third, responsibility bears its burden in the face of a subject (or subject’s face) that contradicts possessive objectification.\textsuperscript{126}

For Levinas, this sort of unconditional responsibility is bound to humanity’s inherent sociability as it is banal to claim that persons live in solitary or exclusive existences, and

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{122} Emmanuel Levinas, Basic Philosophical Writings, eds. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 9; Emmanuel Levinas, Existence & Existents, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2001), 2; Michael Purcell, Levinas and Theology (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 58.
\item \textsuperscript{123} Levinas speaks specifically of these face-to-face encounters as between humans; however, I include the non-anthropic within the concept of otherness as also claiming an existence beyond exploitation.
\item \textsuperscript{124} Purcell, Levinas and Theology, 156-157.
\item \textsuperscript{125} Emmanuel Levinas, Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 34-35.
\item \textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 103-104; Levinas, Ethics and Infinity, 57, 77, 87, 95, 98; Purcell, Levinas and Theology, 71-72; Emmanuel Levinas, Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism, trans. Sean Hand (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 82.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
therefore, necessitates the acknowledgement that one must ethically and consciously live in a shared existence.\textsuperscript{127} Responsibility when understood as consciously sharing existence has two consequences: first, it entails the internal ordering of one’s own life such that the act of living rejects the exploitation of others through the overconsumption of materials, power, etc. Sharing naturally implies self-restriction, and becomes responsibility’s response to the mutual existence of others.\textsuperscript{128} Second, this sort of responsibility entails an external activism for the sake of those exploited, be it that conscious living abhors preventable and reversible suffering that contradicts the dignity of existence.\textsuperscript{129}

As it appears, Levinas’ work in establishing an ethic of otherness places great weight on the role of responsibility, but the manner in which this responsibility takes shape in a globalized world must also attend to the concept of difference: in that respecting the sanctity of others infers the non-oppression of differences. While the awareness of others contains the basis for ethical behavior, the concept of difference pertains to the social nature of face-to-face encounters as the face of each person comes with an identity fashioned by the influences of one’s physical existence within a particular historical, cultural, and socio-political environment.\textsuperscript{130} Here two points are worthy of note: first, as a normal function of the human brain, persons naturally categorize others into social groups of sameness and difference based off physical markers,

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\item \textsuperscript{127} Levinas, \textit{Ethics and Infinity}, 57-58; Levinas, \textit{Entre Nous}, 14.
\item \textsuperscript{128} Sallie McFague, \textit{Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril} (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 193.
\item \textsuperscript{129} Levinas, \textit{Difficult Freedom}, 82.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Miroslav Volf, \textit{Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation} (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 66.
\end{itemize}
intellectual capacities, class, religion, nationality, etc. And second, identity forms in response to the interactions one has with others, one’s environment, and one’s experiences, including the social groups that one identifies with or participates in. This helps illustrate that the difference (and identity) of others is comprehended through the sensory input of relational encounters which lies within the realm of sociability without effect on the other’s ontology, or in other words, the fact that the other exists as different does not negate the fact that the other exists. In view of this assertion and since differences are becoming more visible everyday, Levinas’ ethical theory contributes by placing the foundational criteria for ethical behavior on the other’s existence rather than on the other’s represented identity (such as one’s race, sex, religion, nationality, etc.), making unconditional the response of respect and responsibility toward the other and unalterable in the face of difference. This response, however, has everything to do with the other’s identity for the simple reasons that ethical behavior performs socially and that persons cannot be decontextualized from their identities, such that respect honors the other’s existence as it is represented and responsibility makes room for the identity-bound other in a shared existence.

It is important to emphasize one further connection between ethics and identity: namely that one’s ethics, in terms of how he/she responds and interacts with others, is the visible representation of one’s identity. Although the nature of persons’ existence cannot fully be comprehended, it is through the communication of observable interaction that one becomes


known to others.\textsuperscript{133} This is important to recognize as this chapter turns to the discussion of the Christian identity as it is revealed by her ethical relationship with the world, indicating also the manner in which the Christian presence is known within the global context. As a religion that embraces the ethical mandate to love God and neighbor, the reflection of the Christian identity comprises the task of living consciously as embodied lovers within the world, a claim which Levinas felt encompasses the required response of respect and responsibility.\textsuperscript{134} Thus it is from here that this chapter will proceed by highlighting the detrimental effect of a separatist mindset to that of the Christian presence’s shared existence with the world.

\textbf{Stanley Hauerwas: Church as Social Ethic}

Stanley Hauerwas is a well-known theologian, ethicist, and professor whose prolific and somewhat controversial writing has deeply influenced Christian thinking in matters of ecclesiology and Christian witness. It is precisely for this reason that Hauerwas enters this thesis particularly as the most common criticism laid against him is the assertion that his work advocates a type of sectarianism in his promotion of the church \textit{being} a social ethic rather than \textit{having} a social ethic in order to allow the church to be an alternative to the political influences of

\textsuperscript{133} Marilynn B. Brewer and Miles Hewstone (eds.), Introduction to \textit{Self and Social Identity}, eds. Marilynn B. Brewer and Miles Hewstone (Maldon, MA: Backwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), xi.

the world.\textsuperscript{135} Hauerwas, who is categorically opposed to this sectarian charge, recognizes that his claim necessitates the depiction of the church as a body polity that requires him to attempt a description of the Christian community that avoids mirroring the nation-state.\textsuperscript{136} As such, Hauerwas’ agenda throughout his career has been to unite the church under the agreement that pacifism is the Christian normative response, that all forms of Constantinianism should be rejected, and that liberalism (especially political liberalism) has no place in Christian rationality.\textsuperscript{137} Consequently, Hauerwas’ position regarding the church as a social ethic has required him to strongly emphasize the building, maintaining, and displaying of the church’s distinctive identity as an alternative society, implying a divergent rather than collaborative relationship between the church and the surrounding society.\textsuperscript{138} As a result, the church’s existential purpose is for her to be a contrastive alternative to the world’s societies, which Hauerwas claims is achieved by the church simply being herself.\textsuperscript{139}


Although this thesis will sift through Hauerwas’ work with the intention of withdrawing his separatist tendencies, there are a couple of disclaimers to be made: first, although Hauerwas’ model of the church’s social ethic will come into question, this is not to say that I disagree with all of Hauerwas’ conclusions or methodologies. As his work is extensive, he has discussed a wide variety of topics such as his theology of disability that I do not wish to discredit.\textsuperscript{140} This statement is particularly directed toward his use of narrative-virtue ethics, which contains a wide measure of validity and merit even if here it will be reflected somewhat negatively.

Second, I have no intention of demonizing Hauerwas for encouraging separatism in his work, especially since he himself rejects the concept and as there are many instances in his writing that would prove just that. However, Hauerwas is notorious for a rhetoric that is often difficult to read, doggedly vague, and full of shocking and often misleading or contradictory statements intended to prove a point.\textsuperscript{141} Thus it may indeed be the case that his separatist tendencies are a misreading of his work; yet as multiple scholars have laid the charge of sectarianism and separatism against him, it is clear that there exists a carelessness in Hauerwas’ writings that justify these charges against him. Due to the wide-spread fame of his work in Christian circles, it is the purpose of this section to examine where these separatist tendencies do infiltrate his writing and his concept of the church’s social ethic. Therefore, it is not the particular interest of this thesis to decide whether or not Hauerwas is indeed a sectarian, but rather to illustrate how the church’s identity as a contrastive social ethic inevitably leads to separatism.

\textsuperscript{140} See Stanley Hauerwas, \textit{Suffering Presence: Theological Reflections on Medicine, the Mentally Handicapped, and the Church} (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986).

\textsuperscript{141} Healy, \textit{Hauerwas}, 12. For an example where Hauerwas encourages political involvement but then claims that the Church’s political involvement has caused the Church to lose sight of itself. See Hauerwas, \textit{A Community of Character}, 73-74.
thereby hindering both Christian witness and participation in benevolent world-mending and shaping.

A Contrastive Social Ethic

As indicated in his introduction to *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*, Hauerwas’ primary concern throughout his collective work has been to describe the purpose of the Christian presence in the worldly context. He states, “Though this book touches on many issues it is dominated by one concern: to reassert the social significance of the church as a distinct society with an integrity peculiar to itself... In particular I have tried to show why, if the church is to serve our liberal society or any society, it is crucial for Christians to regain an appropriate sense of separateness from that society.”142 From the very beginning, Hauerwas expresses two claims central to his construction of the Christian identity: first, that the representation of the church’s identity to society has significance in its internal integrity and external demonstration of service; and second, that for the church to attain this significant and relevant identity, it must be distinctive and appropriately separate from that of its society. What results in Hauerwas’ claim of the church as a social ethic stems first from his recognition of the interwoven dependency of belief and ethics as it connects to Christian embodied and lived identity, and second, from the awareness of the other’s role in identity formation. Implicitly, Hauerwas is entertaining an ethic of otherness, where the world exists as other to the church both as participant in the formation of the Christian identity and recipient of its visible manifestation.143 Yet, as will become clear, his contrastive approach delegates the worldly other

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142 Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 1. Hauerwas (and William H. Willimon) similarly states in [*Resident Aliens*, 43], “The church’s only concern is how to be in the world, in what form, for what purpose.”

to a position of inferiority that diverges from that of Levinas’ ethical requirement of respect and responsibility.\textsuperscript{144}

Hauerwas summarizes the interaction between belief and ethics as such: “The social ethical task of the church, therefore, is to be the kind of community that tells and tells rightly the story of Jesus... [It] means that we, like the early Christians, must learn that understanding Jesus’ life is inseparable from learning how to live our own.”\textsuperscript{145} To become Christian is to become a participant in the narrative of Jesus Christ, who Hauerwas (taking after John Howard Yoder) views as a political (or contra-political) figure of peace, the bearer of a new possibility free from the worldly authorities and powers that pursue deception, coercion, and violence.\textsuperscript{146} “Jesus is the story that forms the church,” which is to say, “The call to be part of the gospel is a joyful call to be adopted by an alien people, to join a countercultural phenomenon, a new polis called church.”\textsuperscript{147} Thus, the church’s existential position in the world is primarily to serve as a social alternative to the politically influenced world by being a community of character since all politics (or polises) are judged by the character of the people it produces.\textsuperscript{148} On its surface, there is an appeal to Hauerwas’ evident anti-Constantinianism and pacifist leanings; however, this

\textsuperscript{144} A large portion of this chapter discusses the relationship between the church and the world and deserves more than a footnote to outline the complicated usage of these terms. However, Hauerwas recognizes that the term “world” applies negatively to those who reject Christ (those living in the world), to socio-political regimes and powers, and to a general spiritual dimension or atmosphere of evil, but also positively to God’s creation [see Hauerwas, A Community of Character, 247 (fn8)]. As will become clear, Hauerwas’ writings are directed primarily toward the negative, non-Christian usage of “world,” but to detrimental effect as “worldly” solutions to human dignity and global sustainability (causes that benefit God’s creation) are more or less rejected.

\textsuperscript{145} Hauerwas, A Community of Character, 52.

\textsuperscript{146} Hauerwas, Peaceable Kingdom, 93; Hauerwas, A Community of Character, 48-50; John Howard Yoder, The Politics of Jesus (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 43, 214.

\textsuperscript{147} Hauerwas, A Community of Character, 50; Hauerwas and Willimon, Resident Aliens, 30.

\textsuperscript{148} Hauerwas is referencing Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn; see Hauerwas, A Community of Character, 51, 74-75.
appeal wanes as his stark opposition to Constantinianism provides the justification for separatism and his promotion of pacifism as an alternative political response turns into passivism toward matters of social justice. 149 Both of these charges will be looked at in turn.

Separatism and Passivism

The source of Hauerwas’ problem stems from the weighty role he grants to the world in shaping the church’s identity in society. Hauerwas recognizes that the “[c]hurch and world are relational concepts – neither is intelligible without the other,” which is a fairly standard insight into identity formation. Yet in light of this intelligibility, Hauerwas is necessarily compelled to extrapolate upon the contrastive characteristics between the two in order to maintain their distinctive identities. 150 This is evident when he says that “the church first serves the world by helping the world know what it means to be the world. For without a ‘contrast model’ the world has no way to know or feel the oddness of its dependence on power for survival.” 151 And again, “The challenge is always for the church to be a ‘contrast model’ for all polities that know not God. Unlike them, we know that the story of God is the truthful account of our existence, and thus we can be a community formed on trust rather than distrust.” 152 And further that “the world cannot be the church, for the world, while still God’s good creation, is a realm that knows not

149 I say there is an appeal as I, myself, support pacifism and the rejection of the association between the Christian identity with a specific political position; however, I find the manner in which Hauerwas justifies these positions wholly distasteful and detrimental to Christian presence in the world. See David H. Jensen, “Whose Conversation? Theology and Its Audience” in Theology that Matters: Ecology, Economy, and God, ed. Darby Kathleen Ray (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 22.


151 Hauerwas, A Community of Character, 50.

152 Ibid., 85.
God and is thus characterized by the fears that constantly fuel the fires of violence…Our task is not to make these nations the church, but rather to remind them that they are but nations.”

Clearly, these statements imply that the primary task of the church is to show the world that it is not nor can it be the church, entailing further that the mode of Christian living is fundamentally different from that of the world’s – a community “capable of engendering and recognizing saints.” As circular as it appears, the church as a contrastive polity with a separate social ethic requires the world’s corrupt policies in order for the church to embrace its alternative. The result is an overly crass depiction of the world (which fluctuates in its meaning) and withdrawal from participation in what would be considered worldly solutions to injustice. As described, the church as a social ethic cannot help but foster separatist leanings in her intention to contrast, or rather contradict, anything politically relevant to today’s society, including matters of social and environmental justice. The world as “other” serves one function: to inform the church’s identity as a separate polis, that having been called out by God, “embodies a social alternative that the world cannot on its own terms know.” Therefore, for Hauerwas, “Christians must attempt to be nothing less than a people whose ethic shines as a beacon to others illumining how life should be lived well.”

As an ethical beacon of right living, Hauerwas’ commitment to a contrastive church model reaches its separatist pinnacle by implying that Christianity lays claim to true ethical

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justice – a claim seemingly supporting moral exclusivism and elitism. Unfortunately, this is further reinforced by Hauерwas’ position that the church should embrace pacifism as her response to political tensions. In the effort to depict the church as a “peaceable kingdom,” Hauерwas engenders a passivism rather than pacifism that disengages from societal justice, leading him to make comments such as: “I am in fact challenging the very idea that Christian social ethics is primarily an attempt to make the world more peaceable or just.” In fact, Hauерwas calls Christian participation in worldly social justice movements “fake” and misguided attempts to “update the church” by identifying the church and the scandal of Jesus with secular radicals and the “newest secular solution” (such as feminism).

The consequences of Hauерwas’ contrastive social ethic, as a position many Christians embrace, has serious implications for an active Christian presence in the world, particularly in regards to Christian benevolence. By posing the world as the church’s antithesis, the world becomes known only in light of its corruption; and indeed, the world must stay corrupt in order to provide a platform for faithful Christian living. Such a position toward the world as “other” maintains the dualisms of good vs. evil and sacred vs. secular, making it hard for the church to truly see the world as “God’s good creation.” As such, separatism as an ecclesial disposition toward the world effects Christian participation in benevolence in the following manners: First, a separatist mentality fosters a moral exclusivism present in the notion that the sacred church and

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158 Hauерwas, *Peaceable Kingdom*, 99; see also Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 143.


secular world have ulterior motives when addressing matters of social justice and suffering.\footnote{161} Either Christian benevolent action assumes an attitude of superiority in its model of service making it subject to paternalism and thereby largely ineffective, or in view of the world’s corruption, any attempt to alleviate world suffering is seen as futile, creating the condition of avoidance to matters of suffering that fall outside the confines of the church.\footnote{162} Furthermore, this moral exclusivism also has the capability of becoming suspicious, as Hauerwas is, of the social and environmental justice movements pertinent to the world’s growing concern for human and environmental dignity and sustainability.\footnote{163} Christians become apprehensive of these causes not only because they characterize worldly understanding of justice (and so inherently lacking truth), but also because of their prevalence in the political realm, particularly in that of the liberal left.\footnote{164} Set to contrast the world and political liberalism, the church has the potential of becoming an oppressive alternative to the world, hurting rather than helping the church’s witness of God’s expansive love.\footnote{165} By doing so, Christian benevolence extends only to those who fall neatly into the categories of the biblically oppressed (the widow, the orphan, and the poor) without


\footnote{164}{This is not to say that all secular agendas are consistent with Christian ethics nor that all conservative political positions are void of social and environmental justice, but to emphasize the hesitancy of many Christians to participate in social/environmental justice movements merely because they are linked to a party’s political stance.}

\footnote{165}{In contrast to Hauerwas, Dietrich Bonhoeffer states that “the first task given to those who belong to the church of God is not to be something for themselves, for example, by creating a religious organization or leading a pious life but to be witness of Jesus Christ to the world” [*Ethics*, trans. Reinhold Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Scott, vol. 2 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 64].}
compassion to the socially and environmentally oppressed so visible in the world but often hidden to and in the church.\textsuperscript{166}

Second, and in extension to separatism’s moral exclusivism, the church may become socially exclusive to (and excluded from) her worldly context in virtue of her motivation to be a distinctive society. In her toil to become a countercultural community, the church becomes subjected to the bondage of maintaining a carefully constructed image and worried over any who would disrupt her molded version of Christianity.\textsuperscript{167} The purpose of an image-driven community (a community of character in Hauerwas’ case) centers on becoming enticing to those in the world so that they join the church, which effectively turns the church into a proselytizing community that seeks to rescue persons from a world beyond help.\textsuperscript{168} In terms of benevolence, this attitude entails faith-contingent ministry by conditioning the requirements persons need to first fulfill in order to receive assistance, even to the extent that those suffering must either join the church or find help elsewhere. This also has the detrimental effect of qualifying persons’ needs based on the sin committed (the cause of their suffering), placing some people beyond the extent of Christian charity. Exclusion not only effects Christian benevolence, but it also effects persons who already identify as Christians when by some circumstance (such as identifying with a social justice movement) they no longer fit the mold of an ideal Christian.\textsuperscript{169}


\textsuperscript{168} Yoder, \textit{The Politics of Jesus}, 226. Louis Evely states, “The true dimensions of our Christian vocation is not the Church but the universe…We are not baptized to assure our individual salvation in a headlong flight. Nor are we baptized to seek refuge in the Church, sheltered from the dangers of the wicked world” \cite{Love Your Neighbor}, trans. Imelda L’Italien (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 43.

\textsuperscript{169} Healy, \textit{Hauerwas}, 73-74.
When the church allows its identity to be shaped by contrastive comparison to the world, it possessively uses the worldly other as a tool to craft its external image and bolster its self-regard as the holy people of God set apart from the world.\textsuperscript{170} But more importantly, this identity manifests in the church’s social ethic, curtailing the impact of the Christian vocational call to love others within their contextual environments.\textsuperscript{171} Before offering an alternative approach to considering the church’s existential position in the world, it is important to be reminded of Emmanuel Levinas’ presentation of the other as the subject of the ethical response of respect and responsibility. Indeed, Hauerwas is correct in his understanding that identity formation depends on interaction and comparison with the other; yet he fundamentally goes awry in assuming that this takes place only in the contrast. In other words, identity formation relies not only on how two entities are different, but also in how the two are the same.\textsuperscript{172} As such, Hauerwas’ insistence in the church’s purpose as a contrastive alternative does not allow him to admit the legitimacy of non-Christian benevolent activity and the restorative purposes of the social and environmental justice movements that align with the Christian mandate to love. Yet even more seriously, the contrastive model neglects the sanctity of the worldly other that warrants the ethical behavior of the church’s social ethic. Instead, and notwithstanding the fact that the church exists within the world and so shares a common existence, the world as the non-Christian other (or neighbor) begets the ethical responses of respect and responsibility for its wellbeing – a prerequisite response essential to an active and involved Christian presence within the global context.\textsuperscript{173}

\textsuperscript{170} Stout,\textit{ Democracy and Tradition}, 155-156.


\textsuperscript{172} Oyserman, “Self-concept and Identity,” 10-11.

\textsuperscript{173} McFague, “Epilogue, 199 205.
Jürgen Moltmann: An Ethic of Hope

The immediate concern presented to the removal of a contrastive church model is the worry that the church will lose her distinctiveness and significance in the world, and thus blur into society as differences between the two become less distinguishable. However, this need not be concerning, and by introducing Jürgen Moltmann’s ethic of hope for an engaged church as an alternative to Hauerwas’ ecclesial model that engenders a separatist ethic, the concluding intention of this chapter is to demonstrate that an active participation in societal transformation is paramount to a distinguishable Christian identity, and indeed, is the Christian vocational calling.

Moltmann’s first contribution toward an involved ecclesial position in the world is his emphasis upon the eschatological role of Christ’s narrative as the source and substance of the Christian identity. For Moltmann, all Christian living is done with an ethic of hope that sees the future in light of Christ’s resurrection – the salvific event that frees one from the fear of death and apathetic living. Hauerwas, like Moltmann, highlights the merging of the believer’s narrative with that of Christ’s, yet his commitment to the church’s role as a contrastive alternative to the world’s societies traps the church into resorting to the world to define its identity and to fashion the terms of its countercultural ethic. Moltmann, however, diverges from this line of thinking by attributing the sole source of the Christian identity to the redemptive and

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reconciling action of God in Christ to whom the church owes her existence.  What binds Christians together as a distinctive community is not the commitment to virtuous living that contradicts the world, but rather a commitment to the Holy Spirit – the very source of life who “already brings this eternally living life here and now, before death, not just after death, because the Spirit brings Christ into this world and Christ is the ‘resurrection and the life’ in person.” Thus, the art of the church’s Spirit-directed Christoformation, the transformative embodiment of Christ’s narrative, is nothing other than “the revelation of God’s indestructible affirmation of life and [God’s] marvelous joy in life. Where Jesus is, there is life” (italics in original). To put it simply: the church’s identity is to be a community of Spirit-bearers who are irresistibly addicted and committed to life, linking “a religious attitude toward life with a moral respect for the wonder of life… – that is to say, the life common to us all.” This has two implications for the church as it relates to Christian identity and ethic: the first is in the association between God’s affirmation of life to that of freedom; and the second correlates a moral respect and responsibility for the wonder of life with an ethic of hope.

The prominence of God’s unequivocal and unconditional affirmation of life consistently infiltrates Moltmann’s writings as the backbone to his theological and ethical construction in which the concepts of the divine incarnation and resurrection centrally confirm human existence within the earth’s community of creation. This affirmation of human existence, an affirmation


that consists of the passionate love of God, ultimately liberates persons from an oppressive fear of death and frees them from the “cramped life of self-confirmation.”\textsuperscript{182} Moltmann states: “If God wants so much to suffer us that he so deeply suffers for us, because of us, and with us, then we also become free to be transformed. We are not forced to hold fast to ourselves or to our image and appearance. We are already held. Since we can no longer lose ourselves, we can therefore open up and change to ourselves.”\textsuperscript{183} Notably, the Christian identity subsists of divine affirmation rather than worldly contrast. This simple shift grants the church freedom from the laborious task of maintaining a countercultural image and opens the church up to a mirrored divine passion for the whole vista of the world’s life.

Essentially for Moltmann, the church’s existential position in the world not does not fall within terms of who the church is, but how the church is within the world. No longer made insecure by the worldly other and wholly awakened to the life affirmed and afforded by God, the vocational calling of the church, and therefore manifestation of an identity held securely in God’s love, is a conscious and active willing and yearning for life. In other words, the world becomes the subject of the church’s love and recipient of an ethic of hope enraptured with the possibility and wonder of life rather than a deterministic submission to suffering, evil, and death.\textsuperscript{184} Thus, for Moltmann, the only response to the worldly other available to the church is one that respects and affirms its life by taking responsibility for the betterment of its future. This vocational stance is inseparably conjoined to hope as it looks to the future of the world without

\textsuperscript{182} Moltmann, \textit{Passion for Life}, 31.

\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., 32.

\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 22; Moltmann, \textit{Ethics of Hope}, 57, 60.
submitting to an apathetic despair.\textsuperscript{185} Thus, instead of seeking to be an alternative community that effectually invalidates the world’s movement toward a more dignified and sustainable future, the church embodies a living hope that seeks the worldly other’s flourishing – a responsibility that does not provide the church an escape from the injustices of society, but rather leads to a passionate ethical response in willingness to suffer for the justice of society out of a “love for the true life of the whole imperiled and impaired creation.”\textsuperscript{186}

\textbf{Concluding Remarks}

With Moltmann, there are two key departures from Hauerwas’ contrastive church model that enable compassionate benevolence as the Christian response to the pervasive suffering in the world: first, Moltmann allows the articulation of the church’s identity to derive from the divine other rather than the worldly other. By doing so, the church no longer must regard the world as her corrupt antithesis incapable of embracing the life Christ afforded, but rather accepts Christ’s identity into her own and thus sees herself as being sent to the world for the sake of the world’s life. This allows for the church to open and make herself available to the world instead of withdrawing into an exclusive ethos that accentuates the superiority of her members over and against the worldly other. Secondly, the church thus becomes capable of ordering her ethos in such a way that encourages the flourishing and wellbeing of global life without restriction, thereby being moved to take an active stance against injustice rather than dismissing it as a terminal condition of the world.\textsuperscript{187} Therefore, the church as a presence of hope rejects a

\textsuperscript{185} Moltmann, \textit{Creating a Just Future}, 7.
\textsuperscript{186} Moltmann, \textit{Theology of Hope}, 225.
\textsuperscript{187} Ibid., 21.
separatist’s apathetic determinism by living consciously aware of injustice and suffering as embodied lovers who worship a God of life amongst her global neighbors.\textsuperscript{188}

\textsuperscript{188} As Moltmann remarks, “Love does not snatch us from the pain of time, but takes the pain of the temporal upon itself. Hope makes us ready to bear the ‘cross of the present’” [Theology of Hope, 31].
CHAPTER THREE:
EUCHARISTIC LIVING: A THEOLOGY OF HOSPITALITY AND INCARNATIONAL PRAYER

Introduction

The church who accepts the ethical task of living consciously as embodied lovers is incapable of defaulting to an apathetic dismissal of those suffering injustice as an inevitable condition of life on earth. Nor is this church’s solution to worldly suffering the creation of a detached community that offers an escapist’s alternative and accentuates a countercultural ethic in order to appear socially significant. Rather, this is a church who awakes daily to the wonderment of life affirmed, experiencing the irresistible beckoning to seek life’s future and wellbeing, and thus, cannot tolerate injustice’s destructive interference to both anthropic and non-anthropic flourishing.189 It is this church who recognizes that she shares life with the world around her, accepting both the sanctity of the other and the requirement of an unconditional responsibility for the other’s life, equally essential in the mere recognition of the other’s existence and in the adherence to the Christian mandate to love God and neighbor.190 In light of this responsibility, this chapter will suggest hospitality as an ethical disposition and practice that mirrors divine hospitality and shapes the church’s primary posture of benevolent justice and transformational participation towards global betterment.

In her book *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, Christine D. Pohl remarks that “[h]ospitality is not so much a task as a way of living our lives and of sharing

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ourselves…Our hospitality both reflects and participates in God’s hospitality. It depends on a disposition of love because, fundamentally, hospitality is simply love in action.”\textsuperscript{191} Pohl’s statement encompasses the stance of this chapter: that hospitality is love in action, a way of living that involves sharing, and predominantly is a means to practically image and represent the Triune God to the world. Thus in order to make an argument for hospitality as a natural Christian response and disposition, this chapter will first examine the divine’s initial extension of hospitality to the world as represented in the creation narrative, also incorporating Rabbi Jonathan Sacks’ ethic of responsibility that promotes human initiative towards a hospitable justice. This will be followed by demonstrating divine hospitality as revealed in the incarnation and the Eucharist event, evidencing to the believer a radical expression of divine self-giving and sharing. Lastly, it will be shown that participation in the practices of the Eucharist and also prayer form the avenue for divine hospitality to become ingrained into the church’s very outlook, presentation, and action in the world denoting both her identity and her vocation. Drawing much from the richness of the works of Daniela C. Augustine, Sallie McFague, William Cavanaugh, and others this chapter hopes to present a way of Christian living that does not withdraw from the world, but instead sees the world as God’s and so worthy of a love that gives of oneself for the sake of the world’s flourishing.

**Theology of Hospitality and an Ethic of Responsibility**

In (mostly Western) Christianity today, hospitality is not often considered to be a means of resistance against injustice; however, a growing initiative has emerged in the hopes of

reviving this perspective (in both its practical and theoretical forms) particularly as it is a practice that not only reflects biblical hospitality (as Pohl remarks, “God’s guest list includes a disconcerting number of poor and broken people”) but it also appears as a provocative global statement of human dignity for the socially ostracized and as a movement of restoring integrity to non-anthropic creation.192 At its very core, hospitality is an affirmative acknowledgement of the other’s presence in the offer of welcoming space, time, and resources.193 When put into perspective, the extent to whom Christian hospitality is offered, in terms of the Christian’s “other,” reaches far beyond those who are considered safe or worthy as evidenced by the biblical language of “neighbor,” “stranger,” “enemy,” “foreigner,” “the needy,” etc.194 In this comprehensive light, it would be with great difficulty for the Christian to withhold invitation and welcome to any demographic (the disabled, the Muslim, the poor, etc.) entailing that the Christian hospitable response towards the globally diverse other is one of inclusive welcoming, affirmation, and self-giving.195

Any hospitable landscape entails a curtailing of oneself – a willing decentralization of self-attention in order to attend to the needs of the other – that involves both restraint and generosity (self-limiting and self-giving), but simultaneously and rewardingly makes available the conditions for relationship since hospitality is essentially the invitation to the other to share in the moments and resources of one’s own life. As such, hospitality enters the realm of Christian


193 Pohl, Making Room, 179.

194 Ibid., 31.

justice in the act of sharing life by transcending barriers and meeting needs, and thereby
becoming the conceptualized location for intentionally responsible and relational living as
members who participate in a single, interconnected, and interpersonal global context.196

It is in such terms that Daniela Augustine’s theology of hospitality directs the church
towards a vision of social transformation as divine hospitality is as much relational as it is
Vision of Social Transformation, Augustine states,

The Pentecost community, as an outcome of the socio-transformative work of the
Spirit, becomes the embodiment of God’s hospitality and self-sharing with the other
within the present (Acts 2:43-47). This divine hospitality is an all-inclusive justice.
It reunites economics with their spiritual foundations in the new Christ-like
consciousness of the believers. The consequence is a new form of economic
relationships, that is, relationships that embrace the other and provide for their need
out of one’s own resources.197

This summative statement, not only places the church within her identity as imaging the
relationally self-giving Trinity, but also describes the church’s vocational embodiment of divine
hospitality as an act of all-inclusive justice. As human persons who “consciously aim” towards
what they worshipfully love, this vision of an all-inclusive justice that dignifies divine creation
becomes the ultimate “vision of the good life” that “shapes and molds [the believer’s] being-in-
the-world.”198

196 Daniela C. Augustine, Pentecost, Hospitality, and Transfiguration: Toward a Spirit-inspired Vision of

197 Ibid., 107-108.

198 James K.A. Smith, Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation, vol. 1 of
Cultural Liturgies (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 50-51.
This divinely-inspired vision and motivation is most clearly visualized in the creation narrative’s depiction of the utopic Garden of Eden, where the garden environment hosted both God and humanity in conditions where all flourished, thereby offering humanity a brief vision of the divine’s original intention for relational justice that now finds itself seated longingly and imaginatively within each person’s being.¹⁹⁹ This vision of relational justice in the creation narrative informs a theology of hospitality by describing the very act of creation as a relational, synergistic activity of the divine for the purpose of life’s flourishing. Augustine reveals that in “the first chapter of Genesis we see God creating within the divine communal self not only a sanctuary for the possibility and flourishing of the other but also building a home for them.”²⁰⁰ Earth became the birthed space for created life that bears the imprinting of divine love as reflected in its hospitable environment, the home in which life is capable of flourishing and continuing.²⁰¹ And yet, as Genesis depicts the act of divine creating, the flourishing of this earthen home’s vast diversity of life interdependently relies upon a mutual participation in communal living, testifying to the impression that true justice is both relational and inclusive of all life, both the anthropic and non-anthropic.

Sadly, any quick assessment will reveal that the current state of the world is nowhere near this utopic illustration of a peaceful and fruitful cohabitation of the global home. It is upon this


assessment that Rabbi Jonathan Sacks conditions his ethic of responsibility, in which he claims that within the very fabric of life is an enduring call for human initiative to be God’s “partners in the work of creation.” 

For Sacks, this calling of responsibility is the result of God’s true love for all that bears the divine’s image, as genuine love by its very nature seeks not to coerce or subjugate others into reciprocated relationship. Thus, divine love necessitates freedom as a prerequisite to life’s flourishing, but also requires God’s own self-limitation in the opening of space for the loved other. Freedom as love’s prerequisite births God’s plea to humanity for responsible living, but does not force it, thereby making the tragedy of the fall narrative in Genesis 3 not so much a tragedy of lost paradise or that evil now prevails in the world, but that humanity has become apathetic towards a divinely cherished creation, neglecting this shared life’s responsibility towards a justice that seeks the inclusive flourishing of all. Thus, for Sacks, an ethic of responsibility recognizes that there cannot be true justice unless there is true life; there cannot be true life unless there is true freedom; there cannot be true freedom unless there is true love; and there cannot be true love unless there is self-sacrifice. Further still, the divine’s desire for justice is a desire for relationship with the created other, and even more so for the created other to freely desire this relationship and offer it in return. As a result, the creation

202 Sacks, To Heal a Fractured World, 3.


205 Sponheim, The Pulse of Creation, 72; Sacks, To Heal a Fractured World, 159.

206 Williams, “Incarnation,” 137.
narrative falls into the language of hospitality while also conditioning the terms upon which genuine hospitality, as a reflection of the Trinity’s, performs.207

With a hospitable foundation to justice, responsible living becomes an act directed towards restoring (re-creating or creating new) community as a means of partnership with God in global life that presumes two notable characteristics: first, it acknowledges the human need to be in a community of loving relationships in order to flourish, a principle fortified by the perichoresis of the Triune God; and second, it recognizes how intimately connected one’s own wellbeing and survival is to that of another’s in the most immediate (one’s family/ environment) and broad (the planet) sense of the word.208 Restoring community surfaces as a mode of hospitable justice with its attention to holistic care in the mediation and reconciliation between complex human beings with each other, their environments, and with the divine.209 Additionally, the church’s investment in creating intentional communities as a means of responsible living rejects an apathetic despairing of the world’s condition, allowing an active hope renew the earth into a home where God, humanity, and the nonhuman can live in mutual fellowship and wellbeing.210


At this point, if the above description of responsible living still allows an avenue for the church to exclusively invert the task of restoring community to that of only Christian ones, allow me to rectify that. With an exclusive mindset, the church pockets restored living to the benefit of her members, assuming that true community can only be found within the safe confines of the church, but this mindset also enables a xenophobia and/or paternalism toward non-Christians, especially those who are ethnically different, and results in a strategy of band-aid solutions to worldly benevolence.  

This is not to say that the church should neglect the holistic task of restoring Christians to community nor ignore the fact that a programmed church service indeed hospitably serves persons by creating space for solidarity in worship and respite from daily toils. Certainly, Christian participation in restoring community as a form of responsible living should in fact begin within her own members as the manner in which Christians relate to one another is witness to the God they worship and adore. Yet exclusivism arises when Christians begin to withdrawal from their “worldly” communities under the assumption that the true life Christ affords is intended only for the enjoyment and benefit of those inside of the church (presenting an immediate problem as there are even Christians who live oppressed by some churches’ stances towards certain social demographics).

In order to avoid this exclusivism, and with an understanding that Christians are just as much relationally interconnected as any other human being, a theology of hospitality affirms sharing life with the worldly other as a vocational calling that emulates the divine’s sharing of

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212 Smith, Desiring the Kingdom, 169.

213 C. Margaret Hall, Identity, Religion, and Values: Implications for Practitioners (Bristol, PA: Taylor & Francis, 1996), 105.
space and resources for the sake of an inclusive flourishing of all.\textsuperscript{214} Truly, it is because of divine hospitality that believers are empowered to live with an open embrace towards the other – the neighbor and the stranger – that both honors the dignity of their existence and takes responsibility for their flourishing.\textsuperscript{215}

\textbf{The Incarnation and the Eucharist}

For the Christian, this divine hospitality takes no clearer form than in the divine incarnate, whose passionate embrace of created life, for the sake of its life, liberates believers to follow and do likewise out love for both God and neighbor.\textsuperscript{216} Consistent with the creation narrative, Sallie McFague describes the incarnation as God’s “radical relationality, in intimate relationship with everything as the source, sustainer, and goal of every scrap, every quark, of creation.”\textsuperscript{217} The incarnation confirms that God is in love with the world, not with some futuristic or idealistic world, but with \textit{this} world and all life within.\textsuperscript{218} McFague writes:

\begin{quote}
[F]or Christians Jesus is the paradigm of both God with us and the world within God…The incarnation is the solution to the “two worlds problem”: the problem of how to love God and the world. There is only one world, a world that God loves. Since God loves it, we not only can but should. In fact, loving the world (not God alone), or rather, loving God through loving the world, is the Christian way (italics in original).\textsuperscript{219}
\end{quote}

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\textsuperscript{214} McFague, \textit{Life Abundant}, 21.
\textsuperscript{215} Volf, \textit{Exclusion & Embrace}, 63-64.
\textsuperscript{216} Williams, “Incarnation,” 141; Augustine, \textit{Pentecost, Hospitality, Transfiguration}, 22; Pohl, \textit{Making Room}, 30.
\textsuperscript{217} McFague, \textit{Life Abundant}, 18.
\textsuperscript{219} McFague, \textit{Life Abundant}, 13.
\end{flushright}
Similarly, Daniela Augustine notes that in the incarnation Christ plays both guest and host as creation welcomes the divine into its home when the Spirit assumes matter. She remarks, “Matter becomes a sanctuary for the Incarnated God so that He in turn may become a sanctuary for matter. For indeed, in the Incarnation matter meets the redemptive embrace of divine hospitality, as its elemental structure and content are welcomed into the inner-circle of the Trinitarian communal life through the body of the Son.”\textsuperscript{220} In this manner, Augustine notes that through Christ heaven and earth are united in their “ultimate destiny in and with God, bringing humanity within the \textit{koinonia} of the Trinity, making us ‘partakers of the divine nature’ (2 Pet. 1.4) and making possible our transfiguring into its likeness.”\textsuperscript{221} Indeed, such \textit{theosis} is the calling and purpose of all humanity.\textsuperscript{222}

Even at its surface, the incarnation directs the believer towards the other in a new way of hospitable love instead of a xenophobic fear of and response to the differences of otherness. This new way finds repetitive demonstration in the gospel narratives as Christ approaches, touches, talks, and eats with sinners, Jewish enemies, and the socially repressed. Christ’s Spirit-led mission to bring the good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, recover sight to the blind, let the oppressed go free, and proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor illustrates for the believer the divine’s passionate longing for this world’s life without exclusion (Luke 4:16-19). The Christian response to the strangeness of the other is thus not to recoil or withdraw from the world, but to extend welcome and seek its wellbeing.\textsuperscript{223} As a religion rooted in the principle of

\textsuperscript{220} Augustine, \textit{Pentecost, Hospitality, Transfiguration}, 57.

\textsuperscript{221} Ibid., 22.

\textsuperscript{222} Ibid.; See also, Volf, \textit{Exclusion & Embrace}, 127-128.

\textsuperscript{223} Volf, \textit{Exclusion & Embrace}, 128-129.
emulation (a discipleship/following after Christ), this hospitable love towards the worldly other is itself a form of incarnation as the believer’s faith becomes enfleshed into daily interactive living.\(^{224}\) In this fashion, Augustine says,

> The Christoforming work of God in the human being turns his/her face towards the other, being summoned to responsibility to provide what is lacking but needed in the other’s life so that they may truly flourish. Therefore, the divine perichoretic reality enfleshed within the human community is manifested as *philanthropia* (self-giving as love for the fellow human – emphasizing the shared sameness of humanity) and *philoxenia* (self-sharing in hospitality as love for the stranger – highlighting the unique, irreproducible otherness of each human being).\(^{225}\)

Ultimately, the commission for Christians to embody the responsibility of a hospitable love towards others is representationally rooted in the practice of the Eucharist, which Miroslav Volf describes as the divine’s “making-space-for-us-and-inviting-us-in,” enveloping recipients into God’s embrace of grace but also changing them into agents who likewise “make space for others in ourselves and invite them in – even our enemies.”\(^{226}\) William Cavanaugh further expounds on this by claiming that “instead of simply consuming the body of Christ, we are consumed by it.”\(^{227}\) He explains that in the Eucharist, “Christ is gift, giver, and recipient; we are simultaneously fed and become food for others.”\(^{228}\) Both Volf and Cavanaugh expose the Eucharist’s dual purpose of unifying the community of believers and reorienting them back


\(^{226}\) Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 129.


\(^{228}\) Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed*, 56.
outwards towards the world in response to the remembrance of Christ’s shared life. In these terms, the unifying encounter of the Eucharist initiates at the shared table, which Chris Green describes as the “communion of God and Human” that “because the Supper is Christ’s, it occasions not only believer’s communion with God but also believers’ communion with one another.”

Through the agency of the Spirit, the Eucharist serves as a reminder that it is through Christ’s shared life that believers, having been fed, are enabled to partake in the life of the Beloved – a drawing in of persons into relationship with the divine, but also with others.

Cavanaugh’s important distinction that believers not only consume the body of Christ but are also consumed by it (are fed and become food) helps remind the community of believers that they now represent Christ’s incarnational presence to the worldly other. Altogether too often, however, the sacrament is treated purely symbolically as a reminder to the believer of one’s personal fallenness and salvation in Christ without extending to the vocational implications of what it practically means to share in Christ’s life. This is what Alexander Schmemann notes in his book, The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom, where he worries that the church’s designation of the sacraments as symbols (although genuinely symbolic) has the capacity of disabling the transference of their significance into practical living as the term “symbol” denotes a representational element of reality that may or may not exist.

As the Eucharist is the sacrament of the Kingdom, Schmemann sees the importance of merging the sacrament’s symbolism and practical relevancy by regarding it as a “spiritual reality,” which allows Christian

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230 Vanier, Community and Growth, 196-197.

worship to be “symbolic because, first of all, the world itself, God’s own creation, is symbolic, is sacramental; and second of all, because it is the Church’s nature, her task in ‘this world,’ to fulfill this symbol, to realize it as the ‘most real of realities.’ We can therefore say that the symbol reveals the world, [human]kind and all creation as the “matter” of a single, all-embracing sacrament” (italics in original).\footnote{232 Schmemann \textit{The Eucharist}, 40.} Thus, when partaking in the Eucharist, as in the other sacraments, it become a special reality “in their essence as the ‘visible signs of invisible grace,’ special in their ‘efficacy’ and, finally, special as the ‘causes of grace.’”\footnote{233 Ibid., 32.} In this way, the church herself becomes a sacrament for the world: transfigured into the “body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit,” making visible an invisible grace for the purpose of the salvation and life of the world.\footnote{234 Schmemann \textit{The Eucharist}, 48; See also Megan McKenna, \textit{Rites of Justice: The Sacraments and Liturgy as Ethical Imperatives} (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 118-119.} In this, the church can take seriously McFague when she gravely remarks that “[i]f God’s presence is to be found sacramentally everywhere, it is to be found especially in those human beings who, as God’s co-workers, improve the well-being of some aspect of creation…If God is absent from the world, it is because we are.”\footnote{235 McFague, \textit{Life Abundant}, 151.}

Transfiguration into the body of Christ, being consumed even as one consumes, transforms the church into a mission that gives herself “daily to feed and heal a starved and broken world,” which in large part calls for a hospitable invitation and welcome to the starved and broken other – and by doing so, intentionally creates a community in which sharing one’s own life is sharing the Beloved’s life by taking responsibility (causing grace) for the other’s
This imitation of the divine hospitality is an extension of new life that seeks reconciliation of persons to an awareness and atmosphere of love, which in the words of Jean Vanier, depends on the church’s ability to welcome. He states, “To welcome is to make the stranger feel at home, at ease, and that means not exercising any judgment or any preconceived ideas, but rather giving space to be. Once we have made the effort of welcoming and accepting the disturbance, we discover a friend; we live in a moment of communion, a new peace; a presence of God is given” (italics in original). Yet Vanier does not describe the church’s welcome in the typical sense of ushering redeemed sinners into an isolated Christian community, but rather this welcome is a discovery of a hope within and for God’s creation that enables Christians today to love others by going out and creating communities that “will bring a solution to the troubles of our world.”

It is in this manner that the church becomes food for the world: that to welcome the other, the neighbor, the stranger is to nourish them by providing space and resources for them to be and become, to heal and to grow, to be known and to be loved – which is to make known to them that they are loveable, for so God loves them.

At the Eucharist event, justice enters into the terms of hospitality, creating the conditions for believers to seek the flourishing of others in Christ’s subtle imperative to “do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19b, NRSV). This statement of active remembrance joins

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236 Augustine, “Holiness and Economics,” 198. See also, Cavanaugh, Being Consumed, 54.

237 Vanier, Community and Growth, 266.

238 Vanier’s full quotation is: “As fears and prejudice diminish, and trust in God and others grows, the community can radiate and witness to a style and quality of life which will bring a solution to the troubles of our world. The response to war is to live like brothers and sisters. The response to injustice is to share. The response to despair is limitless trust and hope. The response to prejudice and despair is a limitless trust and hope. The response to prejudice and hatred is forgiveness” [Community and Growth, 100].

239 Ibid., 98-99; Augustine, “Holiness and Economics,” 188.
together the church’s dual purpose of unification and mission in that it draws believers together around the table of Christ, in remembrance of his life, passion, death, and resurrection, securing and unifying believers in belonging to and relationship with the divine.\textsuperscript{240} To “do this” is to partake in Christ’s hospitality – to be fed by his self-gift so that each may have new life. But to “do this” also sends believers out to do likewise, to emulate the same hospitality by feeding others. In the words of Rowan Williams, “Celebrating the Eucharist not only reminds us that we are invited to be guests; it also reminds us that we are given the freedom to invite others to be guests as well. We have experienced the hospitality of God in Christ; our lives are therefore set free to be hospitable.”\textsuperscript{241} Eucharistic living testifies to the justice desired by the divine, the kind that brings together community both around the communion table and throughout one’s neighborhood, which is, in other words, “to make our lives and our communities places of welcome for those most deeply in need of solidarity, of fellowship.”\textsuperscript{242}

**Prayer Incarnate**

As James K.A. Smith rightly contends, “We are embodied, affective creatures who are shaped and primed by material practices or liturgies that aim our hearts to certain ends, which in turn draw us to them in a way that transforms our actions by inscribing in us habits or dispositions to act in certain ways.”\textsuperscript{243} The Eucharist is one such practice that transforms the

\textsuperscript{240} Schmemann, *The Eucharist*, 137.


\textsuperscript{242} Williams, *Being Christian*, 46.

\textsuperscript{243} Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 133.
believer from inward belief to an outward expression of a hospitable justice, which as a collective practice brings unity between believers in their identity and vocation that motivates intentional living for the sake of the holistic flourishing of the world. Another such practice is prayer, which in the terms of this chapter, is the medium for a hospitable relationship between individual believers and the divine in which the believer is drawn into the life of the divine and the divine into the contextualized life of the believer.\textsuperscript{244} Prayer’s attention towards building relationship with the divine notably invites the Holy Spirit’s work of Christoformation as divine love transforms the believer into a more authentic version of human living.\textsuperscript{245} Williams describes prayer simply as “the life of Jesus coming alive in you,” – both a eucharistic statement and evidence of the work of the Spirit – that makes it “hardly surprising if [praying] is absolutely bound up with a certain way of being human which is about reconciliation, mercy, and freely extending the welcome and the love of God to others.”\textsuperscript{246} Within the simplicity of this statement, Williams presents a profound perception of prayer as the space and experience in which the reality of one’s relationship with the divine infiltrates into one’s enfleshed and specific existence – which is to say that as the life of Jesus comes alive in a believer, he/she becomes an incarnation of prayer.\textsuperscript{247}

The practice of prayer itself is a discipline that takes many forms, serving different purposes and personalities, and as a result will be limited to a brief discussion of prayer as an

\textsuperscript{244} Steven Jack Land, Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2010), 167, 169; Brueggemann, Mandate to Difference, 66.

\textsuperscript{245} Augustine, “Holiness and Economics,” 188.

\textsuperscript{246} Williams, Being Christian, 80-81.

\textsuperscript{247} Land, Pentecostal Spirituality, 163.
incarnational practice of pneumatological hospitality between the divine and persons that involves “a certain way to be human.”\textsuperscript{248} It is in the mutual meeting ground of hospitable prayer, an environment of a self-giving and sharing, that Christ’s life becomes alive within the one who prays (and thus the one who invites divine participation in one’s life) such that “out of the believer’s heart shall pour forth rivers of living water,” referring to the Spirit’s outpouring as the natural effect of the Spirit’s indwelling within the believer (John 7:38-39). This imagery of the Spirit as living water exemplifies the pneumatological quality of prayer, indicating the transformational nature of relationship with the divine and the result of inviting the Spirit into one’s material existence. The Spirit as a source of living water enriches the content of the believer’s life – who is cultivated in the affirmation and acceptance of being a child of God – and fertilizes the believer’s propensity to seek life’s growth and continuation externally to oneself. Thus, in prayer’s divine-human encounter, the Spirit transformationally enlivens believers to their own contexts but also empowers them to be the cause of life-giving transformation within society at large.\textsuperscript{249} Prayer becomes a “certain way to be human” as it inscribes the believer’s engagement with a lovingly invested Triune God into the reality of one’s embodied habits and dispositions that emerges as a eucharistic desire to integrate Christ’s shared life within all aspects of living one’s own.\textsuperscript{250}

Metaphorically speaking, prayer’s hospitality cultivates a new garden in which God and human once again walk and talk together as the Spirit makes immanent the divine’s presence to


\textsuperscript{250} Williams, “Incarnation,” 144.
the believer. Although this language is suggestive of assigning anthropomorphic qualities to God, the intention is to emphasize the availability and nearness of the divine such that prayer unveils, makes aware, and enlivens one to the divine’s presence. However, this anthropomorphic language does assist in the affirmation that the human experience of the divine is capable of transcending into one’s embodied and sensory existence.\footnote{Ibid.} Thus prayer becomes the practice of becoming more attune to the divine’s presence in one’s life as embodied persons who hear the Spirit in the quiet of one’s inner sanctum and experientially in one’s external circumstances and environment.\footnote{Richard Rohr, \textit{The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See} (New York, NY: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 2009), 25-26.} It is as much to say that a transcendently immanent God need not “speak” in order to be heard or experienced, as it is to say that human persons cannot pray in any manner that would not be “heard” by this same divine being. Experience of the divine is enhanced by the simple acknowledgement, as McFague notes, “that God is reality, the breath, the life, the power, the love beneath, above, around, and in everything.”\footnote{McFague, \textit{Life Abundant}, 10.} Whereas the human prayerful response is similarly enhanced when it borders the wisdom of Paul Evdokimov when he says, “It is not enough to say prayers; one must become, be prayer, prayer incarnate. It is not enough to have moments of praise. All of life, each act, every gesture, even the smile of the human face, must become a hymn of adoration, an offering, a prayer. One should offer not what one has, but what one is.”\footnote{Paul Evdokimov, \textit{The Sacrament of Love}, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel and Victoria Steadman (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985), 61-63. See also, Michael Plekon, \textit{Un-Common Prayer: Prayer in Everyday Experience} (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), 7-8.} By turning every moment and act into a prayer, the believer turns every moment and act into an invitation for divine participation and presence on earth, seeking the reconciling...
action of returning the earth into a home where the divine and humanity once again walk and talk together.\textsuperscript{255}

Prayer’s transition from personal to public concern evidences the Spirit’s work within the believer as one begins to love what God loves, suffer for what Christ suffers for, and to pursue what the Spirit pursues, which is the salvation and abundant life of the world.\textsuperscript{256} This transition also expresses a “certain way of being human” as persons are transfigured into eucharistic beings, having been reconciled to God and thus tasked with the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-20; Eph 2:16; Col 1:20-21).\textsuperscript{257} As Augustine notes, “the process of discerning Christ in the other, even in his/her most distressful condition (Matt 25:31-46) becomes the Christoforming power in one’s life that ultimately allows them to see God.”\textsuperscript{258} Prayer’s intentional seeking after God causes an awakening in persons to the divine’s image that imprints the whole of humanity and the rest of creation and turns one into a eucharistic being for the sake of the world.\textsuperscript{259} By discerning Christ in the other, hostility and apathy towards the unknown stranger dissipates as Christians recognize their own Savior within them. Christian living, as shaped by the practices of the Eucharist and prayer, thus becomes a dispositional expression of hospitality, which as Pohl

\begin{itemize}
  \item Sacks, \textit{Heal a Fractured World}, 4; Linette Martin, \textit{Practical Praying} (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 15-16.
  \item Land, \textit{Pentecostal Spirituality}, 159; Brueggemann, \textit{Mandate to Difference}, 66.
  \item McKenna notes that the word “reconciliation” in Greek literally means “to walk together again,” which directs one again to the Garden of Eden motif [\textit{Rites of Justice}, 128].
  \item Augustine, “Holiness and Economics,” 188.
  \item Cavanaugh, \textit{Being Consumed}, 55-56. As the “Prayer of St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)” states, “Christ has no body now but yours; no hands but yours; no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ must look out on the world. Yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which He is to bless His people” [CatholiCity, accessed 18 April 2019, \url{https://www.catholicity.com/prayer/prayer-of-saint-teresa-of-avila.html}].
\end{itemize}
claims, “is first a response of love and gratitude for God’s love and welcome to us.” By extending hospitality to the world (enveloped in Christ’s love), believers fulfill the calling to become eucharistic beings and prayer incarnated in the sharing of one’s own life for the sake of the other’s wellbeing as an inseparable expression of love and gratitude to God Therefore, as Esther de Waal suggests, Christian living as hospitable action assumes the responsibility of asking two simple questions: “Did we see Christ in them? Did they see Christ in us?”

Concluding Remarks

“A new hope is indeed being born today,” says Jean Vanier, “— a hope that [people] can today love and create community because they believe in Jesus Christ.” Although such a simple statement, it is profoundly challenging to a world characterized by “a rising sense of socio-political claustrophobia under the influx of the other” that manifests as a “social anxiety in the pathological form of xenophobia, feeling threatened and repelled by the stranger.” Loving and creating community becomes subversive to the negative repercussions of globalization in the active working towards the actualization of visibly holistic spaces of co-habitation. This hopeful vision knocks against the walls of Christian separatism and escapism in its expression of reconciliation and hospitable love that mirrors the divine hospitality towards all creation – one

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263 Vanier, Community and Growth, 62.

264 Augustine, Pentecost, Hospitality, Transfiguration, 44.
that invites others to share in life together. Instead of a withdrawal from the world, the church withdraws from fear, particularly from fear of the worldly other, which is itself a freedom born forth from being reconciled to God. Thus liberated, the church is capable of lovingly opening herself in hospitality to the stranger, the enemy, and the neighbor both as a transformational means of resistance against injustice and as an expression of an uncontainable passion for life that cannot help but seek the flourishing and future of the world. As Jürgen Moltmann concludes,

Hope is lived, and it comes alive, when we go outside of ourselves and, in joy and pain, take part in the lives of others. It becomes concrete in open community with others…In spite of all the intimidations of our lives, [God] keeps us alive and gives us courage to be. Therefore, let us impartially accept one another and hope for one another so that we mutually keep each other alive and invested with the courage to live.\textsuperscript{265}

\textsuperscript{265} Moltmann, \textit{Passion for Life}, 35.
CONCLUSION:

Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done,
as in heaven,
so in earth.
(Luke 11:2, KJV)

Earth’s crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.
(from Aurora Leigh, Elizabeth Barrett Browning)²⁶⁶

Earth’s Crammed with Heaven

Hearing the earth cry out for justice is to hear the earth’s cry for heaven – it’s a plea for holistic and relational reconciliation with the divine and all created life – for the sad truth of it is that there are many living whose experience on earth is not heavenly but quite the opposite. Exploitation of divine generosity, as it occurs in the exploitation of persons and the earth’s resources, is deeply rooted in the inability to see every common bush afire with God and every face alit with Christ’s, and yet God still is generous, still sustains life. The awakening of persons to God is, in fact, the opening of one’s eyes to the divine’s immanent presence available on earth,

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where one stands upon holy ground in awesome wonderment, and even more so in awesome awareness that the divine tremendously yet meekly desires to be in free relationship with the created other. Such is the Kingdom of God.

Perhaps one of the most harmful ideologies preventing the realization of God’s Kingdom and resulting in the perpetuation of poverty and other injustices within today’s society is that of scarcity, the mindset that privatizes consumption and limits universal freedom based on the notion that no one has enough.⁶⁷ Scarcity talons society with the underlying assumptions that there are not enough resources, opportunities, space, time, and even divine love resulting in the fragmentation of society into a caste system of hierarchal value based on possession, status, and accomplishment.⁶⁸ Consequentially, scarcity perpetuates poverty by training society’s members to live beyond their means and/or become unsatisfied with what one has (which is often reinforced by the production of cheap products); it inhibits persons from seeing the resources already available to them no matter how little; it causes people to forget that they are themselves an asset with potential, intellect, and creativity; it forces people into a standard of value based on one’s output and their usefulness; and it also ensnares many of the impoverished to an unfortunate reality of having to work low-paying or part-time jobs in order for employers and investors to maximize their profits. Ultimately, scarcity doubts the full freedom of all earth’s members by disbelieving that all may flourish and by cultivating the anxiety that prompts them

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⁶⁸ If examined closely, the causes of each of the social and environmental justice movements have reason to cite a scarcity mindset as contributing to states of oppression. Take for example racism: the exploitation of entire races for the sake of cheap labor; sexism: the prevention of women from succeeding in the workforce or politics because it will take jobs away from men and make policies unfavorable to male convenience; or environmental exploitation: the stripping of the earth’s resources to meet the demands of the market without concern for fragile ecosystems and the life dependent on the fruitfulness of that land.
to take as much as possible in order to ensure survival. Since the church claims the freedom of Christ and liberation from destructive forces, this is fundamentally the issue she must address both within herself and society if she is to represent this freedom and liberation to the world.\textsuperscript{269}

Part of the aim of this thesis has been to present a theological framework capable of overcoming the assaults of scarcity with tangibly practical implications for lasting poverty alleviation, for it is the church’s praxis that is both the criterion and criticism for Christian theology.\textsuperscript{270} Hospitality falls in line with this goal as it is emulative of the divine’s hospitality, seeking not to capitalize upon, exploit, nor restrict the other’s freedom by demanding reciprocity or conformity, but rather offering to the other welcoming affirmation and the invitation to share one’s space, resources, time, and ultimately life. Incorporating a theology of hospitality into the church’s praxis has significant applications in regards to the vocational focus of the church towards the world. First of all, a hospitable disposition disables any separatist inclinations as hospitality opens doors rather than closes them, invites participation rather than excludes, and enables compassionate response to “worldly” needs rather than become desensitized to a world fated to suffer. Such a disposition is only possible, however, in purview of divine hospitality itself, found within the very fabric of earth’s design as a home for all to flourish as well as in the invitation for mutual participation in daily moments through eucharistic living and prayer, which is to be embraced and accepted in loving communion and so free to live fully, consciously, responsibly, and open to all others. And lastly, a hospitable disposition compels the church towards benevolent action that pursues holistically relational justice, aware of the interconnected


dependency of persons to their contexts, the fragility of one’s flourishing in connection to the
ture flourishing of others, and in that loving one’s neighbor (both anthropic and non-anthropic)
comes in the form of sharing one’s own life. It is here that scarcity dissipates, abundance
manifests, and communities form in the reflection of the communal, self-giving, and vibrant
nature of the Triune God. The vocational task of the Christian may very well be best described as
the work of cramming earth with heaven, which is to make known God’s loving presence already
available on earth.

The primary aim of this thesis, however, was to condition an avenue for Christian
participation in Community Development as a means to alleviate poverty and promote social
transformation within a globalized world. As Community Development intentionally both seeks
to restore persons to dignity by empowering them to creatively move out of poverty themselves
and also to reconcile community members to each other, their environments, and to God by
uniting them under a common desire for their community’s flourishing, the ultimate purpose of
Community Development is to return neighborhoods to places of hospitality and welcome for
residents and visitors alike. The call for Christians to participate in this vocation (as community
developers or simply as neighbors) is the plea for them to become ministers of reconciliation, to
become food for the world, and to share life with those around them by embodying a concrete
form of love that positively impacts their immediate other and indirectly their global neighbors.
To do so would entail a rejection of scarcity’s grip upon one’s own life as sharing occasions
giving, which is most freely done in the recognition of one’s abundance. Communal sharing seeks not to exploit the giver, but enrich the whole, and makes it the collective’s concern when genuine need presents itself. The capacity for Christians to model this freedom of sharing and giving to the world (as a eucharistic demonstration) is something Jürgen Moltmann claims is only possible in love:

![Image of text]

This social side of freedom has revolutionary implications for the global situation characterized by xenophobia and a form of consumerism that pits one against the other, specifically when applied to the work of Community Development. For one, it respects the diversity of humanity by calling neighbors of different races, beliefs, sexes, etc. to be reconciled in relationship and share in a common purpose and living space. Secondly, it emphasizes local solutions and initiatives to empower community members with ownership over their own neighborhoods to employ creative, sustainable, and resourceful techniques to shape the space and

271 It is important to define the sense in which I am using the word “abundance.” Abundance here does not imply that persons are now free to take whatever they want, it does not entail that Christians are now entitled to be monetarily wealthy, nor does it imply that the earth is replete with resources (whether it is or is not, I do not know, but better to err with caution); rather, abundance here means a freedom from possessiveness – the satisfaction that one is perfectly sustained and so free to give without concern for one’s own lack. It is a responsibility to not take more than what one needs (particularly relevant in a consumeristic society), and a responsibility to share, create, and be fruitful in ways that honors humanity and the natural world.

character of their shared home. Essentially, these efforts are transformative and revolutionary because they foster a sense of belonging for people generally ostracized, abandoned, and stereotyped against by promoting the most genuine expression of hospitality – the sharing of life together. But it also can be revolutionary and transformative environmentally, as community members become aware of the resource available to them and how to carefully cultivate these earthly resources for sustainable use. It is not uncommon to find community gardens, playgrounds and parks, recycling efforts, and local businesses supported by local resources (including local employment) in neighborhoods where Community Development has been initiated. For Christians and whole churches to become involved in Community Development’s intentional neighboring is to open their eyes to the circumstances and people already surrounding them, paying particular attention to those in isolation, those oppressed, and those in need.

This vision of intentional neighboring and the principles of Community Development are hardly foreign concepts to Christianity, having been embraced throughout time as a reflection of Christ’s incarnational presence in and through the church for the sake of the world. As believers who embody the perichoretic love of the divine, it is not surprising that it trickles into a desire to combat injustice by restoring all creation to God in open relationship. This is a desire that has engulfed the Christian vocation from the beginnings of time, from the moment Christ said “follow me,” and from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that will persist until the Kingdom of God is fully revealed. Faith in the Triune God falls limp in the ideology that the world is lost and un-savable, aligning with what Bonhoeffer describes as a “fanatic belief in death.”273 The task of cramming heaven into earth is much the same task of revealing how it already is full of God’s

grace, love, light, and life. For a faith in Christ no longer allows a believer, as Bonhoeffer says, “to speak of the world as if it were lost, as if it were separated from God. It is nothing but unbelief to give the world…[T]here is no part of the world, no matter how lost, no matter how godless, that has not been accepted by God in Jesus Christ.”274 It thus becomes the mission of the Christian church, in the words of Henri Nouwen:

[T]o make people aware of their hidden potentialities, to unify the many different self-interests into a common concern, to remove the paralyzing influence of fatalism, and to offer a vision that makes people see their social responsibility... [Christians] can break through the chains of pessimism and collective depression and make people aware that things do not necessarily have to be the way they are. [They] can prevent people from falling back in apathy after unexpected disappointments and from using destructive escapisms instead of constructive action. [They] can help create a mentality of hope and confidence, which makes a community flexible and adaptable to new situations and always alert for new possibilities and new perspectives.275

In other words, it is the vocation of the Christian to embrace the ever-living hope of Christ that seeks the future of the world through the creation and cultivation of a global home where all life may flourish in reconciled community.


BIBLIOGRAPHY


