

2-1-2017

Roots, Routes, And Religion: Calling Playful Pilgrims To Follow The Way Of Jesus

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Recommended Citation

Morse, Pamela, "Roots, Routes, And Religion: Calling Playful Pilgrims To Follow The Way Of Jesus" (2017). *Doctor of Ministry*. 222. <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/222>

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

ROOTS, ROUTES, AND RELIGION:
CALLING PLAYFUL PILGRIMS TO FOLLOW THE WAY OF JESUS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2017

George Fox Evangelical Seminary
George Fox University
Portland, Oregon

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on February 16, 2017
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics and Future Studies.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank my advisor Josh Sweeden, and editor Colleen Butcher, for guiding me through this extraordinary process. You both make me look good! I also give great credit to the staff of the Portland Seminary of George Fox University who had faith in me from the very beginning. Most of all, I acknowledge that after spending two years learning with Len Sweet I am forever changed. I hope I never lose my passion to search semiotically for the signs of our time.

I am incredibly grateful for my Semiotics and Future Studies Cohort (SFS13) and the way in which they invited me to be part of the gang. I will always cherish our robust conversations and the way in which we all had to think just a little bit harder because we were pushing one another deeper into semiotic waters.

My heart is full of gratitude for the people of Sugarloaf Christian Ministry whom I have had the pleasure of journeying with for over twenty-six years. I continue to learn from them and be inspired by their lives. I am especially thankful for the small group who dedicated themselves to reading all my drafts and took the time to support me with their thoughtful feedback including: Ruth Smalt, Jean Keith, Robin Sykes, Dorothy Breen, Steve Arner, and Carol & David Kerr. Louise McCleery and Krystyna Tuckerman rounded out the team with their prayers. Without this faithful crew I might well have drowned in the overwhelming flood of words required for this dissertation.

I am indebted to Tim Flight who kept my computer working at peak performance. Meanwhile, my chiropractor, Dr. Jan Roberts, and his staff did their best to maintain my body in working order after long hours spent hunched over said computer. My physical

therapist, Dennis Flannigan, brought the healing power of humor to our sessions as well as exercises to keep my joints lubricated.

I want to thank my sons, Sam and Ben, and my daughter-in-law Molly, for encouraging “mom” to pursue this lifelong dream. They were great cheerleaders! I am also blessed by the inspiration of my mom, Joanne, who constantly told me I could do anything I set my mind to. Finally, I would never have accomplished this course of study without the support and insistence of my husband, Earle. He has always had more confidence in me than I’ve had in myself. Earle is the one who has lifted me up so that my head would crack the glass ceiling above me. I count myself truly blessed to be surrounded by such a love as this.

ABSTRACT

People who own and utilize their second homes frequently live in such a way that they rarely intersect with the local church in either locale, limiting opportunities to follow the Way of Jesus. An understanding of this population can help the church in a resort community to engage these second-home owners. This thesis explores two driving needs of second-home owners: the longing to escape the daily routine found in their primary home community, and the desire to significantly attach to a place of personal meaning. Play is one key way that they meet these desires. Spending rejuvenating time outdoors is another. The resort church that learns to play well outside will discover opportunities to invite these friends and neighbors to follow the Way of Jesus.

Chapter one introduces the North American context and the challenges it represents, particularly for the church in a resort setting. Chapter two explores responses to the post-Christendom context. Celtic Christianity will be investigated to highlight the challenges of contextualization. Chapter three reviews a biblical theology of place. Placemaking as a form of contextualization will be investigated. Chapter four presents a rethinking of the understanding of place in light of the relatively new phenomenon of amenity migration. Chapter 5 investigates characteristics of play as well as several theologies of play, making the case that play helps meet the need of second-home owners to escape the daily routine of life. Chapter six explores play through the lens of Christian outdoor adventure strategies, concluding with several play ideas for churches in resort areas seeking to play well with others. Chapter seven concludes with several concepts for local churches seeking to revitalize their outreach through play and outdoor adventure, providing the framework for playful pilgrims seeking to follow the Way of Jesus.

CHAPTER ONE: GROOMING THE TRAILS

Once you have suffered through the wind and cold,
along with the rainstorms, the powder days, and the sunny skies,
your veins will run Sugarloaf blue.

—Sam Morse
Sugarloafer since 1996

Vignette One¹

The Kelly family lives in upstate New York, but owns a studio condo at Sugarloaf Mountain Resort, a ski resort located in the Western Maine Mountains. There is no easy way to get from there to here. The choices involve driving through Canada (which they refuse to do because they carry fire arms as a matter of habit), riding a ferry across Lake Champlain in Vermont, or taking a long meandering route over secondary roads. The trip can take as long as seven hours. The Kellys make the trip several times a month throughout the ski season and occasionally during the off-season. Patricia is a pharmacist, Chris an engineer who attended Maine Maritime Academy, but has chosen life on land. Sugarloaf is an incredibly important place to them.

The Kellys have become increasingly involved with our local congregation, Sugarloaf Christian Ministry. During the ski season, we offer Downhill Worship services outside on the hillside, a service the Kellys find meaningful. People gather at the Downhill Worship sign on Sundays at 11AM, ready to experience something unique. The

¹ While a true story, the names of individuals have been changed in Vignette One.

group takes a ski run together, stopping four times to rest, encounter the natural beauty of the surroundings, and, through discussion, bring to life the biblical theme of the day.

One March weekend, the Kellys brought 30 of their friends and relatives to participate in Downhill Worship and celebrate the baptism of their infant daughter, Colleen. The family comes out of the Reformed tradition that baptizes infants. The Ministry, however, identifies with a Baptist tradition, so we worked together and planned a meaningful service in which the father actually performed the baptism himself—much to his delight. He gathered water from the stream outside their camp in New York state, water from our local Carrabassett River here in town, and snow from the hill, to formulate his own concoction of holy water, which he used to baptize his daughter. It was an inspiring moment, an encouragement to the church gathered, and a witness to those skiing by.

Vignette Two²

The Smiths have owned a home at Sugarloaf for over 30 years, even though they live four hours away, in a different state. Their son grew up skiing every weekend at Sugarloaf and now he also owns a second home here, for his family of six. He and his clan are actively involved in the weekend alpine racing program and he personally coaches a group of children every weekend during the winter season. The Smiths attend the Community Candlelight Christmas Eve service led by the Ministry, and the grandfather personally calls me each year to tell me they will be present and how large his donation will be that year. A couple of years ago, the elder Smith was furious when

² While a true story, the names of individuals have been changed in Vignette Two.

he discovered that our Carrabassett Valley town cemetery by-laws set different rates for residents and non-residents seeking to purchase a plot. Not only is he a taxpayer, he feels Sugarloaf is his home, despite where he claims residency. I volunteered to bring his concern to the town selectmen who were surprised at the depth of his feeling. After minimal consideration, they changed the by-laws to include taxpayers in the lower rate structure.

Vignette Three³

It's Friday afternoon, and the sun has already slipped below the horizon. It's still a couple of weeks until the Winter Solstice, when the days will start to get longer again. The snow crunches underfoot. The kids pile into the SUV as their mom, Maureen, swings by dad's Portland office to pick him up on the way out of town. The black lab is in the way-back, excited. Everyone is excited. They are getting away for the weekend. They can't wait to see their friends at Sugarloaf. The daughter, Emily, has already made plans to meet up with her girlfriend at the Super Quad at 8:30 a.m. before the lift opens. Her mom smiles: how many teenage girls wake up early on Saturday morning voluntarily? The son, Adam, is working on his homework in the backseat. He's hoping to finish it all during the drive so can enjoy a full weekend with no one bugging him about his homework.

³ Vignette Three is a compilation of individuals.

Life as a Sugarloafer

On and on they come, car after car, mile after mile. The caravan winds its way from southern Maine, New Hampshire and even Massachusetts. Up the interstate, onto the two-lane state road, and up the winding access road they travel. Every winter Friday they make the pilgrimage through snow, rain, wind or sleet. The weather is of no consequence, because they are Sugarloafers, and they are coming home.

They are also getting away from home and the demands of school and work. They are escaping, at least for the weekend, the stack of unread mail and bills on the counter. They are getting away to a place they love. Ironically, their means of pilgrimage—Subarus, Audis, old Saabs and new Land Cruisers—also identify their rootedness to Sugarloaf. A quick walk through the parking lot will reveal some creative license plates on those getaway vehicles: SLOAF, SLOAFER, LOAFER, LOAFIN, SLFMTN and SUGARLF to name a few. Some are more obscure with clues decipherable only by a fellow Sugarloafer. DBLBTR is one of the best, referring to Double Bitter, an original Sugarloaf trail that relies on natural snow. Our family's personal contributions to the collection include my son's SKIRCR, and my husband's SKIERS.

People whose primary home is also in Maine own approximately 60 percent of second homes at Sugarloaf, which is considered southern Maine's playground. Lawyers, doctors, surgeons, and even one of Maine's U.S. senators, retreat to this place. Even though they are at Sugarloaf to get away, neighbors from back home often surround them. People from Portland and Cape Elizabeth greet one another in the lift line and may meet for cocktails later, but while they are at the mountain they are first and foremost *Sugarloafers*. This designation can include employees, locals, or second-home owners. It

can also include anyone who has been to Sugarloaf once in their life. Once a Sugarloafer, always a Sugarloafer. Sugarloafer is a serious designation. The employee nametags include not only their names and hometowns but also the year in which they became a Sugarloafer. I have been a Sugarloafer since 1990. My two sons use their birthdate as reckoning.

Sugarloaf Mountain Resort is one of the largest ski areas in the Northeast United States. The first trails were cut by a group of young men fondly named the Bigelow Boys. The first trail, named Winter's Way, after local organizer Amos Winter, was completed in January 1951.⁴ There was no lift access, and it was a long hike up the mountain, since the trail covered 1,800 vertical feet. A 700-foot rope tow was installed in 1953 that serviced the bottom portion of the trail. Everything changed when a gondola was installed in 1966, allowing lift access to the top of the 4,237-foot mountain for the first time. Sugarloaf receives on average 200" of snow annually. Modern-day snowmaking allows the mountain to extend its season from Mid-November through early May. While the gondola is now history, the current lift system has a capacity to transport 21,810 passengers per hour. Today the ski resort boasts 1,240 developed, skiable acres, making Sugarloaf the largest ski area east of the Rockies.⁵ Among skiers, it has a reputation as a skiers mountain; it's challenging terrain and bitter cold temperatures weed out the fair-weather skier. Sugarloaf is Maine's winter playground.

⁴ "Sugarloaf Mountain Resort," New England Ski History, last modified April 25, 2016, accessed October 10, 2016, <http://www.newenglandskihistory.com/Maine/sugarloaf.php>.

⁵ "The Mountain," Sugarloaf Mountain Resort, last modified June 10, 2016, accessed October 10, 2016, <http://sugarloaf.com/the-mountain>.

The state of Maine's slogan is, "Life the Way it Should Be." Carrabassett Valley, Sugarloaf's hometown, also has a motto that appears on the town sign, "From Here on Life Will Never Be the Same." Maine, and Sugarloaf in particular, is offering people a lifestyle choice. As a matter of fact, those who choose to align themselves with a ski resort are making a lifestyle choice. There is an old joke that runs through the ski industry: "How do you make a million in the ski industry? Start with two million!" Even though skiing is an expensive hobby, Sugarloaf has a large and loyal following.

Sugarloaf, like many resort areas, contains several populations including local employees, local residents, newly retired residents, and day-trippers. The focus of this paper is the seasonal second-home owners, who are not well-served by traditional church methods. Sugarloaf is a unique setting, but it is also an excellent place to explore the emerging trend of amenity migration as well as the growing demographic of second-home owners in North America. This group of people presents new challenges to the church.

My husband and I have been co-pastors of Sugarloaf Christian Ministry for 26 years. The church's purpose is clear: "At Sugarloaf Christian Ministry we seek to inspire in all persons a love for Christ and an eagerness to live out their responsibilities to God and to all people—without exception. We seek to: honor God with joy and love, grow and mature in Christ, connect people together for mutual encouragement, serve the Congregation and the World Community, and bring the Good News to the Valleys and Mountains."⁶ Our focus is the self-identified Sugarloafer: those people who choose to associate themselves with Sugarloaf Mountain Resort. The church owns no building,

⁶ Constitution and By-laws of Sugarloaf Area Christian Ministry, amended February 6, 2011.

preferring to rent space in an interfaith chapel in the base area for its Sunday morning worship and pastor's office. I watch a chairlift glide by outside my office window, and I store my ski gear near my desk. My job description includes the ability to ski. People expect to see me out on the hill. Sugarloaf Christian Ministry is also the only year-round worshipping congregation in Carrabassett Valley. In contrast to many resort outreaches, it operates 52 weeks a year.

Admittedly, this is a unique setting, but it is also a tremendous opportunity to observe the emerging trend of amenity migration and the growing demographic of second-home owners in North America. These people share many characteristics with the general population, especially in their view of religion.

The North American Context

In North America, many congregations are shrinking in size and church buildings are closing their doors at an alarming rate. Despite occasional claims to the contrary, past strategies for maintaining congregational vitality are no longer working as they once did. Diana Butler Bass refers to this present time as the Great Religious Recession.⁷ Curiously, however, "spirituality" may be on the rise. In her book *Christianity after Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening*, Bass closely examines these trends, and offers several insights pertinent to this discussion.

⁷ Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity after Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2012), 20.

Bass makes a case that the old form of religious participation, articulated as a journey of “believe, behave, belong,” needs to give way to a new rubric of “belong, behave, believe.”⁸ Reflecting on this new state of affairs, Bass declares,

Church is no longer membership in an institution, but a journey toward the possibility of a relationship with people, a community, a tradition, a sacred space and of course, God. With complete and certain assurance, I confess that I no longer hold propositional truths about Christianity; rather, I experience propositional truths of being found *in God through Christ with others toward the kingdom.*⁹

Her view is reflected in the experience of many who identify themselves as spiritual but not religious. This is radical news for religious institutions relying on structure, order, and a clear chain of command. Bass challenges the status quo in a powerful way declaring that church-as-institution, must give way to church-as-community. For her, “Community is about relationships and making connections. That’s spiritual work. And it may or may not happen in a church.”¹⁰

Bass does not despair, however. She identifies this shift toward “belong, behave, believe” as The Great Reversal¹¹ and believes this reversal has, and will, play a large part in the 4th Great Awakening which is currently underway—though somewhat stalled—in the United States.¹² It is a bold statement to identify and declare a Great Awakening, but Bass is adamant. And she is not alone: much of her work in this area culls material from

⁸ Ibid., 201.

⁹ Ibid., 192.

¹⁰ Ibid., 19.

¹¹ Ibid., 204.

¹² Ibid., 241.

the late Brown University professor William McLoughlin, author of *Revivals, Awakenings and Reform*. Technically, an awakening is distinct from a revival in that it is a movement involving not only a religious revitalization but a cultural one as well. Old systems are shut down and new ones arise. Perceptions about God, self, and others undergo radical transformation.

This understanding of awakening has similarities to Phyllis Tickle's image of the great church rummage sale that she articulates in *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why*. Tickle proposes that every 500 years or so, the Church holds "a giant rummage sale, shattering the empowered structures of institutionalized Christianity,"¹³ with three results: a more vibrant form of Christianity emerges, the dominant form is re-formed into a more pure and less ossified version of itself, and the faith is spread. Tickle works to show common characteristics between each of these 500-year time periods. Of particular interest is her claim that "each time a re-formation has occurred the same central question comes forth: Where, now is the authority?"¹⁴

In our time, this question is showcased in the movement of "spiritual but not religious" articulated by Bass. "Religion" connotes an external authority while "spiritual" is often viewed as something that is found within. Authority is no longer external and hierarchical; it is internal and horizontal. The influence of the Internet and the World Wide Web cannot be underestimated here.¹⁵ Knowledge is no longer in the hands of the sacred few; it is equally accessible to all who can manage an Internet connection.

¹³ Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 17.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

Similar undertones can be found in Dan Kimball’s discovery of modern perceptions about the church. One of these perceptions, “the church is about hierarchy, power and control with a political agenda,”¹⁶ is a scathing critique arising from this shift in the location of authority.

Definitions

There are several terms that require working definitions before proceeding to a review of modern perceptions of the church.

A working definition of post-Christendom comes from Stuart Murray: *post-Christendom* can be described as that culture which emerges as the Christian faith loses coherence within a society that has been previously shaped by the Christian story.¹⁷ In such a culture, the institutions that have been created to express Christian convictions decline in influence.

It is important not to confuse the concept of post-Christian with that of post-Christendom. Here, *post-Christian* refers to the mindset of people themselves and the ways in which they view their connection to the Christian story. They may uphold the ethical teachings of Jesus but deny adherence to a formal Christian faith. In a post-Christian context, “when someone talks about Jesus, it is no longer clear whether that

¹⁵ Ibid., 53.

¹⁶ Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 1069-1070, Kindle.

¹⁷ Stuart Murray, “Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World,” (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004), quoted in Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom, Post-Constantinian, Post-Christian...Does the Label Matter?*, accessed November 1, 2014, <http://www.anabaptistnetwork.com/book/export/html/506>.

person is talking about the same person traditionally accepted as God.”¹⁸ This perspective can give rise to confusing conversations with individuals still functioning within the traditional Christian church.

Those who might be identified as *post-modern* (Christian or otherwise) share a “relativistic system of observation and thought that denies absolutes and objectivity.”¹⁹ The present conversation around “spiritual but not religious” reflects the culture moving away from absolutes—moral or otherwise—and toward subjective experience as a way of discovering truth.

Finally, David Kinnaman’s term *outsider* is used to describe those who look at Christianity from the outside in.²⁰ While not meant to be a negative descriptor, it is less than helpful coming from an author whose stated purpose includes a recognition of a growing hostility between those who identify themselves as Christians and others in our culture. Nevertheless, it will be used here to give more accurate expression to Kinnaman’s work.

Keeping these definitions in mind will bring clarity to the current perceptions of the church in America.

¹⁸ David E. Fitch and Geoff Holsclaw, *Prodigal Christianity: 10 Signposts into the Missional Frontier* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2013), 619-621, Kindle.

¹⁹ “Postmodernism,” *Theopedia*, last modified, March 29, 2016, accessed October 10, 2016, <http://www.theopedia.com/Postmodernism>.

²⁰ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity...and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2007), 249.

North American Perceptions of Christianity

One outsider from Mississippi made this blunt observation: “Christianity has become bloated with blind followers who would rather repeat slogans than actually feel true compassion and care. Christianity has become marketed and streamlined into a juggernaut of fear-mongering that has lost its own heart.”

—Kinnaman and Lyons

The centerpiece of Kinnaman’s book is based on research done primarily through the Fermi Project, though other data from various Barna studies also played a role. The information was collected primarily by telephone from 2004-2007.²¹ Gabe Lyons was twenty-eight years old when he contracted with the Barna Group for this research, done from a Millennial perspective. Together they hoped this presentation would open the eyes and ears of Christians, preparing them to deal with a future in which the surrounding culture is increasingly hostile and cynical towards the church. The study focused specifically on the opinions of two generations: Busters (born 1965-1983) and Mosaics (born 1984-2002). At the time of the study, the concerns of the sixteen to twenty-nine year-old respondents received the closest scrutiny.²²

The study uncovered several negative outsider perceptions that they organized into six categories. Christians are hypocritical: they say one thing but act entirely differently.²³ Christians are disingenuous and focused only on converting other people.²⁴ Christians are anti-homosexual and bigots: they show hatred for gays and lesbians.²⁵ Christians are sheltered: “they are boring, unintelligent, old-fashioned, and out of touch

²¹ Ibid., 250.

²² Ibid., 17.

²³ Ibid., 41.

²⁴ Ibid., 67.

²⁵ Ibid., 91.

with reality.”²⁶ Christians are too political: they are principally driven by a “political agenda and promote right-wing politics.”²⁷ Christians are judgmental: “they are prideful and quick to find fault in others.”²⁸ While some are inclined to mount a quick defense against such charges, it is important to remember that to a large extent perception is reality.

Alongside the work of Kinnaman sits the less data-driven—though not less thoughtful—work of Dan Kimball, pastor, author, and professor. His book, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations*, reviews and analyzes intentional conversations he has had with numerous twenty and thirty year-olds, delving into their impressions of both Jesus and the church. His experience with their perceptions of the church echoes Kinnaman’s findings. What is notable, however, is the observation that Kimball’s subjects were also asked about their impressions of Jesus specifically. Many of Kimball’s conversations began with discussions about Jesus. As a group, these young people had wonderful things to say about Jesus.²⁹

Maya, a 27-year-old hair-stylist, gives a representative voice to the many he spoke with:

Jesus was powerful and a good leader. People trusted him, and trust is very important. Jesus gave so many people hope. He gave people hope that there is a life after this, but more importantly, he gave people hope in this life. He told people that things don’t have to be the way they are and that they can change. Jesus was kind of like a pirate—a modern thinker who led a rebellion against

²⁶ Ibid., 121.

²⁷ Ibid., 153.

²⁸ Ibid., 181.

²⁹ Ibid., 975.

religion that was corrupt. Jesus was a Messiah. He was a good leader who came to help a lot of people. Jesus was someone who had something important to say.³⁰

Her perception of Jesus is decidedly positive. Maya's views regarding the church, however, were quite different. After a friend of hers became a Christian, she realized he not only started dressing differently and stopped listening to music they had both enjoyed, but he had become quite judgmental and repeatedly tried to dictate her behavior.³¹ Even after several years, Maya blamed the church for making her friend into a negative person; she had no interest in becoming like him.³² These are serious charges that the church in North America must face if it is to be effective in inviting people to follow the Way of Jesus.

The Maine Context

Since "every church is a local church" it is time to reflect upon these findings within the context of Sugarloaf Christian Ministry.

Maine proves to be an interesting religious demographic study. In 2010, only 27.6 percent of the total Maine population (of 1.3 million people) identified themselves as congregational adherents; meaning those who consider themselves full members of a religious congregation, plus those who self-identify as regularly attending religious services.³³ This percentage is the lowest in the nation. Sugarloaf is located in Franklin

³⁰ Kimball, 963.

³¹ Ibid., 1391.

³² Ibid., 1395.

³³ "State Membership Report," *The Association of Religion Data Archives*, last modified October 29, 2014, accessed December 1, 2014, http://www.thearda.com/rcms2010/r/s/23/rcms2010_23_state_name_2010.asp.

County, which has an even lower religious identification rate. Using the same measure, Franklin County reports only 23.6 percent of the population qualifies as congregational adherents.³⁴

For a sense of perspective, the Pew Forum reports that, of those who say religion is important in their lives, Maine ranks 43rd out of 46 states (some states are combined in the survey.) Maine, along with its neighbors Vermont/New Hampshire and occasionally Alaska, holds the dubious honor of being the least religious state in the country. Of those surveyed who confess they pray at least once a day, Maine claims last place.³⁵ In Maine, there is no longer any cultural advantage to being associated with religious institutions. The outsiders outnumber the insiders by a wide margin: post-Christendom is alive and well here.

Not surprisingly, these demographics were listed as significant factors when Bangor Theological Seminary—the only accredited seminary in Maine—decided to close its doors in 2013. According to the Rev. Robert Grove-Markwood, former president of the seminary, “The reality of decline for many of our churches has directly impacted the vitality and sustainability of our theological schools. The patterns of declining religious participation and membership, diminishing denomination loyalty, and also growing religious pluralism, are some major indicators that the religious landscape of North

³⁴ “County Membership Report,” *The Association of Religion Data Archives*, last modified October 29, 2014, accessed December 1, 2014, http://www.thearda.com/rcms2010/r/c/23/rcms2010_23007_county_name_2010.asp.

³⁵ “How Religious is Your State?” *Pew Research Center*, last modified October 28, 2014, accessed December 1, 2014, <http://www.pewforum.org/2009/12/21/how-religious-is-your-state/>.

America has radically changed.”³⁶ The former academic dean of the seminary, the Rev. Steven Lewis, noted that there is a spiritual revival on the horizon but it is not religious. He called it “humanitarian spirituality.”³⁷ More optimistically, Bass sees signs of the Fourth Great Awakening.

As a premier destination ski resort located in Western Maine, Sugarloaf attracts vacationers from Maine who bring their religious value system with them. Curious to see if the Sugarloaf community follows national trends, an informal survey was taken at an October 2014 worship service asking the same question used in a 1999 and a 2009 national study. The results are surprisingly similar. The question was, “In general, do you think of yourself as...spiritual but NOT religious, religious but NOT spiritual, religious AND spiritual or NOT spiritual and NOT religious?”

³⁶ Judy Harrison, “Got faith? Maine the least-religious state in the nation,” *Bangor Daily News*, May 18, 2012, accessed December 1, 2014, <http://bangordailynews.com/2012/05/18/religion/got-faith-maine-the-least-religious-state-in-the-nation/>.

³⁷ Ibid.

Identifier	1999 ³⁸	2009 ³⁹	October 2014 ⁴⁰
Spiritual Only	30%	30%	35%
Religious Only	54%	9%	0%
Both	6%	48%	57%
Neither	9%	9%	4%
No Opinion	1%	4%	4%

Table 1.1 Multi-year comparison of Spiritual/Religious Questionnaire

It is always possible to critique a survey: How large was the sample? What does “spiritual” mean? How was “religion” defined? Nevertheless, the trend is clear: “religious” as a singular identifier is no longer attractive to most people. On the upside, a growing percentage of the population desires to have both a spiritual and religious component in their lives. The extensive use of the term spiritual in our culture is both a critique of the church-as-usual, and a reflection of the desire to be connected to something greater than oneself.

The following email articulates this “spiritual but not religious” inclination at a local level, and is indicative of the Sugarloaf community and its relationship to church

³⁸ Frank Newport, “Americans Remain Very Religious, but not Necessarily in Conventional Ways,” *Gallup*, December 24, 1999, accessed November 30, 2013, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/3385/americans-remain-very-religious-necessarily-conventional-ways.aspx>.

³⁹ “Newsweek Poll: A Post-Christian Nation?” *Princeton Survey Research Associates International*, April 3, 2009, accessed November 16, 2014, <http://www.psrai.com/filesave/0904%20ftop%20w%20methodology.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Sugarloaf Christian Ministry Worship Service, October 12, 2014.

life. This Sugarloafer parent wrote to me after I invited her 5 year-old daughter to join us for an afterschool program sponsored by the church, held at the local recreation center.

I am not a religious person, I am spiritual and would not say I believe in the rebirth of Christ. I am influenced spiritually by many different forms of religion and/or spirituality, especially Native American. I do not believe that any one has all the answers or that I need to go to a church to find my inner peace. (I find hiking in the mountains works for me), however for most a church seems to work. It's not my place to tell people what or who to believe and I can't stand it when people come knock on my door. The commonality I take away from most religions is to live your life with kindness, treat others as you would like to be treated and keep your family safe. I feel I am a moral person and enjoy helping others. That being said, I would like to introduce my daughter to God, but do not want to pressure her to believe in any one religion.⁴¹

The dilemma for the church is crystalized here: how does the church engage its neighbors with the Good News, without pushing “religious” buttons that will cause people to disregard not only the local church, but also the truth of Jesus Christ?

Sugarloaf Christian Ministry has been offering an Easter Sunrise Service since its inception over thirty years ago. Participants load the chairlift in the dark and gather in the quiet pre-dawn to witness the sunrise and proclaim the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. This service has attracted quite a following among Sugarloafers, many of whom would describe themselves as spiritual but not religious.⁴² Several Jewish friends have begun attending, because the setting and service touch them deeply. One year, however, Sugarloaf management received a scathing letter from a visitor who was offended by the many references to Jesus at the Easter Sunrise Service. This guest did not understand that the central component of Easter is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ! Evidently, she was

⁴¹ Parent, e-mail to author, September 15, 2014.

⁴² Over 500 Sugarloafers attended the 2015 Easter Sunrise Service.

anticipating something more spiritual and less religious. Welcome to ministry in a post-Christian community.

The Second-Home Owner Lifestyle

Many Sugarloafers are second-home owners. There are many advantages to this lifestyle. Children and teens can follow athletic pursuits not often found nearer to home including hiking, skiing, golfing, kayaking, ice climbing, and hunting. If the second home is situated near a lake or ocean, opportunities for swimming, sailing, waterskiing, paddle boarding, or jet skiing increase. This is also true for adults, because adults, regardless of age, can pursue many of these athletic endeavors. An amenity lifestyle which focuses on a second home also offers the possibility of engaging the whole family together in these activities. Such an investment of time and money increases a sense of family unity and cohesion. It can also be an opportunity to remove the youth from negative influences in the home neighborhood or school system.

Of course, there are drawbacks. Getting away each weekend to the family cottage disrupts relationships with those in the primary home community. Parents are always packing, unpacking, and repacking. Travel is tiring, even if the desired outcome is rest and relaxation. I know one woman who takes photos of the interior of her refrigerator so she can remember what food is where. Running multiple households is also a strain on the family budget.

People frequenting their second homes live such that they rarely intersect with local churches in either locale. This limits opportunities for them to discover and follow

the Way of Jesus.⁴³ In many respects, the local church is irrelevant to their lifestyle. Traditional approaches do not interest them. Traditional church programming does not fit with their lifestyle schedules. They are too mobile and too transient to be reached effectively by the current structure of Sunday morning worship, Sunday evening youth group and midweek prayer or Bible Study. Furthermore, this programming is primarily didactic in its approach, and this population leans toward experiential learning, especially as it relates to the outdoors. They are lovers of nature who seek to escape the routines of daily life but also yearn to find meaningful attachment to a place they love. Most important, they are beloved by God.

The local hometown church may not even know they exist. They are away most weekends. During the week they are squeezing in their weekend responsibilities so they are free to leave. They are, by and large, people of means who may or may not be involved with the public school system, making it even more challenging for the hometown church to identify and connect with them. Increasingly, they may work from home, remotely connected to their business colleagues, so that they are less connected to their workplaces as well. They may have some notion about Jesus but it is vague, personalized, and irrelevant to daily life. It is critical that the church find, reach, and embrace this highly mobile post-Christian population.

Sociologists, real estate specialists, and leisure study experts have studied the second-homeowner population. These amenity migrants are seeking to escape from their

⁴³ For the purposes of this paper, to *follow the Way of Jesus* calls for a commitment to Jesus Christ beyond an intellectual assent to a set of beliefs about Christ. *Following* involves pilgrimage, a sense of journeying through this life. *The Way of Jesus* necessitates the call to not travel this life alone but to submit one's journey to seeking Christ's way in decision-making and life choices. To follow the Way of Jesus is about discipleship not simply reciting the sinner's prayer and then living life as one pleases.

daily routine and attach to a place that has personal meaning for them. These needs must be taken into consideration and addressed creatively by the local resort church seeking to influence this population.

The Challenges

Some may question the legitimacy of a church's outreach to this population. After all, Jesus came to bring good news to the poor (Luke 4:18). He even advised the rich young ruler to sell all his possessions and follow him. Many second-home owners are well-off financially. Churches who focus on reaching wealthy individuals are often criticized for serving the rich and ignoring the poor. Many second-home owners are well educated, working in well-paying fields where they hold positions of power and authority. They are the decision makers, the influencers in our culture. They can change the world. To ignore this population is not only perilous for the church, it is dangerous for the world.

For several years, the Maine governor was a Sugarloafer who owned a condo on the mountain. He skied regularly and could be identified by his bright pink totally out-of-date ski poles. He often attended the Ministry's outdoor Downhill Worship service where he was careful to keep a low profile. This was not always possible, since the group averages about a dozen people. Nevertheless, fellow Sugarloafers at the service respected his need for privacy, allowing him the space to be one of the gang. This same former governor is currently our U.S. Senator. Last winter he attended our Community Candlelight Christmas Eve service and the other worshippers left him alone. During the candle lighting ceremony, with Silent Night played by a single acoustic guitar, he rose to his feet with his eyes closed, oblivious to those around him still seated. He was

transported. This unique ministry provided a meaningful place for an important and influential political figure to worship God.

This dissertation will not have the time or space to address the complex issues of wealth and faith. Deeper study into the intersection of wealth, faith, and mobility would be a great compliment to this work. There is little in print on how to specifically reach out to the wealthy with the Good News of Jesus Christ. They are a distinct population with culturally specific needs. This type of research would provide needed attention to an often-overlooked group.

Although Sugarloaf Christian Ministry is situated in the midst of a northeastern ski resort, the findings presented in this dissertation can be adapted for other types of resort experiences such as golf resorts, ocean-side resorts and others. I recognize that the northeast is not necessarily reflective of other parts of the North American cultural experience, however, other parts of the U.S. mirror the northeast in experiencing larger numbers of post-Christian people within their regions. Canadian congregations have already experienced much of what is currently being experienced by churches in the northeast. It is also vital to acknowledge that Sugarloaf Christian Ministry is an American Baptist congregation, which affords us with great flexibility and local church autonomy. These factors all influence the research and findings in this paper.

Significantly, my focus is on reaching non-churched, post-Christian, North Americans with opportunities to follow the Way of Jesus. I leave it to others to address the already Christian second-home owner.

In the following chapter, I investigate several possible responses to the current religious context in North America. It is critical to examine the cultural context in which

the Gospel is to be expressed. While there is a need for contextualization, care must be taken to ensure the integrity of the message. The context of early Celtic Christianity will serve as one example of the challenges of contextualization.

CHAPTER TWO: ENGAGING CONTEXT

Introduction

Go to the people.
Live among them.
Learn from them.
Love them.
Start with what they know.
Build on what they have.
—Darrell Whiteman, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*

It is imperative for the church in North America to discover and create effective opportunities for second-home owners in resort communities to follow the Way of Jesus. Several key characteristics influence this population, including the reality of pluralism, the reality of a post-Christendom context, and the influence of wealth. The uniqueness of place must also be discussed, as attachment to place is critical for this group of people. This study will develop recommendations for how the church in a resort community can build upon a second-home owner's need for escape and attachment to place, and provide opportunities for them to connect with a faith community, and follow the Way of Jesus.

Western society, including the North American context, is characterized by increasing pluralism.¹ This chapter will articulate the weaknesses of religious pluralism as identified by Leslie Newbigin. Though inadequate, some thoughtful Christians, including Karl Rahner, suggest inclusivism as one way to seek harmony among the world's religions. An alternative approach to engaging the culture—Nicholas Healy's practical-prophetic ecclesiology—will be considered, along with a brief look at Christian

¹ Western society is Newbigin's term and is somewhat broader than the North American context focused on in this paper.

Scharen's proposal for fieldwork in theology. While aware of its limits, David Bosch presents the concept of contextualization as another way to bring the gospel to the surrounding culture.

This investigation provides background material for an extended examination of the common Celtic Church of the early middle ages. The church of this time period can serve as a model for today, because of the challenges it faced from both Pelagianism and the Roman church. An understanding of early Celtic Christianity will highlight the possibilities and limits of contextualization.

The Problem with Pluralism

Every culture and society possesses a worldview that informs its inhabitants about what is reasonable, plausible, and appropriate to believe. In his pivotal work, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Lesslie Newbigin refers to this as a plausibility structure, noting that it is most often invisible, unconscious, and assumed. Western society's current plausibility structure values pluralism.² Pluralism welcomes all lifestyles, ethnicities, religions, and cultural identities in society. The difficulty with this kind of inclusive plausibility structure arises when truth claims come into conflict. Since the Enlightenment, scientific truth claims have come to be viewed as absolute, while religious truth claims are considered subjective, relative, and personal. This unspoken rule implies that religious truth may be true for one person, but not true for everyone. Newbigin declares this to be a logical absurdity within our current plausibility structure.³

² Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989), 64, Kindle.

³ Ibid., 22.

As a result, evangelism that dares profess truth violates the sanctity of the plausibility structure and is labeled narrow-minded, perhaps even heretical, in Western society. An outcome of this dilemma is the subsequent rise of religious pluralism, which Newbigin finds problematic. “Religious pluralism ... is the belief that the differences between the religions are not a matter of truth and falsehood, but of different perceptions of the one truth; that to speak of religious beliefs as true or false is inadmissible.”⁴

In the West, a split has arisen between “facts” and “beliefs.” Facts are what is known. Facts have no inherent moral value, whereas beliefs are personally held truths that, by definition, have a moral quality. Newbigin finds such distinction an illusion.⁵ He claims that all facts are interpreted and rely on some kind of belief. For example, the advance of science itself would be inconceivable without a belief in a rational universe.⁶ As a result, religious pluralists believe that the aspiration of all religions is salvation, though it is articulated and experienced in diverse ways.⁷ Consequently, there can be no real disagreement between religions because they are ultimately concerned with belief and not truth.

For theologian Nicholas Healy, religious pluralism distorts Christianity because it requires a full reconsideration of Christology. If all religions are the same at their core, what role does Christ play? For the pluralist, Christ is not unique, but encourages the

⁴ Ibid., 14.

⁵ Ibid., 21.

⁶ Ibid., 20.

⁷ Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1015, Kindle.

world to embrace good values such as justice, mercy, and love. While Jesus does espouse these values, he is much more than a moral teacher. In *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology*, Healy declares that,

the Christian community has been given the task of proclaiming and following Jesus Christ. The church does so because it believes that Jesus is the true and good news about the world and its relation to the Father. He is the good news because God has redeemed us and all his creation through his Cross and Resurrection. He is ultimately the sole way to the Father, for it is through him and the activity of the Spirit that we may come to live in communion with the Father.⁸

For religious pluralists, Jesus Christ must take his place alongside the human heroes of other faiths. The Incarnation is then rejected as myth and the notion that God is in some way made uniquely known through Christ is dismissed. This is unacceptable to both Newbigin and Healy.

The Drawback with Inclusivism

Christians who find pluralism unacceptable often turn to inclusivism for a solution. For the inclusivist, Jesus Christ does hold a unique place in the world, but the saving work of Jesus Christ extends beyond the confines of Christianity itself. Salvation extends to include the entire world, subsuming all religions in its embrace.

Karl Rahner may be the most well-known theologian articulating this view, with his understanding of anonymous Christianity. Newbigin summarizes Rahner's position in four movements. First, Christianity is the absolute religion because it is centered in the unique work of Jesus Christ. Second, Jesus Christ appeared on earth in a particular time, therefore all religions before his earthly arrival should be considered salvific and lawful

⁸ Healy, 1127-1130.

until that time. After the gospel has been preached and heard, non-Christian religions are no longer lawful. Third, those who are faithfully following a non-Christian religion should be regarded as anonymous Christians who can be saved through faithful practice of their religion. Rahner does admit, however, that those who accept Christ have a greater chance of salvation. Finally, Christianity will not overtake other world religions, but religious pluralism will actually ensure continued interreligious struggle.⁹ Rahner's concept of anonymous Christianity has not kept a large following, but his view of non-Christian religions as conduits of salvation is widely accepted in inclusivist circles.

Healy also engages some aspects of Rahner's theology, but does not find it suitable to deal with our present ecclesiological context.¹⁰ For Rahner, the church is the "fundamental sign or sacrament"¹¹ indicating God's presence on earth. His model is rooted in the Roman Catholic understanding of sacrament, allowing for a deep distinction between the church's divine interiority and its earthly bodily nature. Rahner's is a systematic, sacramental approach, though later writing suggests he was moving toward a more realistic understanding of the visible church.¹² Rahner endeavors to offer a better relationship between the church and the world, recognizing and preparing for the day when Christianity will no longer be the dominant religion.

Rahner's view includes three fundamental principles. The first two principles—faith is required for salvation and there is no salvation outside the church—are held in

⁹ Newbigin, 174.

¹⁰ Healy, 1735.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 383.

¹² *Ibid.*, 1732.

tension with a third principle, the rule of universal salvific will as endorsed by Vatican II.¹³ For Rahner, “*all* people of goodwill are truly Christian in their heart and are therefore true members of the church,”¹⁴ even though they do not realize it. Ultimately, Healy finds Rahner’s model inadequate because the church is no longer seen as distinct and unique from the rest of culture. If everyone is secretly a Christian, then the church has little to offer the world. Why would one make a commitment to follow the Way of Jesus? Furthermore, in this model there is no need for the church to learn from other religions, something that is important for Healy. The church loses its platform to engage the world. Christianity has nothing to offer the world that it cannot get from other religions or even from secular humanism.

The Possibility of a Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology

For Healy, blueprint ecclesiologies such as pluralism and inclusivism, view life as an epic horizon where the end is already predestined: history is merely marching toward a predetermined finish. The horizon, sometimes called the metanarrative, is critically important because it forms the framework of any ecclesiology. Using an epic lens, theologians may quarrel over the minutiae, but the end is fixed, and individuals become more spectator than participant. Healy finds that such ecclesiologies rely too heavily on a bifurcated understanding of the church: the church as constituted by God in its idealized form and the church on earth comprised of fallen humanity.

¹³ Ibid., 1759.

¹⁴ Ibid., 1784-1785.

Healy frames his response as a practical-prophetic ecclesiology that engages a theodramatic approach. The end is not fixed; humanity is full of actors, each one playing a part in the unfolding drama. In a theodramatic horizon, each character matters. Healy develops his theodramatic structure from a narrow portion of the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar. von Balthasar pioneered the use of dramatic theology as a metaphor for the life of faith, and the need to be engaged as a participant, rather than a spectator, in the unfolding work of God. Engaging theology as a spectator can cause the church to become static, missing the movement of God.¹⁵ Additionally, Scripture itself is dramatic, not epic, in the sense that the story is not told from the perspective of the conclusion but unfolds as a journey. “It reveals the whole as something rather like a play authored by the Father and directed by the Spirit, the chief actor of which is the Son. The dramatic character of Christian existence ‘here’ is thus grounded in the primary drama ‘beyond,’ in the life of the immanent Trinity.”¹⁶ Because God is free to choose, the story is free to develop dramatically.

Healy’s theodramatic horizon for the Christian metanarrative provides a way to view all people within God’s grand story without co-opting their personal journeys and claiming them as anonymous or unwitting Christians.¹⁷ Healy’s ecclesiology also challenges the church to engage other religions more honestly, recognizing that other non-Christian religions speak truths that the church can learn from. In pluralism and

¹⁵ Ibid., 695.

¹⁶ Ibid., 776-778.

¹⁷ Ibid., 1921-1922.

inclusivism such humble learning is not actually necessary because all religious journeys are perceived as arriving at the same epic end.

Newbigin would agree with Healy in acknowledging the importance of humility. The church does not possess all truth. Newbigin states, however, that its source of guidance is clear—Jesus Christ. Healy acknowledges the possibility of diverse paths to salvation, which is one of the mysteries of God: “Buddhist Nirvana and Christian trinitarian salvation, for example, appear to be incompatible goals. But within a theodramatic horizon we can acknowledge that we do not know the shape of the end.”¹⁸ Healy recognizes that his approach will not please the pluralists who are often trying to make peace in the midst of religious conflict. It will also disappoint the inclusivists who would wrap all in the saving embrace of Christ. Traditional evangelicals will also be dissatisfied with Healy’s seeming willingness to concede that there may be “many mansions” in the Kingdom of Heaven. Healy is not a Universalist, however.¹⁹ He enjoins Christianity to keep its particularity while at the same time fearlessly engaging other traditions for insights into truth. Healy’s theodramatic approach does not solve the mystery of salvation but offers another way to engage the world’s religions.

Newbigin’s nuanced position will also find detractors but deserves to be quoted directly:

The position which I have outlined is exclusivist in the sense that it affirms the unique truth of the revelation in Jesus Christ, but it is not exclusivist in the sense of denying the possibility of the salvation of the non-Christian. It is inclusivist in the sense that it refuses to limit the saving grace of God to the members of the Christian Church, but it rejects the inclusivism which regards the non-Christian

¹⁸ Ibid., 2013-2014.

¹⁹ Ibid., 2015-2017.

religions as vehicles of salvation. It is pluralist in the sense of acknowledging the gracious work of God in the lives of all human beings, but it rejects a pluralism which denies the uniqueness and decisiveness of what God has done in Jesus Christ.²⁰

The challenge for the church is that it must reject the temptations of religious pluralism, inclusivism, and even exclusivism practiced by some Christian fundamentalists. Instead, it must hold sacred the mystery of Jesus Christ while humbly acknowledging the movement of God wherever it may be found.

The Need to Engage Context

For Newbigin, the gospel is first and foremost a story, the story of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ into a rebellious world. Jesus takes on the burden of guilt and shame and embraces humanity into his fellowship. The gospel centers on God's action, not humanity's reaction. Newbigin argues that the central gospel question is not, "How can I be saved?" but, "How shall God be glorified?"²¹ The first question exposes arrogance, for it presumes that one can know the mind of God. The second question turns the focus and becomes the goal of missions. Newbigin finds this question a better platform to engage the world's religions and ideologies, introducing the concept of context. Context is the interwoven aspects of life in which a local culture exists.

Should context shape the gospel? Newbigin would argue yes, and no. No, because the gospel of Jesus Christ—his life, death and resurrection—is historical truth. And yes, because the gospel is always incarnated and received within a particular culture. He is adamant, however, that the starting point for mission is not the local context but the

²⁰ Newbigin, 182-183.

²¹ Ibid., 179.

gospel. When the local context is the starting point for outreach, Newbigin finds that the gospel becomes subservient to the culture and loses its power. Contextualization certainly happens, however, as the community indwells the story. In that way, the community, not the individual, becomes the hermeneutic of the gospel. Jesus did not come to earth to write a book but to form a community.²²

Newbigin acknowledges that Christianity's plausibility structure should be grounded in the biblical story. He challenges the Christian community to indwell the biblical story and to place itself within the grand story of God. The imagination of the church should be captivated and informed by the story the Bible tells. This story is the gospel.²³

From Healy's perspective, the church in its concrete form is not a totally distinct community, but rather lives within a larger community.²⁴ Healy proposes employing ethnography, or cultural analysis, to identify the cultural forms so that the church can learn from the local environment. Similar to Newbigin's plausibility structure, Healy acknowledges that the church has its own culture. The gospel is always incarnated within a culture. Healy is quick to admit that the church is not reducible to merely a culture, nor is it an institution; both are metaphors with limitations. Nonetheless, he suggests "My proposal is thus fairly simple: it is useful for ecclesiology to regard the *in via*, concrete Body of Christ as if it were, in some significant respects, something like a culture, a culture that necessarily engages with other religious and non-religious bodies similarly

²² Ibid., 227.

²³ Ibid., 99.

²⁴ Healy, 2193.

conceived as something like cultures.”²⁵ Healy has coined the term “ecclesiological ethnography”²⁶ as a model for theological cultural analysis.

One of the advantages of this kind of approach is the willingness to engage in ongoing reflection and reassessment. By engaging with the world intentionally and humbly, the church can see how God is acting in the rest of the world and join God there. Ideally, the church would engage the world with a ‘common witness,’ though even Bosch admits that this brand of ecumenism has lost some of its momentum.²⁷

In his volume, *Fieldwork in Theology*, Christian Scharen echoes some themes present in Healy’s discourse, especially as he encourages a similar kind of engagement with the world. Scharen challenges the church to enter the mission field and discover the connection between God’s action and human reaction. For that reason, the church needs to understand the surrounding context and culture. Scharen aligns with the current missional climate as well, and its focus on seeing where God is moving and joining God there.

As with Newbigin’s plausibility structure, Scharen argues that all theology comes out of a social context: a culture. It is never created in a vacuum. Healy’s awareness of the limits of blueprint ecclesiologies and his frustration at their inability to influence concrete forms of the church is reinforced by Scharen’s claim.

Understanding context is key, and Scharen proposes that this can be done utilizing the social sciences. Healy is slightly more cautious in this regard, though he does admit

²⁵ Ibid., 2215-2216.

²⁶ Ibid., 2219.

²⁷ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 456, Kindle.

that there are benefits to be gained. Scharen proposes the need for a disciplined craft of inquiry that he calls fieldwork in theology.²⁸ The aim of fieldwork is to discover evidence of God's divine action and detect human response.

Scharen highlights that the church can learn new truth, and rediscover forgotten truth, from those outside the church and from other religions. He calls for an openness to others in a posture of love, leaning in to listen. As the church listens, hears, and understands, it may begin to participate in God's redeeming and healing work. To aid the church in this approach, Scharen concludes his thoughts with an analysis of the work of Loïc Wacquant, a student of the French philosopher and social scientist, Pierre Bourdieu. Scharen is intrigued by what Wacquant calls a carnal sociological approach to fieldwork. Wacquant's method was to "flip the standard position in fieldwork of participant observation so that it becomes observant participation."²⁹ Social researchers are continually warned not to "go native" during their research. Missionaries are warned as well. Wacquant modifies this caution, warning would-be explorers to "go native armed."³⁰ His goal is to immerse himself as fully as possible within his field of study while retaining the ability to find his way out. Wacquant is seeking something even deeper than "insider knowledge," he is hoping to inhabit the culture he is researching.³¹

This kind of exploration requires the social researcher or missionary to observe and acknowledge suffering, because such investigation will bring them closer to those

²⁸ Christian Scharen, *Fieldwork in Theology (The Church and Postmodern Culture): Exploring the Social Context of God's Work in the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 217-221, Kindle.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1476.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1481.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 1486.

who are struggling at the margins. Wacquant desires to make visible those who are invisible in modern society. Jesus is the epitome of immersion. Incarnation took him to the margins as well. Newbigin encourages Christians to indwell the biblical story so that it becomes their story, as they live within the world. Scharen speaks of carnal sociology to emphasize his call to embodied theology.³²

The Challenges of Contextualization

Missiologist David Bosch voices some reservations about contextualization, the process by which the gospel is interpreted in a specific culture. In his foundational work, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Bosch declares that all theology is influenced by context. There is no purely objective theology.³³ Even Paul Ricoeur, perhaps the leading linguistic scholar of our time, argues that “every text is an interpreted text.”³⁴

One danger with taking contextualization too far is a tendency to break free from the past, denying continuity with the history of ecclesiology. At the same time, however, traditional theologians fail to recognize the effect of contextualization on their own thoughts. Modern contextual theologians are reluctant to formulate neat and orderly systematic theologies because context continually changes. Traditional Western theologians are sometimes frustrated with their compatriots who do not value systematic theology as they do, failing to recognize that even their own theologies are contextually

³² Ibid., 1569.

³³ Bosch, 414.

³⁴ Ibid., 415.

constructed. As Bosch rightly notes, “Contextualism thus means universalizing one's own theological position, making it applicable to everybody and demanding that others submit to it. If Western theology has not been immune to this tendency, neither are Third-World contextual theologies. A new imperialism in theology then simply replaces the old.”³⁵

Bosch calls on all theologians to be respectful of one another. Humility must be the valued virtue; without it, all dialogue becomes a power struggle. For Bosch, the most valuable contextual theologies manage to balance belief, practice, and holy awe.³⁶

Bosch identifies inculturation as one model for contextualizing the gospel. Inculturation recognizes multiple, diverse cultures, and acknowledges the necessity of forming theology to respond to each culture independently.³⁷ Inculturation requires cooperation between the Holy Spirit and the local community as theology is tested and developed. This is not theology imposed from outside. The emphasis is on the local situation as seen by the locals, not on the priorities of outsiders who arrive to ‘help.’ It does have a local impact, however, for it is clearly incarnational in approach. Bosch reflects, “it is not so much a case of the church being expanded, but of the church being born anew in each new context and culture.”³⁸ There are limits with inculturation. It is not a perfect model, because two principles remain in constant tension: there is the indigenizing principle, “the gospel is at home in every culture and every culture is a home

³⁵ Ibid., 420.

³⁶ Ibid., 423.

³⁷ Ibid., 445.

³⁸ Ibid.

with the gospel,³⁹ which is constrained by the pilgrim principle that warns us that we will often feel in conflict with the surrounding culture.

Inculturation makes clear that there are many Christian theologies, and they are always undergoing a process of contextualization. Bosch highlights, “This insight has important consequences. We are beginning to realize that all theologies, including those in the West, need one another; they influence, challenge, enrich, and invigorate each other—not least so that Western theologies may be liberated from the “Babylonian captivity” of many centuries.”⁴⁰ Such inculturation can guard against an isolation that leads to erroneous belief.

Bosch stretches his audience by suggesting that inreligionization could be a next step in reaching Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist believers—groups previously resistant to the gospel. For instance, the world recognizes Chinese Buddhism, Thai Buddhism, and Japanese Buddhism.⁴¹ They all grew from the same seed but they are not the same. Is there room in current theological thought for Chinese Christianity, Saudi Christianity, and Nepalese Christianity? How far are we willing to follow contextualization?

The Celtic Context

This chapter has explored how key voices have responded to the challenges facing the North American church in a time of increasing pluralism. A careful use of

³⁹ Ibid., 448.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 449.

⁴¹ Ibid., 471.

contextualization can assist the church to meet this challenge. Reaching back to study early Celtic Christianity can also help the church move forward.

The life of Saint Patrick is an historic example of Wacquant's carnal sociology, and a good starting point to analyze the contextualization of the common Celtic Church. In the preface to the 10th anniversary edition of his book, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West...Again*, George Hunter identifies our current postmodern, secular people group as 'neobarbarians' not dissimilar to the early Celts, and he challenges the church to adapt principles from early Celtic evangelism to reach them.⁴² Hunter postulates that since its arrival in North America, the church has approached evangelism in a way that is Roman and Western. He believes that this is no longer the most effective way to invite people to follow the Way of Jesus. His argument has flaws, but invites good discussion.

Patrick was born in Britain around 390 CE, but at sixteen was captured and enslaved in Ireland where the Christian faith of his infancy was rekindled. Six years later he escaped, eventually returned to England, and studied for the priesthood, learning a basic theology that was not dominated by the theology of Augustine.⁴³ He departed for Ireland around 432 bringing with him his understanding of Celtic culture, his love for the Celtic people and his passion for Jesus Christ.

Even though Patrick is often credited with bringing Christianity to Ireland, the Christian faith had been known and practiced there for some time. The Roman church

⁴² George C. Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism, 10th Anniversary Edition: How Christianity Can Reach the West...Again* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), preface, Kindle.

⁴³ Ibid., 3.

influenced Patrick, who formed monastic communities after the pattern of dioceses, with presiding bishops rather than the form of monasteries with autocratic abbots.⁴⁴ Monastic communities proved integral to the development of Christianity in this region. The influence of Pelagius on Patrick's theology is a matter of debate and will be investigated. It is clear, however, that Patrick had a deep understanding of the culture he was trying to reach.

Patrick employed his insider knowledge of the Celts to share the love of Christ as he embodied Christ's love. Hunter identifies several key elements of Celtic culture which Patrick, and later evangelists, used to their advantage in sharing the gospel including: recognition of the immanency of the divine, acceptance of paradox, admiration of heroes, a fondness for oral tradition and learning, and an affection for the natural world.⁴⁵ While Christianity had reached the southern part of Ireland and Britain, it was the northern section where Patrick focused his work. This relatively unreached region offered Patrick an open hearing.⁴⁶

At the time of Patrick's death around 461 CE, the Irish church reflected much of the Roman form. Towards the end of the fifth century, however, political conditions on the continent deteriorated isolating the Celtic regions from the Roman church for some time, allowing the legacy of Patrick's sensitivity to culture to continue.

What is meant by the term Celtic Christianity can vary between authors. Before proceeding, then, it is important to define how Celtic Christianity will be utilized here.

⁴⁴ John Finney, *Recovering the Past: Celtic and Roman Mission* (London, UK: Darton Longman & Todd, 2011), 27-28.

⁴⁵ Hunter, 7-8.

⁴⁶ Finney, 28.

Michael W. Herren and Shirley Ann Brown in their scholarly analysis, *Christ in Celtic Christianity: Britain and Ireland From the Fifth to the Tenth Century*, employ the term Celtic Christianity as a descriptor referring to concepts held in common by Christians at that time across the region of Ireland and Britain. Herren lists such features as “...the natural goodness of human nature, the possibility of a sinless life, the denial of transmitted original sin, categorical denial of predestination, a marked tendency to discount the miraculous, and the reliance on the scriptures as the sole source of religious authority.”⁴⁷ It is important to note that this list includes the central tenets of Pelagianism.

The British and Irish did not consciously or intentionally express a unified identity as Celts. The Roman church, however, did tend to view them as a group with a collective identity.⁴⁸ There was no central church authority in the region at the time but there were common features, such as a recognition of the authority of certain monastic figures, a common literary culture, a shared view of the supremacy of Scripture over every other authority, and a very limited recognition of other theological writings. Herron and Brown add the descriptor ‘common’ to Celtic Christianity to communicate the sense of some shared theologies and practices. It is a small-c intentionally, to dispel any notion that there existed a formal institutional connection between all religious bodies in the Celtic region.⁴⁹ They also exhibited a mutual and strident suspicion of outsiders, especially if they were from Rome. Herren explains, “The Celtic regions, largely isolated from continental religious trends for 150 years, developed a regional religious culture that

⁴⁷ Michael W. Herren and Shirley Ann Brown, *Christ in Celtic Christianity: Britain and Ireland from the Fifth to the Tenth Century* (Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2012), 5.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

was, in some respects, archaic, but in others, innovative. The innovative character of Celtic Christianity was defined by its internal struggle with Pelagianism; the resolution of this struggle produced the common Celtic Church.”⁵⁰ Described as a time of “relative harmony in theology and practice in Britain and Ireland,”⁵¹ the common Celtic Church held sway from approximately 450-630 CE, until significant contact with the Roman church resumed.⁵² Religiously, Northern Ireland, Southern Ireland, and Britain became increasingly disjointed starting in 630 CE until around 750 CE as the Roman church cemented its authority over the region.⁵³

Additionally, scholars who investigate the Celts must confront Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. Written late in the seventh century, Bede’s work is well regarded. He offers the most comprehensive history of this time period. It is clear, however, that he was thoroughly committed to the superiority of Roman ways. His overall view of the Celts is negative, although he is generous towards the Celts prior to the arrival of Rome. After the council of Whitby in 664 CE, any Celt who refused to acknowledge Rome was condemned, and would be punished accordingly. Bede’s primary concern is for the unity of the church and he is more concerned with heresy within the church than the influence of paganism in the surrounding culture.⁵⁴ Curiously, Bede

⁵⁰ Ibid., 5.

⁵¹ Ibid., 3.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Finney, 16-20.

never mentions Patrick.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, Bede gives rare insight into the common Celtic Church.

Pelagius, Patrick and Celtic Christianity

As previously stated, the influence of Pelagius on Patrick's theology is a matter of debate. It is clear, however, that any discussion of the common Celtic Church must address the influence of Pelagius.

Pelagius, born in Celtic Britain in approximately 350 CE, promoted a theology that clashed with his contemporary, Augustine, while both were in Rome during the 380s. Pelagius recognized only divine law, as revealed in Scripture, as authoritative. A literalist, Pelagius believed that God's law was clear and required no interpretation.⁵⁶ He taught a straightforward gospel: for Christians to be saved they must overcome the temptation to sin and be determined to follow the teachings of Jesus.⁵⁷ David Bosch explains Pelagianism succinctly, "Humanity did not need redemption, only inspiration. This meant that Pelagius did not regard Christ as Savior who died for the sins of humankind, but as master and model whom we are called to emulate."⁵⁸ The possibility of not sinning was central to Pelagianism and a clear rejection of Augustine's developing view of sin. Augustine's theology of original sin became even more strict as he sought to refute Pelagius' view. For Augustine, sin had so corrupted humanity that people were no

⁵⁵ Herren and Brown, 2.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁷ James Boyce, *Born Bad: Original Sin and the Making of the Western World* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2015), 14, Kindle.

⁵⁸ Bosch, 204.

longer free to will what God desires. Only the grace of God could move the hand of God from wrath.

In his book, *Recovering the Past: Celtic and Roman Mission*, Anglican Bishop John Finney insists that Pelagius was alarmed by Augustine's obsession with original sin and how it led to a misleading view of God's grace. This unhealthy combination promoted a deterministic understanding of Christianity that left no room for free will, human response, or personal responsibility.⁵⁹ This issue of the balance of human free will and the grace of God are still being discussed to this day.

It is thought that Pelagianism may have entered Britain by the teaching of Agricola in 420 CE, and not by Pelagius himself, who may not have ever returned to the region after his sojourn to Rome.⁶⁰ Herren is adamant that the heart of common Celtic Church theology in the sixth century, and for some time afterward, was a composite of Pelagian and semi-Pelagian views. He also maintains that there is no evidence of any adherents to Augustinian theology in the British Isles before the middle of the seventh century, and then only in southern Ireland.⁶¹

While it is clear that Pelagius' teaching affected the Celtic Church, Hunter minimizes the influence of Pelagius on other parts of the Celtic church, including Patrick himself.⁶² Herren also makes a point of articulating where Patrick diverged from Pelagius. For example, Patrick was a proponent of monasticism, especially as it promoted

⁵⁹ Finney, 121.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 122.

⁶¹ Herren and Brown, 7-9.

⁶² Hunter, 143.

virginity for young women. Pelagius was indifferent on the need for monastic communities, even though his rigorous asceticism would have been better supported by the monastic life.⁶³ Pelagius did not oppose the virginal life but he was far more concerned with the virtue of poverty. Some argue that Pelagius' emphasis on rejecting worldly goods was more 'heretical' than his dismissal of grace.⁶⁴ Patrick did not harbor the same intensity toward material wealth. For example, Patrick utilized money inherited from his father's estate to further his mission. Patrick also placed a great deal of emphasis on grace. In Patrick's two surviving writings he clearly stresses that he is a willing recipient of God's grace, taking no credit for his work. He also never mentions Pelagius by name.⁶⁵ Finney, Hunter, and Herren all agree that Patrick himself was not a Pelagian, though they disagree on the overall impact of Pelagianism on the common Celtic Church. After careful study, Herren and Brown make this conclusion:

Pelagianism may have dominated this Church for only a short time, but its ideology persisted, in some form, beyond the dissolution of the common Celtic Church in the early part of the seventh century. Its adherents taught the natural goodness of man, that a sinless life was possible not only for the Jewish patriarchs but for gentiles as well, that sin was not transmitted through the blood-line, that grace was not necessary for salvation, that God predestined no one, that all men could be saved if they believed, that salvation was achieved through perfect obedience to the law, and that obedience to the law was fostered by asceticism.⁶⁶

Herren sees the persistence of Pelagian thought even after the disbanding of the common Celtic Church, and claims this theology was never fully extinguished by Rome.

⁶³ Herren and Brown, 13.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 24.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 82.

⁶⁶ Herren and Brown, 280.

Finney is not willing to paint the common Celtic Church with the wide brush of Pelagianism. He argues, “It was not that Britain took Pelagius to its heart; rather that it did not take Augustine of Hippo into its thinking.”⁶⁷ Augustine was fascinated with the thoughts in his head and the struggle between free will and the grace of God. For the Celts, faith was shown more by prayer and ascetism and less by an introspective clash between faith and doubt.

Herren does recognize, however, that several of these Pelagian notions were tempered early on, discarding some of the more radical ideas and introducing several key Roman beliefs. For instance, the Roman practice of repeatable penance replaced the Pelagian idea that sins committed after baptism could not be forgiven.⁶⁸ Despite Patrick’s witness, the Celtic church remained firm, however, in its restricted view of grace. God’s grace is limited to baptism and the example of Jesus. No other grace is available because God treats all people the same way.⁶⁹

In spite of the early influence of Pelagius, Hunter declares that the early Celts did not articulate a systematic theology of human nature. They did, however, focus on how human nature had been imprinted with the nature of God. Human nature and creation itself were both understood to be infected—but not destroyed—by sin. Hunter is uncomfortable with Celtic Christianity’s optimistic view of human nature. He finds Augustine’s position of a corrupted human nature to better account for the depravity witnessed in the world today. Nevertheless, Hunter admits that especially in this day and

⁶⁷ Finney, 123.

⁶⁸ Herren and Brown, 279.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 280.

age, it is more effective to begin the conversation with a recognition of our goodness rather than our depravity.⁷⁰ Hunter astutely observes:

This difference between Roman and Celtic Christianity is very important for evangelization because the two views lead to quite contrasting understandings of what is essentially involved in salvation. For Augustine, Jesus Christ saves us by rescuing us from sin and the consequences of the Fall. For the Celtic apostles, Jesus Christ comes to restore our humanity and to complete his good creation.⁷¹

Despite his concerns, Hunter continues to believe that the Celtic approach to evangelism holds great promise for the church today.

Some theologians are revisiting this ancient debate and perhaps clearing the way for an alternative approach. Brian McLaren reminds us there have always been other voices:

I believe that however predominant this [Augustinian] narrative has been in Western Christian history for seventeen hundred years, there have always been minority reports—among the desert fathers and mothers, the Celts, the Franciscans, the Anabaptists, the Catholic and Protestant mystics, not to mention the other main wing of the faith known as Eastern Orthodoxy. These persistent voices encourage us that the future of the Christian tradition can be different from—and better than—it's Western, Greco-Romanized past.⁷²

There is historical precedence for expanding theology beyond Augustinian thought. It is time to re-evaluate our dependence on the Augustinian model. Currently, it is common for many North American churches to focus on the total depravity of humankind as its starting point for evangelism. Many people raised in a post-Christendom context find this unacceptable and reject any approach that first demands recognition of original sin.

⁷⁰ Hunter, 86.

⁷¹ Ibid., 85.

⁷² Brian D. McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions That Are Transforming the Faith*, (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), 263-264, Kindle.

Hunter points out another problem with current outreach methods. He claims that many North American churches practice an unconscious prejudice, not unlike the early Roman church that considered the Celts, who were not like them, too barbaric to be evangelized.⁷³ He proclaims, “No major denomination in the United States regards apostolic ministry to card-carrying, secular, pre-Christian, outsiders as its priority or even as normal ministry.”⁷⁴ Hunter criticizes those who focus their efforts on literate English speaking people, failing to see the diversity all around them.⁷⁵ He claims that such churches also expect non-church people to act like ‘good’ church people.⁷⁶ The church would never admit to thinking of the non-churched as ‘barbarians’, but the church does seem to want them to become civilized before reaching out to them in a meaningful way. In a strange twist, the current North American church also has difficulty reaching out to the wealthy and highly educated for some of the same reasons.

In contrast, the monastic tradition within the common Celtic Church was known for its willingness to engage the local culture. The local monastery was the primary expression of the church, often situated in the center of village life. An exploration of the monastic contribution to contextualization is now in order.

⁷³ Hunter, 12.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 13.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 91.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

The Role of Monasticism

The roots of Christian monasticism germinated from the practices of solitary hermits living far from civilization, who desired a pure pursuit of God. Earliest evidence for such ‘desert fathers’ is found in Egypt. Even hermits have some social needs, however, and some began to gather together to seek God alone–yet together. These loose associations eventually led to the development of organized communities.⁷⁷ As hermits began to pray and worship together, a need for a common language and practice became apparent. This recognition led to the writing and subsequent replication of manuscripts and the eventual preservation of libraries that would prove critically important for the times ahead. Monasticism is often credited with preserving Christianity through the ensuing middle ages. Bosch reflects, “We may perhaps even say that, humanly speaking, it was because of monasticism that so much authentic Christianity evolved in the course of Europe's ‘dark ages’ and beyond.”⁷⁸

During the time of invasions, plague, and peril, monasteries became havens of order, learning, and preservation of culture across the continent and throughout the Celtic region. The monks lived an admirable lifestyle: poor but hardworking, humble yet literate. Benedictine monasteries of the Roman church were not intentionally missional in nature but their conduct and community became quite attractive to a society searching for harmony and order. Their moral activity and self-discipline was inspiring. Their patience

⁷⁷ Finney, 51.

⁷⁸ Bosch, 219.

and willingness to take the long view projected an atmosphere of peace and contentment.⁷⁹

Contrary to later approaches, Patrick himself sought to establish a diocesan structure for the Irish church reminiscent of the Roman model. In a diocese, local parish churches are organized geographically and supervised by a bishop who is appointed by the church hierarchy. It did not take long, however, for monasteries to replace dioceses as the primary organization for worship, prayer and learning. They also become the starting point for evangelism.⁸⁰

Celtic monasteries were not organized like their Benedictine counterparts. The Celtic abbot ruled autocratically over the community, even over the residing bishop who was primarily responsible for evangelism. The abbot also chose their own successor, unlike the Benedictines who called for the abbot to listen to those in his care and allow them to choose the abbot's replacement. All too often, abbots in the Celtic region came from royal heritage (especially the abbesses), which often led to heavy-handed rule. The Celtic form worked well in areas of rapid change but was not as effective in more settled regions.

Perhaps it was this autocratic approach that led to the emergence of a certain subgroup of monks known as the *peregrinati*.⁸¹ These 'wanderers' were peculiar to Celtic monasticism. Bosch contends that these wanderers primarily set out in search of their own personal salvation and that mission was an "unplanned appendage to their penitential

⁷⁹ Ibid., 222.

⁸⁰ Finney, 28.

⁸¹ Ibid., 57.

roaming.”⁸² Finney counters that many clearly left their homes with evangelism in mind, for the Celts saw movement as essential to the gospel.⁸³ Admittedly, some wanderers may have been avoiding their abbots or the work of the spring planting season. They often traveled in small groups and settled from time-to-time in various locations. When they did, a new functional monastic community often developed. When the new monastery became settled, another small group of monks invariably petitioned the abbot for permission to go wandering. The process would begin again. Finney observes, “The Celts did not church-plant; they monastery-planted.”⁸⁴

The freedom of movement made for an organic structure that worked well during times of great change. However, it was not as effective in establishing settled communities over long periods of time. Inevitably, Celtic and Benedictine monasticism clashed at a philosophical and practical level. While the Benedictine approach was less evangelistic, the structure of the Benedictine Rule proved more enduring.⁸⁵

Celtic monasteries were more flexible than those established under the Benedictine Rule, for they contained hermits, semi-hermits, priests, deacons and lay monks with wives and children. They were bustling places; the hermits often had to head out for the wild places to find quiet and solitude. Virginitly and abstinence were key values. Sexual contact for lay members was limited to procreation during prescribed

⁸² Bosch, 222-224.

⁸³ Finney, 66.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 28.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 70.

times of the year. Still, “Irish evidence from the sixth to the ninth century shows that the monastic life was the measuring rod by which every other kind of life was judged.”⁸⁶

Celtic monastic communities were distinguished by their concern with what Hunter calls the “middle level” of life—a realm he claims is still largely ignored by Western Christianity.⁸⁷ The top tier is the transcendent realm where God, prayer, and mystery reside. The bottom level is the empirical world of toil and labor. The middle is where both realms rub up against each other and cause questions about the why’s and how’s and what-ifs of life. The middle plane is especially concerned with the near future and the anxiety such speculation causes. Hunter claims that the Benedictine approach tended to focus on the transcendent, ignoring this middle level that was of great concern to everyday people. This engagement illustrates the effectiveness of contextualization within the common Celtic Church.

As contact between the Celtic and continental Roman church increased, so did the pressure to conform. Benedictine Rule demanded prayer at set times and hours while the Celtic communities emphasized reflective prayer while working. The imposition of keeping divine hours proved quite frustrating to the Celtic people. Roman bishops wanted Roman culture to take hold in all the churches of the known world, while Celtic missionaries were more invested in adapting to the local culture. Unfortunately, hundreds of years later, the Protestant Reformation would largely continue the Roman paradigm of colonialism.

⁸⁶ Herren and Brown, 38.

⁸⁷ Hunter, 19.

Columba and his disciples are a useful example of contextualization. Columba was an Irish abbot and missionary credited with bringing Christianity to present-day Scotland. Upon his arrival at Iona in 563 CE, Columba and his fellow monks built their monastery atop a pagan temple, hoping that the local community would continue to seek out that holy place and encounter the One True God.⁸⁸ They also began their outreach by approaching nearby royal households. They were not always successful, but such introductions often afforded them a measure of toleration by the local rulers. Iona became the central hub for reaching the Picts of Scotland.⁸⁹ Adapting what they could, and confronting what they could not, Columba and his disciples changed the face of Scotland forever.

Finney ponders the effectiveness of the Celtic and Benedictine models: “The Roman pattern of parishes and dioceses...may well be the most suitable for settled communities and a commonly accepted faith. The question, which seventh-century evangelists faced, and which the Church today faces, is whether it is an appropriate organization for a non-Christian or semi-Christian situation.”⁹⁰ Finney raises an astute question for the North American church as it responds to the current post-Christendom context.

Recognizing the Divine

Suspicious of outsiders, the Celts keenly observed the conduct and character of those they encountered. Patrick, and those who followed him, were aware of this concern

⁸⁸ Finney, 29.

⁸⁹ Hunter, 25.

⁹⁰ Finney, 31-32.

and responded accordingly. Patrick also understood the passionate nature of the Celtic people. Hunter expands on Aristotelian thought to explain Patrick's approach. According to Hunter, Aristotle observed that people need an authentic sign before believing something told to them by another. A credible communicator must possess three necessary qualities for persuasive communication: intelligence, character, and goodwill.⁹¹ Facts and reason alone are not enough to move the human heart; the listener must experience the emotion behind the message for it to take root in the soul.⁹² Hunter believes that Patrick's effectiveness was due in large part to an innate understanding of these principles.⁹³ The Celtic people, especially the Irish, were renowned for their passion. This emotional intensity was actually one of the reasons that the Roman church considered them barbarians.⁹⁴

Patrick leveraged this emotional intensity to increase the impact of Jesus' story. First, by engaging Celtic passion he stimulated their interest. Also, until the arrival of Patrick and his followers, the Celts had followed indifferent and hard-to-please gods. The missionaries were able to persuade them that this new Christian God cared about their feelings. Third, they were able to quell the terror engendered by these fickle, yet powerful, gods. Finally, they helped the Celts express their feelings and passions in constructive ways that fostered faith. Ultimately this approach allowed the Celts to

⁹¹ Hunter, 49.

⁹² Ibid., 63.

⁹³ Ibid., 47.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 63.

experience the immanency of a loving God. Hunter believes that engaging the passion of the Celts was a key to their evangelism.⁹⁵

There is no evidence of direct communication between the common Celtic Church and the Eastern Church during this time, yet they did possess some common characteristics, including a skeptical attitude toward Augustinian theology and an emphasis on heartfelt experiences of faith. Finney asserts that the Celts' sincere expression of faith took precedence over a systematic study of theology. It was their experience of the three persons of the Trinity that caused the doctrine of the Trinity to be real to them. Their experience of the beauty and power of nature led them to understand God as Creator over all. Despite wars, they continued to believe in the goodness of human nature through the experience of kindhearted neighbors. It was not so much that the Celts held a different theology, but they approached it more personally and experientially.⁹⁶

Author and professor Leonard Sweet tells a personal story to illustrate the value of this approach. As the story goes, Sweet's two children arrived home from school after a day studying birds. His daughter reported that a guest teacher had come in that day, a biology professor from a nearby university. They watched while the teacher dissected a bird in a pan coated in paraffin. Evidently the bird was splayed open and its sides pinned to the wax for better viewing of its internal organs. Sweet rightly notes, "You know you

⁹⁵ Ibid., 64.

⁹⁶ Finney, 118.

can't dissect anything without killing it, right?"⁹⁷ His son also studied birds that day. A conservationist from the Audubon Society took the class out into the field behind the school, and they observed birds in their natural habitats, watching them glide across the sky and listening for their call. Sweet reflects that both his children did learn about birds that day, but only one bird was alive. The other was dead. So it is with the study of God. Christians appreciate objective truth. When the subjective becomes objectified, however, it is easy to think we also control it.⁹⁸ Beware the theology that kills the bird in order to study it. The Celts would have been far more interested in the bird in the bush than the bird in the pan.

The Celts experienced reality as complicated and enigmatic. Like the millennials of today, the Celts were comfortable with the mystery inherent in paradox. They were not as susceptible to dualism or the need to place things in binary categories. Jesus' death and resurrection was a glorious paradox intriguing to the Celts.

They naturally gravitated toward such concepts as the Trinity, for triads played an important role in Celtic imagination. The Trinity became the central doctrine of Celtic Christianity as symbolized in the Celtic knot. Finney makes clear, "In place of the confused multitude of gods, they spoke of the communal unity of the Trinity, the Alone who is not alone, the social individual."⁹⁹ The Trinity was in evidence everywhere, from

⁹⁷ Leonard I. Sweet, "The Untold Story of the Road to Emmaus," *Worship Leader Magazine* 24, no.5 (September/October 2015): 14.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Finney, 126.

the shamrock in the field to the three joints of the finger. Even the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus formed a trilogy in the Celtic imagination.¹⁰⁰

Admiration of Heroes and Fondness for Oral Tradition

The Celts were storytellers who loved their heroes. Patrick and his followers were quick to capitalize on Celtic admiration of heroes by contextualizing the biblical story. The Bible included a treasure trove of new heroes. The Irish Celts were less interested in the written word, preferring the tradition of oral storytelling. Bards and poets were held in high esteem, for they carried the history of the people within them. It is important to note that at that time, most Irish did not read or write. In describing this love for heroes, Hunter is quick to caution that the purpose of telling the biblical stories was not simply for others to admire the heroes, but to see in the stories what their own lives could become.¹⁰¹

Leonard Sweet suggests our present western culture is also captivated by powerful stories, offering great opportunity for an evangelist. Sweet claims that the first thing a missionary must do is learn the language of the culture, and yet he contends the current North American church is unable or unwilling to learn the surrounding culture's primary language. He asserts that the language of contemporary western culture is story and image, and coined the term narraphor to speak of the melding of narrative and metaphor so prevalent in the culture's communication.¹⁰² This is good news, Sweet

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Hunter, 53.

¹⁰² Leonard I. Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014) 38.

proclaims, because narraphor is the mother tongue of Christianity.¹⁰³ Unfortunately we have been trained away from this first language and steeped in the tradition of classic Western thought. He cries, “making points no longer makes a point.”¹⁰⁴ Jesus did not speak in points; he spoke in narraphors.¹⁰⁵ If we are to reach this current culture, as Patrick once reached the Celts, we must learn the narrative, metaphor, and soundtrack of the people we are trying to reach.

Affection for the Natural World

Patrick and his followers appreciated the Celtic affection for the natural world. The well-loved story of Patrick and the deer reveals his respect for creation. While examining a location for a future church building Patrick and several others,

climbed to that hilltop— and they came on a doe with its little fawn lying in the place where is now the northern altar of the church in Armagh. Patrick's companions wished to catch the fawn and kill it; but Patrick refused to permit this; instead he caught the fawn himself and carried it on his shoulders, and the doe followed him like a gentle loving sheep until he released the fawn on another hillside to the north of Armagh.¹⁰⁶

Stories abound of early Celtic Christians showing love to God’s creation, echoing the Celts’ love of nature. Many years later, similar stories would be told of Francis of Assisi,

¹⁰³ Leonard Sweet, “Session 2: ‘Narraphor’-The Language of this Culture” (audio recording of lecture, Len Sweet Seminar, Institute for Worship Studies, June 17-18, 2013), last modified September 22, 2013, accessed November 30, 2016, <https://iws.edu/2013/07/leonard-sweet-narraphor-the-language-of-this-culture/>.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Liam de Paor, “Muirchu's Life of St. Patrick,” in *Saint Patrick's World: The Christian Culture of Ireland's Apostolic Age* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993): 192, quoted in Hunter, 81, Kindle.

a Roman cleric. His caring treatment of animals and creation was seen as extraordinary in the Roman church. In contrast, such legends are commonplace for Celtic saints.¹⁰⁷

They also learned early on that some Christian stories and concepts translated quite well into the local culture. The shamrock as an image for the Trinity is a good example. Occasionally the local culture helped recover crucial metaphors and insights that had been lost by the Christian tradition. Hunter explains,

Sometimes the mission context serves not only as a theater for adapting the presentation of Christianity to the people; the context can serve also as a catalyst for recovering something essential and precious within Christianity from the people. For instance, the Celtic Christian approach to nature was a very distinctive feature of Celtic Christianity and also represented an important Christian rediscovery—from the barbarians!¹⁰⁸

This respect for local sensitivities and willingness to listen, is reinforced by Healy, who emphasizes the importance of being open to learning something of God through other religions. Christians need to remember they are not the sole possessors of all truth.

While the Celtic affinity towards nature is well known, before the arrival of Christianity there was a certain tendency towards pantheism. Rather than condemn this love for nature, early missionaries inspired this culture toward an understanding of God as beloved Creator. It was Columbanus, an Irish missionary to Europe in 600 CE, who thought of nature as a second revelation of God to be read, showing the Creator to those who would open its pages and reflect.¹⁰⁹ The Celts were encouraged to adopt a healthy

¹⁰⁷ Hunter, 81.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 80-81.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 83,143.

Christian panentheism where the transcendent yet immanent God made himself known, not only through Jesus Christ, but also through nature.¹¹⁰

The Celts loved to worship in the open air. In contrast, the Roman church preferred grand buildings dedicated to God. Even today the Roman Catholic Church does not allow outdoor weddings, insisting that this sacrament take place in consecrated buildings, where parish communities gather.¹¹¹ Current concern for a healthy creation should inspire the North American church to learn from Celtic Christianity. Rather than criticize nature lovers, the church can affirm its importance. It also can be open to relearning important truths about God from the surrounding culture. Christians must humbly admit that living in a harmonious relationship with God's creation can deepen one's friendship with God.¹¹²

Conclusion

Hunter and Finney present us with a challenge to utilize Patrick's approach to the Celtic people to reach current Western society. Hunter wholeheartedly agrees with Scharen and the need to fully immerse oneself in the culture one wishes to reach with the story of Jesus Christ. Like Newbigin, he challenges Christians to fully indwell the story as a critical means to sharing the story. Bosch, while reminding us of the limitation of contextualization, nevertheless encourages a thoughtful inculturation of the Christian

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 82.

¹¹¹ Cathy Caridi, J.C.L., "Does a Catholic Wedding Have to be Held in a Catholic Church?" *Canon Law Made Easy*, January 28, 2010, last modified March 27, 2016, accessed June 29, 2016, <http://canonlawmadeeasy.com/2010/01/28/does-a-catholic-wedding-have-to-be-held-in-a-catholic-church/>.

¹¹² Hunter, 83.

message. Healy's emphasis on dramatic theology finds resonance with Hunter's understanding of employing imagination while sharing the gospel in a specific context.

The common Celtic Church flourished in a specific time and place. To a certain extent, it reminds us that every church is a local church and that every context is a local context. Nonetheless, with Bosch's caution in mind, it is time to look deeply at the role of place in developing a strategy capable of reaching the post-Christendom context of today's North American culture. It is imperative to find ways to meaningfully engage our culture without losing the unique role of Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life.

CHAPTER THREE: EXAMINING THE POWER OF PLACEMAKING

Introduction

There is a great good in returning to a landscape that has had extraordinary meaning in one's life. It happens that we return to such places in our minds irresistibly. There are certain villages and towns, mountains and plains that, having seen them, walked in them, lived in them, even for a day, we keep forever in the mind's eye. They become indispensable to our well-being; they define us, and we say, I am who I am because I have been there, or there.

—N. Scott Momaday, *The Man Made of Words*

There is no escaping place. Place is part of what it means to be human. There is a dynamic relationship between place and the people who dwell in it. All people live in a place. All events occur in a specific place. Each place is unique. Place is so inherent within the human reality, however, it is often overlooked and undervalued. Furthermore, in current society, so many people are on the move from place to place, a kind of “placelessness” is becoming the norm rather than the exception. Even the church is not immune to this kind of rootlessness. Some pastors only appear to their constituents via satellite, which calls into question the value of place. Yet, human beings inhabit a local setting, and one hopes that their pastor does as well. An understanding of a theology of place is crucial to the health and future of the church. It provides a strong foundation for the practical application of placemaking.

This chapter begins with a review of a biblical understanding of the significance of place, especially with regard to Genesis 1-3. The review will include key early church writers, as well as Western philosophers who have had an influence on the current understanding of place. The evolving emphasis of space over place will also be

examined. Concerns about excarnation as articulated by Michael Frost will be noted.¹ An exploration of Sacrament, Incarnation, the Trinity, and Cosmology will aid in recapturing the importance of place for the church today. A final reflection on the need for a Christian ecological theology of nature complements a renewed theology of place.

The second half of this chapter will explore the work of placemaking as a form of contextualization. Placemaking is important in identifying third places within the community. A reinvigorated understanding of parish and an invitation to participate in the new commons will be described as key to the church's placemaking process. The metaphors of tourist and pilgrim will be assessed as disparate ways to interact with place. The role of shrines and their importance as place-makers will connect this discussion to the growing phenomenon known as lifestyle migration.

The Importance of Place in Genesis 1-3

Genesis begins with the creation of a place: first the universe, then Eden—the place where humans initially dwell. Contrary to other Near Eastern creation stories, Genesis 1 introduces a narrative in which this created place is a good place; a place shaped for human beings to reside.² God is the main actor in the story of creation, the prime mover. In each movement of creation God “saw that it was good.” Six times this reminder rings forth, declaring that this creation—this place—is the good work of God.³

¹ Michael Frost, *Incarnate: The Body of Christ in an Age of Disengagement* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2014) 10. Kindle. Frost uses the term excarnation to imply the opposite of incarnation. Frost observes excarnation in the pressure of western culture to adopt an increasingly disembodied presence in the world.

² Craig G. Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 12, Kindle.

Of crucial importance is the fact that humans are *implaced* in this good creation.⁴ Craig Bartholomew rightly observes, “Thus, approaching Genesis 1 through the prism of place helps us to see that earth and humankind are both central characters in the narrative and that a central motif is their interrelationship.”⁵

Unfortunately, in the haste to practice dominion over the earth and subdue it, the church forgot that the biblical story begins with a peaceable kingdom in which the earth, the Creator, and humankind all live in harmony, with humans acting as royal stewards rather than owners. Much scholarly work has already been done on this subject. Suffice it to say that the emphasis on dominion theology has had a detrimental effect on a theology of place where the earth is a gift from God.

Conversely, Bartholomew comments that God’s invitation to Adam to participate in naming can help in a recovery of the importance of place, if attention is paid to the rich heritage of symbolic language.⁶ Humans love what they name.⁷

Genesis 1 presents a vision of the whole earth as the home of humankind; Genesis 2-3 introduces the story of implacement and displacement. This sets the scene for the rest of the biblical story. The progression of Genesis 1 and 2 leads to the establishment of Eden and Adam and Eve planted within God’s garden.⁸ The Garden of Eden becomes

³ Ibid., 14.

⁴ Ibid., 15.

⁵ Ibid., 12.

⁶ Ibid., 16.

⁷ On the other hand, sometimes humans also name what they claim as their own as seen with colonialism. An unhealthy naming can also come with dominion theology, the kind of naming that creates social hierarchy and categorizes God’s creation in ways that do not reflect God’s love but is an abuse of power. This is not the kind of naming God engages in nor asks of humanity.

their home, a place designed for cultivation.⁹ It is nothing less than the garden of the Lord, a place that God inhabits.

With Genesis 3, displacement—exile from place—becomes part of human identity. Bartholomew explains, “‘Displacement within their own implacement’ captures vividly the challenge that will now face humankind. Placement is unavoidable—it is part of the human condition—but to be at rest in their placement will from now on be an entirely different story.”¹⁰ The yearning for re-placement will haunt humankind.¹¹ The desire to put down roots, as well as the tendency toward rootlessness, both point toward the hunger for re-placement within God’s place. This continues to be observed today in the desire to escape the responsibility of daily living while at the same time longing for attachment.

Early Church Writers, Western Philosophers, and Place

The devaluing of the significance of place can be traced as far back as Plato (427-347 BCE). For Plato, space was pre-existent, but place was created. For Aristotle (384-322 BCE), place was articulated as a “container” allowing people and events to be located “in place.”¹² Leonard Hjalmarson, author of *No Place Like Home: A Christian Theology of Place* notes, “The consequence of this [“container”] idea, however, was to

⁸ Ibid., 25.

⁹ Ibid., 27.

¹⁰ Ibid., 30.

¹¹ Ibid., 29.

¹² Len Hjalmarson, *No Home like Place: A Christian Theology of Place* (Portland, OR: Urban Loft Publishers, 2014), 776, Kindle.

mitigate and relativize the value of place. As a merely inert environment where things happen, things might as well happen in one container as another.”¹³ The Neoplatonic movement also contributed the idea of “spaceless spirit” further devaluing place and the material world in general.¹⁴ On a positive note, Aristotle’s work did establish that place was a fundamental feature of the universe, having its own dynamic power.

The concentrated interest in space eroded the value of place until its significance was almost lost altogether.”¹⁵ An increasing focus on the limitless power of God led to an understanding that God’s presence in the universe would also be without limits. Space, without limits, then, became the preferred starting point for an understanding of God. Perhaps unwittingly, then, place became secondary.

Origen (185-254 CE), a deeply philosophical theologian, was quite concerned about matter and place. Unfortunately, he was also quite influenced by Neoplatonic thought and held a low view of the created order. The goal of humankind, he believed, was to ascend to God, in spirit.¹⁶ Anna Case-Winters, explains Origen’s thought process:

The material world is a kind of purgatory that creates in them [humankind] a longing for release and return to heaven. The material world is a place of travail, trial, and testing, that we are “just a passin’ through” on our way back to our true home in heaven with God. When this salvation is accomplished, there will be no need for the material world whatsoever, and it will return to nothingness. The material world serves only to educate, refine, and reorient human beings. Although some of Origen’s specific ideas—such as reincarnation—were rejected

¹³ Ibid., 778.

¹⁴ Ibid., 779.

¹⁵ Bartholomew, 170.

¹⁶ Hjalmarson, 784.

as heretical, this denigration of material existence seems to have taken hold and remained strongly influential.¹⁷

By degrading the material world, Origen also disparaged place. The bondage of matter caused place to be seen as a prison from which only death gave escape. Even though the church officially rejected Origen's theology, it continued to influence the church's great thinkers.¹⁸

Origen's view was not the only voice heard during the church's early formation. Irenaeus (130-200 CE) perceived the material world in a more positive light. For him all of creation was part of God's great plan. God sustained the earth with love and concern. Irenaeus provided an affirming voice for the blessing of God upon the created order.¹⁹

Augustine's view of place was complex and nuanced, and changed over time. Unlike Origen, Augustine (345-430 CE) envisioned that the world itself would be renewed in the culmination of time. Augustine's later writings revealed a "flowering of a Christian theology of nature that is affirmative in its character."²⁰ Regrettably, other forces intervened. Hjalmarson explains,

Both Origen and Augustine remained influential through the Middle Ages, but the triumph of "space" over place was cemented after the death of Thomas Aquinas when the Bishop of Paris, in 1277, issued a series of condemnations seeking to suppress any teaching that limited the power of God. If God is limitless in power, then the universe at large must also be unlimited. The universal presence of God therefore required spatial infinity, and the idea of space triumphed.²¹

¹⁷ Anna Case-Winters, *Reconstructing a Christian Theology of Nature: Down to Earth* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishers, 2007), 149.

¹⁸ Bartholomew, 200.

¹⁹ Case-Winters, 149.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 150.

²¹ Hjalmarson, 794.

The conquest of space superseding place was the causal result of emphasizing God's unlimited power and presence. Because God was understood as limitless, God was also perceived as inaccessible. Such a perspective opened the way for Galileo and then Sir Isaac Newton to delve into the vastness of space with scientific supposition. Newton, who became recognized as the father of the Scientific Revolution, would proceed to build his scientific work within a universe of infinite, absolute space.²² Such a notion had previously played only a minor role in the scientific landscape. The cost of prioritizing space over place, however, turned out to be greater than anyone anticipated.

Germane to the discussion here is that such a focus on space has allowed humans to be less responsible to local place. Space is abstract, place is concrete. A person cannot be held accountable to "space" but may certainly have responsibilities to a particular place. Space stands outside of history, place is inherently historical and has ethical ramifications. Space is impersonal, place is where the neighbors live. Wendell Berry brings this discussion down to the most practical level when he writes,

‘The problem of world hunger’ cannot be solved until it is understood and dealt with by local people as a multitude of local problems of ecology, agriculture, and culture. The most necessary thing in agriculture, for instance, is not to invent new technologies or methods, not to achieve ‘breakthroughs,’ but to determine what tools and methods are appropriate to specific people, places, and needs, and to apply them correctly. Application... is the crux, because no two farms or farmers are alike; not two fields are alike.²³

People do not live in space; they live in place. They live in particular, unique places that require distinct and specific solutions to local problems. The special value of

²² Bartholomew, 175.

²³ Wendell Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*. Edited by Norman Wirzba (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 2002) 302-303.

individual places becomes lost as space consumes increasing attention. The disturbing effects of this shift manifest in the lack of accountability shown by those who live in place yet feel no responsibility toward it.

Sacrament, Incarnation, Trinity, and Place

How can such a rift between space and place be mended? Several scholars look toward a renewed understanding of sacrament, incarnation, and even the Trinity as key components to a revitalized theology of place. God's presence changes place. Hjalmarson optimistically posits, "A sacramental way of seeing the world offers a way of holding a creative tension between place and space, between the particulars and the universal. The infinite God enters place, so that matter is hallowed, and ordinary things like bread and wine become sacred."²⁴ In addition, the Incarnation speaks volumes to God's opinion about place. When God becomes flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, there is an implicit understanding that God loves place, and "that" place in particular. Place is once again in the foreground.

John Inge's volume, *A Christian Theology of Place*, makes an important contribution to this sacramental understanding. An Anglican Bishop and author, Inge holds that place is a fundamental category of human and spiritual experience.²⁵ A particular place in the world may (not must) be a location for God's revelation to us, thus opening the door for possible sacramental encounters. Inge opposes the idea that certain

²⁴ Hjalmarson, 602.

²⁵ John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishers, 2003), 52.

locales are holy in and of themselves. It is the relationship between God, place, and people that allows the opportunity for a sacramental moment to occur.²⁶ It is only when freely offered grace is received by faith, that such an event becomes sacramental. Inge asserts the necessity of personal response for sacrament to be realized in a particular place.²⁷

Hjalmarson contends that a Trinitarian theology of place holds the most promise for recapturing a robust Christian theology of place. The Father creates, the Son incarnates, the Spirit inspires. Human beings may participate in this process as they allow the power of the Trinity to work through them.²⁸ Any adequate reference to the Trinity must stress the vital magnitude of the Incarnation.

For those seeking to devalue place, the Incarnation has always been problematic. Jesus came to earth, in the flesh, to a particular place, and time. The heart of the Good News is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It must also occupy the center of a Christian theology of place.²⁹ The created ordered, and therefore place, is hallowed by the Incarnation. Jesus' implacement speaks definitively of God's interest in and commitment to this place we call earth.

²⁶ Ibid., 80.

²⁷ Ibid., 81.

²⁸ Hjalmarson, 1501.

²⁹ Bartholomew, 245.

Incarnation, Exarnation, and Place

Australian missiologist Michael Frost enters this discussion from a different angle, but contributes a significant point. He agrees with C.S. Lewis, who affirmed that the “central miracle asserted by Christians is the Incarnation.”³⁰ Today, however, Frost argues that rather than embracing incarnation, the church is emphasizing a kind of exarnation.

This kind of exarnation is based on a body-spirit dualism wherein less value and influence is placed on the physical and enormous importance is accrued to the spiritual. What we do with our bodies is of lesser interest to us than what we do with our spirits, an increasingly pervasive stance in Western society and one that is exacerbated by a Platonic form of Christianity. . . . Compare that with the kind of exarnation we’re observing today: the neglect of our embodiedness, the denial of aging and death, the strategic defleshing of our opponents on virtual fields of battle.³¹

Frost is concerned that the material-spiritual dualism emphasized by Plato continues to this day. While there is certainly an emphasis on health and fitness in western culture, the underlying denial of aging and death causes disconnect between body and spirit. Those living an exarnate life are physically present but spiritually absent from place. Frost finds that this tendency is having a deleterious effect on local expressions of the church. Disembodied advocacy becomes the norm while the “dirt and worms and compost of localized service” is scorned.³² Even worse, some pastors primarily appear in exarnate forms, on video screens via satellite. Frost challenges quite strongly, “Christianity has become an out-of-body experience—personalized, privatized, customized—and it is

³⁰ Frost, 78.

³¹ Ibid., 10.

³² Ibid., 12.

being dished up to us by a clergy increasingly disconnected from an incarnational expression of faith.”³³

Frost’s view reveals the necessity for a more integrated theology of place. The church is not only devaluing place but, by extension, debasing materiality in general. Frost is concerned about the proliferation of disembodied faith as well as the objectification of the human body (as a place), that invariably follows. The incarnation was not a necessary evil, but God’s plan for enjoining friendship with humankind, as Jesus Christ is embodied as fully God, fully man.³⁴ A healthy theology of place must take seriously the presence of Christ in the world God created. It must also take a sincere interest in the implacement of Christ’s church in the world.

Cosmology, Theology of Nature, and Place

Thus says the Lord:
Heaven is my throne
and the earth is my footstool;
what is the house that you would build for me,
and what is my resting place?
All these things my hand has made,
and so all these things are mine,
says the Lord.

—Isaiah 66:1-2 NRSV

The cosmos is the universe, seen as a well-ordered system, functioning harmoniously. In their book, *God Dwells Among us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth*, G. K. Beale and Mitchell Kim draw upon Isaiah 66:1-2 to assert that the entire

³³ Ibid., 31.

³⁴ Ibid., 83.

cosmos, not just the earth, is God's temple.³⁵ God currently inhabits the church and so it must grow. They explain,

The church as the dwelling place of God must expand until one day it fills the entire heaven and earth; the entire cosmos becomes the dwelling place of God. Mission does not begin with the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20, but mission is God's heartbeat from Genesis 1 until the new heaven and earth become the dwelling place of the Lord God Almighty in Revelation 21–22. This ultimate picture of the whole earth filled with God's presence fulfills God's original intention from the sanctuary of Eden.³⁶

The new heaven and earth will be full of God's presence. The entire cosmos is his temple. Hjalmarson also sees God resting in the center of the cosmos that is his temple.³⁷ Beale and Kim suggest that this occurs at the consummation of history.³⁸ Other theologians are not willing to wait that long to experience this manifest presence of God. Those who advocate for a comprehensive Christian theology of nature claim the importance of God's connection to place right now. A brief excursion into a Christian theology of nature is in order here.

In his work *The Greening of Theology: The Ecological Models of Rosemary Radford Ruether, Joseph Sittler, and Jürgen Moltmann*, Steven Bouma-Prediger identifies four general rationales that are often used to criticize Christianity for Western society's current neglect of the earth. First, an erroneous interpretation of Genesis 1:28 has led some Christians to exercise a dominion theology, exploiting the earth for human consumption. Second, dualistic thinking about body and soul has caused many Christians

³⁵ G. K. Beale and Mitchell Kim, *God Dwells Among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 60, Kindle.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁷ Hjalmarson, 948.

³⁸ Beale and Kim, 147.

to devalue the material world. Third, a Christian eschatology that emphasizes the impermanence of creation leads some to ignore good stewardship, because they see the world as a disposable resource. Fourth, anthropocentric thinking that desacralizes nature has allowed certain technological advances to destroy nature with little reflection or concern.³⁹

Some Christian scholars have responded to these criticisms with a renewed focus on a biblical understanding of nature and stewardship. This effort is commendable, but it is insufficient by itself for re-valuing the created order as a place loved and inhabited by God. Bouma-Prediger proposes a Christian ecological theology that is faithful to the biblical witness and Christian tradition while taking into account the failures of the past. He proposes refinements to three key theological concepts.

First, with regard to anthropology, he calls for a better balance between humanity and the rest of the created order. Christians must step back from their anthropocentrism, including a tendency to ignore the connection between ecological degradation and social injustice.⁴⁰

His second proposal concerns the concept of nature itself, which he finds full of ambiguity. For example, is nature an organism or a machine? Does it include humanity or exclusively the rest of the created order? The term 'nature' has many connotations. Not surprisingly, Bouma-Prediger prefers the term creation to nature and emphasizes that a

³⁹ Steven Bouma-Prediger, *The Greening of Theology: The Ecological Models of Rosemary Radford Ruether, Joseph Sittler, and Jürgen Moltmann* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995), 1-5.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 268.

Christian ecological theology be theocentric and point towards God's grace.⁴¹ "All creation is a place of grace. And all creatures respond to the call of God to be and become, each in their own creature-specific way."⁴² Creation itself is a place for grace and the product of grace.⁴³

Bouma-Prediger is not alone in his struggle to find the best language for nature. Robin Wall Kimmerer, Director for the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment at SUNY-ESF, claims that nature itself needs a new pronoun. She is disturbed that in the English language a living being can only be referred to as human or "it." She observes,

Objectification of the natural world reinforces the notion that our species is somehow more deserving of the gifts of the world than the other 8.7 million species with whom we share the planet. Using "it" absolves us of moral responsibility and opens the door to exploitation. When Sugar Maple is an "it" we give ourselves permission to pick up the saw. "It" means it doesn't matter.⁴⁴

Kimmerer challenges the premise that human beings and the natural world are separate. Instead, she calls for recognition that all are part of the same family. She implies that in living this way, humanity would feel less lonely and have a greater sense of belonging to the earth. Inspired by the Anishinaabe language, Kimmerer proposes the word "ki" as a new pronoun substitute for "it" to be used when referring to living things in the natural order. For example, when speaking of the Sugar Maple one could say, "Oh,

⁴¹ Ibid., 278.

⁴² Ibid., 281.

⁴³ Ibid., 282.

⁴⁴ Robin Wall Kimmerer, "Nature Needs a New Pronoun: To Stop the Age of Extinction, Let's Start by Ditching 'It,'" *YES! Magazine*, March 30, 2015, accessed September 8, 2016, <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/together-with-earth/alternative-grammar-a-new-language-of-kinship>.

that beautiful tree, ki is giving us sap again this spring.”⁴⁵ The plural “they” would be changed to “kin.”⁴⁶ Kimmerer realizes her proposal is nothing short of revolutionary, but insists the time for change has come if humanity is to cease exploiting the earth and its inhabitants. Both Bouma-Prediger and Kimmerer realize that words have the power to transform thoughts and actions regarding the place all creatures call home.

Finally, Bouma-Prediger calls for a reassessment of how Christianity speaks of, and envisions, the Trinity. There is a need to emphasize the caregiving nature of the first person of the Trinity.⁴⁷ Also, the immanence and transcendence of God must both be accentuated. He resists the temptation to collapse this tension believing that it is “impossible for God to be intimate with creation unless God is transcendent to creation since the kind of loving intimacy predicated of the biblical God is possible only of an agent who is not identical or coextensive with the other.”⁴⁸ With these words he dismisses any accusation of panentheism.

Bouma-Prediger also calls for a rediscovery of the cosmic dimension of Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity. Christ’s redemptive work was not for humanity alone but for the entire created order on earth and beyond. All creation is shaped by the God who suffers: only a suffering God is expansive enough to be Lord of the cosmos.⁴⁹

The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, must also be recognized as an active agent in creation. Bouma-Prediger claims that the Spirit is the “pervasive presence

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Bouma-Prediger, 20.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 287.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 292-293.

of God in creation.”⁵⁰ Ultimately, he finds an inter-personal social model of the Trinity most clearly elucidates the relationship of God and creation. Drawing upon the work of Moltmann, he explains, “... if the very being of God is constituted by relationships and if these relationships necessarily involve mutuality and fellowship, then the relationship of God with creation must also be of the same nature.”⁵¹ Therefore, since Christians are called to be Christ-like, they must also care for creation with reverence and respect. In *The Gift of the Good Land*, Wendell Berry invites humankind to take up a caretaking vocation:

That is not to suggest that we can live harmlessly, or strictly at our own expense; we depend upon other creatures and survive by their deaths. To live, we must daily break the body and shed the blood of Creation. When we do this knowingly, lovingly, skillfully, reverently, it is a sacrament. When we do it ignorantly, greedily, clumsily, destructively, it is a desecration. In such desecration we condemn ourselves to spiritual and moral loneliness, and others to want.⁵²

Berry reminds us there is no escaping the importance of the created order as a place God loves and cares for. It is also the place where humans make their home. This homemaking process includes the endeavor of placemaking.

Placemaking and Contextualization

The work of placemaking begins with a strong theology of place but it does not end there. It is time to focus on the task of placemaking as it relates to the contextualization of the gospel. How can Christians live as placed persons in their contexts? How does living as placed persons help invite others to follow the Way of

⁵⁰ Ibid., 296.

⁵¹ Ibid., 301.

⁵² Berry, 304.

Jesus? Tension is manifest in these questions for the notion of place gives the air of being settled down whereas the invitation to follow is about movement. It is in place that roots dig deep, but it is also to place that pilgrimage is made. In the words of N. Scott Momaday, “It is good for us, too, to touch the earth. We, and our children, need the chance to walk the sacred earth, this final abiding place of all that lives. We must preserve our sacred places in order to know our place in time, our reach to eternity.”⁵³ Moving and rooting frame the placemaking process.

According to the Project for Public Space, “Placemaking inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value.”⁵⁴ For theologian Craig Bartholomew, Christian placemaking also includes drawing from the biblical story and its understanding of place.⁵⁵ Placemaking is related to contextualization, as both recognize the importance of a particular place. Christian placemaking can be seen as one aspect of contextualization.

Frost indicates that the average American stays in one home for only five years. He claims that this is the case for Christians and clergy as well. In response to this trend, he challenges Christians to become the “most rooted people in their community.”⁵⁶ Christian placemaking involves a commitment over a significant period of time;

⁵³ Momaday, 117.

⁵⁴ “What Is Placemaking?” Project for Public Spaces, last modified June 9, 2016, accessed September 8, 2016, http://www.pps.org/reference/what_is_placemaking/.

⁵⁵ Bartholomew, 247.

⁵⁶ Frost, 155.

Christians should have a sense of loyalty to their locale.⁵⁷ A placed person is someone who exists with an awareness that they are living in a particular place. They make a home. They join a neighborhood. They commit to making their local community a better place.⁵⁸ This is in stark contrast to what Frost calls excarnation, the disembodied experience of many people who may be physically present in one place but who are not mentally or emotionally available to that place.⁵⁹

Mark Scandrette, founding director of ReIMAGINE, a center for life integration, is committed to a life of embodied Christian practice.⁶⁰ He asks, “What would it look like to seek the peace and prosperity of the place in which I live?”⁶¹ This question propels him to challenge and equip Christians, and entire congregations, to live an “embodied intentional practice” in their local communities.⁶² Practice shapes us and practice shapes place. Like Frost, he calls the Christian community into a relationship with a particular place.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 167.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 12.

⁶⁰ Mark Scandrette, *Practicing the Way of Jesus: Life Together in the Kingdom of Love* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2011), loc 3143. Kindle.

⁶¹ Mark Scandrette, “Mark Scandrette on His Conversion to Place” (Parish Collective Video, February 17, 2014), accessed September 08, 2016, <https://youtu.be/MIiaQOTuhiI>.

⁶² Scandrette, *Practicing the Way of Jesus*, 295.

Placemaking and Third Places

Placemaking includes serious consideration of “third places,” those locations that are between private homes and public work places.⁶³ They are common places where people intermingle, and they can become places where community forms. Third places can be instrumental in unifying neighborhoods and can serve as thresholds where people enter into the life of the local community. Ideally, third places provide space for generations to mix as well as those from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.⁶⁴ They can also stimulate local desire to improve the community and even provide a safe space to discuss important issues of the day.⁶⁵

Neighborhoods can be viewed as third places as they meet these needs. However, when neighborhoods are viewed as something to be consumed, rather than a place to serve, they no longer function as third places and people become disconnected from one another and the place in which they live.⁶⁶ Hjalmarson succinctly identifies this tension, “If I am not sure if I’ll be here tomorrow, why should I invest my life? If my neighbor is unsure that I will be here tomorrow, why should he tell me who he is and what he cares about?”⁶⁷ For third places to be successful there must be some continuity of participation, some commitment over a period of time.

⁶³ Ray Oldenburg, “Our Vanishing ‘Third Places,’” *Planning Commissioners Journal* no. 25 (Winter 1996-1997): 6, accessed September 8, 2016, <http://plannersweb.com/wp-content/uploads/1997/01/184.pdf>.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶⁶ Hjalmarson, 1904-1906.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 1912-1913.

In their book *The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches Are Transforming Mission, Discipleship and Community*, colleagues Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens, and Dwight Friesen investigate what can happen when local churches look at their neighborhoods in new ways. They begin by resigning the word “parish.” For them, parish refers to “all the relationships (including the land) where the local church lives out its faith together. It is a unique word that recalls a geography large enough to live life together (live, work, play, etc.) and small enough to be known as a character within it.”⁶⁸ This notion of parish is different from the old Christendom model in several key ways. First, the local community helps to shape what the local church looks like.⁶⁹ In addition, the old parish model was centered in a single denomination; the new parish can include many kinds of churches working cooperatively in the third place.⁷⁰ This is quite a contrast to the days when the parish was geographically defined by a church authority some distance from the actual location, and denominational programs were run in competition with one another. The concept of parish is powerful; it represents the church intentionally engaging in a local place in relationship with local people. The parish actually helps create the third place.⁷¹

Sparks, Soerens, and Friesen intentionally label this third place the “new commons,” for it includes “all the dimensions of life for which everyone in your

⁶⁸ Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens and Dwight J. Friesen, *The New Parish. How Neighborhood Churches Are Transforming Mission, Discipleship and Community* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 23, Kindle.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 31.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Hjalmarson, 1919.

neighborhood shares a common concern.”⁷² They invite the church to focus on four areas in the new commons in which they believe the church can have a faithful presence. First, the economy, that includes what everyone in the parish needs, such as food, shelter, and employment. Second, the environment that is a common concern for everyone in the parish: clean water, good soil, safe air. Third, the civic arena, including local governance that is a concern to all in the parish, because decisions local leaders make will affect everyone in that place. Finally, they encourage local churches to make an investment in education, particularly in the areas of formation and wisdom. They claim that this is a common concern, because “nearly everyone desires to grow as mature and good people.”⁷³ Emphasis on the privatized individual must be challenged by the needs of the community living in place. This will prove to be a continual challenge because even good-meaning people have different values and desires. Participating in the new commons broadens the current understanding of the church’s purpose. This is necessary, however, if churches are to make a difference locally. A parish understanding of the local church can provide a mechanism for individuals to engage with, and attach to, place.

Personal experience will always be extremely valuable in placemaking. “Place is first landscape, and then it is memory, and then it is story.”⁷⁴ When our personal stories, God’s story, and the story of a particular place intertwine, a powerful synergy emerges. The new commons can be improved as the church listens deeply to the stories of the local place. The church needs to celebrate the local story and help others see how God is active

⁷² Sparks, Soerens and Friesen, 95.

⁷³ Ibid., 96.

⁷⁴ Hjalmanson, 2117.

in it. However, the act of listening must also include a confession that the church itself is not the answer. The listening must be humble and the answer must arise from God's activity in that place. In fact, it is in community that we come to understand our own stories.⁷⁵

Tourist Vs. Pilgrim

Two predominant story lines are found in the metaphors of tourist and pilgrim. Each one offers a distinct connection to place, and a different role in the placemaking endeavor.

Both Hjalmarson and Frost employ the metaphor of tourist to describe many people's relationship to place. In both cases, it is a negative view. Frost vividly borrows from cultural commentator Richard Sennett, and Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, as he describes how contemporary life is much like an airport departure lounge.⁷⁶ Such lounges look the same regardless of the airport; they are bland by design.⁷⁷ Nobody actually lives in the departure lounge and yet it is often full of people on their way to somewhere else. They have no interest in developing relationships in this temporary place. The architecture is constructed to inhibit forming even temporary relationships. The chairs are immobile in long rows, permitting hushed conversations only with people on either side. The conversations are muted; this is one of the unspoken rules of air

⁷⁵ Sparks, Soerens and Friesen, 124.

⁷⁶ Frost, 17.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 15.

travel.⁷⁸ Frost describes how the process of depersonalization begins immediately with the removal of shoes and watches at security checkpoints. Such depersonalization causes people to disconnect from their surroundings; their minds turn inward where nothing can touch them.⁷⁹ He observes, “Your body might be in the airport lounge, but your mind is somewhere else— on social media, playing online games, watching Fox News on the airport screens, dreaming of somewhere else. You’ve realized your primary status in contemporary society as a disembodied one, free to roam, free to stray, free to be, well, free.”⁸⁰

Both authors call people to rewrite their story from tourist to pilgrim. Tourist and pilgrim often look the same, but the character of the journey is quite different. Tourists are seeking to escape life, even temporarily, while pilgrims are embracing life.⁸¹ Tourists are trying to forget their commitments; pilgrims are searching to remember their vows.⁸² While tourists are out looking for a bargain; pilgrims are embracing hardship as integral to the journey.⁸³ Tourists are not typically interested in seeing behind the glitzy façade; pilgrims behold what is hidden deeply.⁸⁴ Tourists loathe the surprise as much as pilgrims are delighted by the unexpected, considering it part of the journey.⁸⁵ If tourists are

⁷⁸ Ibid., 16.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 17.

⁸¹ Hjalmarson, 653-656.

⁸² Ibid., 656.

⁸³ Frost, 216.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

seeking to mix with the locals it is merely out of curiosity; in contrast, pilgrims pursue and relish the hospitality of strangers.⁸⁶

There are three distinct phases of pilgrimage. “Roots, a journey, and a future destination in a story authored by God: these are the elements of pilgrimage. Roots always involve place, as does any journey. There is a starting point, and an end goal, and places in between. It is the metaphor of in-between, of journeying, that makes up the heart of pilgrimage.”⁸⁷ In this way, pilgrimage is ultimately connected to place.

Bartholomew finds the pilgrimage metaphor an appropriate one as well, although he thinks of it in a more literal, historic sense. The Israelites made pilgrimage to Jerusalem for holy days. Jesus and his disciples were pilgrims, and the Pentecost recipients were as well.⁸⁸ In ancient Israel, pilgrimage became a ritualized practice that cemented their identity as people of God.⁸⁹ Bartholomew imagines that making pilgrimage to ancient sites can help incarnate the gospel for today’s secular culture.⁹⁰ It is not only Christians who are making pilgrimage to traditional pilgrim sites across Europe. The ritual of pilgrimage calls people to what they value most and what stories they want to enliven their lives.⁹¹ “It is vital that this connection with the whole of life be present in pilgrimage—the journey in, as it were, becomes the foundation for the journey out, and

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Hjalmarson, 2681-2682.

⁸⁸ Bartholomew, 302.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 304.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 302.

⁹¹ Ibid., 304.

the aim of the journey out in pilgrimage is to deepen the journey in.”⁹² Here Bartholomew adds a fourth dimension to pilgrimage—the journey out as a new self.

A shrine is often the destination of a pilgrimage as it offers a concrete place to fix the memory.⁹³ A shrine also has the ability to “transcend time and place in facilitating an encounter with God in present experience.”⁹⁴ Shrines do not have to contain holy relics. They can be buildings such as churches or cathedrals. They can be great masterpieces of nature. They can be a pile of stones if that place is considered holy, and a transformative experience has occurred there. Hjalmarson is cautious, however, to label every place a possible shrine. While the entire world is God’s creation, sacred places are created where God and people interact in a meaningful way.⁹⁵ These places become holy ground.

It is this awareness of holy ground that inspires Hjalmarson to offer the image of gardener. Concrete practices are necessary to re-place us in the world. Tending a garden slows us down, locates us in one place and improves that place for the benefit of others.⁹⁶ This image takes us back to the first garden and the original gardener. God was the first gardener and we have been created in God’s image to imitate his work.⁹⁷ Hjalmarson extends this image even farther. Why grow if not to bake? Why bake if not to share?⁹⁸

⁹² Ibid., 307.

⁹³ Hjalmarson, 2897-2898.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 2902-2903.

⁹⁵ Hjalmarson, 2990-2995.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 3255.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 3266.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 3292.

The very concrete act of gardening can change the world because it can change our little corner of the neighborhood.

Conclusion

This chapter began by reviewing a biblical understanding of place and articulating the views of several early thinkers who had a great influence upon the current understanding of place. Place is inextricably linked with what it means to be human. God created the first place and gave humanity a home in God's good garden. Adam and Eve's displacement from God's garden has become part of human identity. The yearning for home and a place of belonging continues to drive the human spirit.

God is unlimited in power and presence. An increasing interest in the limitless power of God has led to a focus on boundless space as the appropriate starting point for understanding an infinite God. People however, live in place, not unbounded space. Through the Incarnation, God's immanent presence revalues place. Particular locales become holy as God's presence manifests there.

Overemphasizing the spiritual aspects of life while diminishing the physical can also lead to devaluing place if material existence is viewed undesirably. There is need for a renewed theology of nature that offers a better balance between humanity and the rest of the created order as a place valued by God. This theology must emphasize the caretaking nature of God. It must also recognize that Christ's redemptive work is not just for humanity but benefits all of God's creation. Finally, the Holy Spirit must be acknowledged as present and active in creation.

The task of placemaking strengthens the connection between people and the material places they share. For Christians this task should involve a commitment to their

neighborhoods, making a difference where they live and work. Embodied intentional practice leads Christians to make an impact in third places where local communities mingle. The new commons includes aspects of mutual concern in the neighborhood. The local economy, environment, governance, and education are arenas of the new commons where the local church can engage to make a difference.

This chapter concluded with an exploration of two different ways to inhabit place for people on the move. The tourist explores place as an outsider, a consumer seeking escape from routine. The pilgrim enters deeply into place and embraces it. The roots, journey, destination and return home constitute pilgrimage and are a form of placemaking. Ultimately, the tourist is an inadequate metaphor for indwelling place.

Hjalmarson's invitation to imitate God as a gardener is another image that can certainly deepen an attachment to place. It does not, however, adequately address the reality of people who are on the move. How can we be pilgrims and placed at the same time? To answer that question, it is imperative to explore amenity migration as a form of pilgrimage.

CHAPTER FOUR: EXPLORING AMENITY MIGRATION

Introduction

Jesus was always on the move, teaching, preaching, healing, and praying from seaside to mountainside, from small towns to the big city of Jerusalem. Jesus did not wait for people to come to him, but went to them, in loving compassion and concern. From the beginning of the church, missionaries have followed his example to be witnesses in “Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to all the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The church on the move has become God’s hands and feet around the globe.

What of the reverse? What happens when people themselves are on the move? Historically, the church in North America has found creative ways to minister to migrant workers, refugees seeking asylum, immigrants building the railroad across America, and even the Okies fleeing poverty and the dustbowl. Today, people on the move also include those of significant financial means who are highly mobile because of their wealth, not their poverty. These people are not seeking refuge from an oppressive political regime, nor are they uprooting their families in search of employment. They are on the move because they enjoy the freedom that their wealth affords.

Telecommunicating has enabled many professionals to live at great distances from their offices, returning only for special meetings. Others are able to retire early, live off investments and split their time between the family home and the cottage. The proliferation of second (and even third) homes among this population has created new challenges for the church. In 2001, there were an estimated 2.04 million seasonal housing

units in the U.S. representing 1.7 percent of the housing stock.¹ By 2009, seasonal housing units represented 3.5 percent of the housing stock with an estimated 4.6 million units.²

This chapter will investigate and engage amenity migration as a new episode in mobility. Who are these noneconomic migrants and what are they doing? What are they seeking? Where is home for them? What part does rest play in their decision to be on the move? How is the church responding to this new challenge?

What Are They Doing?

All migration begins with the capability to move about. Mobility is the movement of people and goods within and across boundaries; it is the ability to overcome spatial distance.³ Migration itself, however, has a narrower focus, often alluding to a relatively permanent change of address.⁴ Today's landscape has expanded this concept in several significant ways: scholars now speak of temporary migration that includes—but is not limited to—commuting, life cycle migration, multiple dwelling migration, and retiree migration. Of particular interest to this study is a new trend toward amenity migration, which is a form of temporary migration understood as “mobility in search of leisure,

¹ “Housing in America: 2001 American Housing Survey Results,” *U.S. House Market Conditions 1st Quarter*, 2002, accessed September 21, 2016, https://www.huduser.gov/periodicals/ushmc/spring2002/summary_2.html.

² “Housing in America: 2009 American Housing Survey Results,” *U.S. House Market Conditions 2nd Quarter*, 2010, accessed September 21, 2016, <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/periodicals/ushmc/summer10/ch1.pdf>

³ Norman McIntyre, “Introduction,” in *Multiple Dwelling and Tourism: Negotiating Place, Home and Identity*, eds. Norman McIntyre, Daniel Williams, and Kevin McHugh (Cambridge, MA: CABI Publishers, 2006), 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

landscape and quality of life.”⁵ Tourism is not included in this concept because tourists pass through a region not intending to dwell within it. Tourism is beyond the scope of this study. Amenity migration does, however, include the notion of second-home ownership.

In other parts of the world, such as Scandinavia, owning a second home is part of the culture for people across the economic spectrum.⁶ In Sweden, for example, 54 percent of the population has the opportunity to utilize a second home.⁷ In North America, this freedom of movement—expressed in the ability to possess and maintain multiple dwellings—is viewed more as a privileged lifestyle, available to those in higher income brackets.⁸ In reality, however, multiple dwellings exist across the financial spectrum. Hunting camps and primitive cottages are found in many rural regions. It is nearly impossible to calculate the number of these types of refuges because they are not usually included in housing surveys.

Technically, a second home is property owned or rented for an extended period of time, used by a person or family as an occasional residence when they actually live elsewhere.⁹ Most second homes in the United States are located in Florida, California, New York and Michigan.¹⁰ They are usually located in amenity-rich areas of natural

⁵ Ibid., 6.

⁶ Linda Lundmark and Roger Marjavaara, “Second Home Ownership: A Blessing for All?” *Scandinavian Journal Of Hospitality & Tourism* 13, no. 4 (December 2013): 283, accessed April 18, 2016, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15022250.2013.862439>

⁷ Ibid., 283.

⁸ Per Gustafson, “Place Attachment and Mobility,” in McIntyre, 31.

⁹ McIntyre, “Introduction,” 9.

beauty such as near mountains or along the waterfront of lakes or oceans. The climate is also critical to location since many second homes are intended for specific outdoor activities such as swimming, hiking, golfing or skiing. They are rarely found in urban areas. Traditionally, they are less than a day's drive from one's primary residence, though emotionally they may feel worlds apart.

What Are They Seeking?

Globalization and urbanization are having a significant impact on many people's lives. The pressure of competing in a global economy and the stress of urban living or commuting from the suburbs are taking their toll on upper-level wage earners. The invasiveness of work upon private life, made possible by new technology, is also increasing fatigue. A second home is becoming one way to escape the pressures of modern life while experiencing a certain rootedness in place.¹¹

These modern migrants desire to leave work behind, at least temporarily. They want to escape the pressure of daily routine and move at a different pace than their workweek speed. Focusing on leisure and play brings relaxation. Immersion in nature can also revive them. The option to gain some distance from technology—even if it is only a perception and not reality—offers a way to gain back command over hectic lives.

Escape rekindles a sense of control over their lives and schedules. It also empowers them to personalize their lives, rejecting the McDonaldisation and anonymous existence of suburbia. The symbolic expression of naming second homes speaks volumes

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Daniel R. Williams and Susan R. Van Patten, "Home *and* Away? Creating Identities and Sustaining Places in a Multi-Centered World," in McIntyre, 36.

about the essence of escape and pleasure associated with these dwellings.¹² Names like ‘Snowed Inn,’ ‘Loon Song,’ ‘Winter Haven,’ and ‘Camp Serenity,’ reject the standard narrative and embrace a personal story.

Not only do these second homes provide an escape, they also provide a feeling of rootedness in the changing landscape of modern living. Taking the family ‘away,’ produces a sense of togetherness not often experienced during everyday living. The daily grind and schedule can be left behind and family memories are made from the simple enjoyments found at the second home. USDA Forest Service employee Daniel R. Williams and fellow researcher Susan R. Van Patten, assert such dwellings provide “symbolic territorial identification for families across generations.”¹³ In addition, second-home owners often find that they have more time and energy to develop a social life ‘away’ than at their primary residence, increasing a feeling of rootedness in relationships.¹⁴

The complexity of modern life can thin a place of its meaning; second homes can offer a thicker place of attachment.¹⁵ Williams and Van Patten suggest, “In a globalized world that many experience as placeless, the cottage may serve as a centre of meaning across the life course even as people relocate their so-called permanent residence. The cottage provides continuity of identity and sense of place through symbolic, territorial

¹² Ibid., 38.

¹³ Ibid., 39.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 38.

identification with an emotional home.”¹⁶ Home is where the heart is, not where the mail is collected.

The Role of the Second Home

While the second home can provide an escape from modern life and a sense of rootedness, some claim it can also contribute to fragmentation and intensify a sense of dislocation. It could be argued that the presence of a second home actually thins attachment to place in both homes.¹⁷ Others maintain that attachment to the primary home is already thin because work can require relocation. In addition, fewer people are living in extended family-based neighborhoods, which provide a sense of continuity and community.

Life can become disjointed when it occurs in two places at once. Material goods are stretched and dislocated: Where is my red sweater? What’s in the fridge? Taking care of two properties can be a challenge as well, especially if they are private homes, not condos. There are two driveways to plow, two roofs to keep in good repair and twice as many mattresses to replace. Relationships can also become strained. There are potentially two groups of friendships to nurture. This is true not just for adults but also for children and teens. They attach themselves to one group of friends at school and bond with another at the second home. Or, sometimes they do not, and they complain about the regular forays to the middle of nowhere. Civic duties and other commitments can also suffer. It is not realistic or fair to make a commitment to serve on the local recreation

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 40.

committee if you are never there on weekends to attend the town soccer tournament. It is also challenging to join with a local church knowing you will not be present most of the time. The invitation to serve on a church board is declined, which in turn further decreases the sense of connection. In this way, owning a second home can increase the sense of a fragmented identity.

It is already difficult to maintain a coherent identity narrative in this modern world affected by global crises and events far removed from the power to control or influence them.¹⁸ Although adding the stress of living in two places at once might seem to compound the pressure of daily life, researchers Williams and Van Patten have found that second homes present the opportunity for individuals to choose their life meaning from a wider array of possibilities. Instead of shrinking options, the second home expands a person's identity narrative and gives them a greater sense of control over their lives.¹⁹ Furthermore, the second home presents an opportunity to live a more personalized life.²⁰ They can "flexibly invest themselves in a variety of places in a variety of times to suit a particular season, stage or sensibility."²¹ Contrary to appearances, second homes can actually provide an ontological security in the midst of a rapidly changing world.²² This is one reason people continue to purchase second homes, and travel a significant

¹⁸ Ibid., 36.

¹⁹ Ibid., 37.

²⁰ Ibid., 38.

²¹ Ibid., 34.

²² Ibid., 48.

distance to them on a regular basis, despite the difficulties and challenges. It is not a nomadic lifestyle; it is pilgrimage.

Richard Stedman, professor in the Department of Natural Resources at Cornell University and a prolific leisure studies researcher, writes,

Loyalty to the second home may be viewed either as a signature of mobility or it may challenge the notion of mobility. If well-off segments of society are so mobile, why is second-home ownership such a burgeoning phenomenon? Why don't we flit from place to place rather than tying ourselves down with the worries and responsibilities of a second home? If the essence of modernity is the 'today a show in New York City, next weekend diving off Grand Cayman' lifestyle, in comparison, second-home ownership requires investment of time in a place.²³

Common sense would indicate that people with significant financial resources and mobility would choose to travel widely and eschew the opportunity to be committed to yet another community. The rise in second home ownership, however, indicates that more people in this demographic are choosing to devote time, energy, and resources to yet another community. Stedman analyzes the habits of second-home owners. He suggests that second homes “represent a more foundational grounding for people—individuals, families and even multiple generations—perhaps even more so than a person's 'primary' residence.”²⁴ For some, a second home may become the place where community is more acutely experienced. A second home does not mean second in importance.

²³ Richard C. Stedman, “Places of Escape: Second-home Meanings in Northern Wisconsin, USA,” in McIntyre, 129.

²⁴ Ibid.

Stedman focuses on the meaning of ‘home’ and ‘escape’ for second-home owners and the impact on place attachment.²⁵ Second-home owners are not tourists who are intent on seeking out the spectacular in an environment. Neither are they quite like the local residents who tend to develop an attachment to place based on everyday experiences over a length of time.²⁶ It has long been assumed that second-home owners do not form as deep an attachment to place as the local residents. Stedman, however, asserts that second-home owners might actually form greater attachment because they are choosing a place intentionally.²⁷

Stedman chose Vilas County, a region thick with lakes and shore frontage, in north-central Wisconsin, to test his theory. At the time of his study (2000) over half of the county’s housing was classified as seasonal. One thousand property owners were chosen at random to participate in his survey with a 72.1% response rate. Three groups of respondents were identified: year-round residents, second-home owners who identified themselves as utilizing their dwellings often and second-home owners who visited their properties sporadically.²⁸ Through extensive surveys Stedman focused on three pursuits: recreational activities, social relationships, and political involvement.²⁹ His conclusions are significant: “the primary message from this analysis is that second-home owners who

²⁵ His findings could have significant impact on the church’s ability to respond to this unique population.

²⁶ Stedman, 130.

²⁷ Ibid., 132.

²⁸ Ibid., 135-137.

²⁹ Ibid., 137. Local social engagement was assessed by responses to four questions related to the second-home locale: How many people do you know on a first-name basis? How often do you interact socially with others? How many people would miss you if you did not see them? How many people do you consider close friends?

spend time at their property are more involved with the lake politically and recreationally, and are no less involved socially, than year-round residents.”³⁰ Indeed, the second-home owners presented a larger attachment to place than the year-round residents.

Stedman discovered that the most significant predictor for attachment was among those who consider their place an escape from civilization. This was a higher predictor than other variables such as length of ownership, social relationship, or even the activities pursued in that locale. In contrast to widely held assumptions about place attachment, length of property ownership did not have a bearing on attachment in this study.³¹ The link between the desire to escape and the depth of attachment is significant.³² It is also clear that these second-home owners have a much stronger attachment to place than previously assumed.

Home *And* Away

In their publication, *Escape Attempts: the Theory and Practice of Resistance to Everyday Life*, sociologists Stanley Cohen and Laurie Taylor identify three different avenues taken by people facing the boredom of routine daily life. Their argument is summarized in *Home and Away: Revisiting ‘Escape’ in the Context of Second Homes* by leisure researchers McIntyre, Roggenbuck, and Williams. In broad terms, there are three reactions to the routine of daily life. For some, the rituals of home provide stability and pleasure. These people see no reason to travel far to create space. They are home at

³⁰ Ibid., 138.

³¹ Ibid., 141-142.

³² Ibid., 144.

home. Others discover that daily life is a drain and routine feels like a prison. These people often end up rejecting structure and choose an alternative route through the responsibilities of life. They avoid long-term commitments and seek novel experiences. The third group configures their lives in such a way as to provide genuine—though temporary—escape from the burden of routine life.³³ This typology has its limits, for each group has a nuanced set of needs. Nevertheless, it is useful for the discussion at hand because the need to escape is genuine and can be met by the “free area” of a second home.³⁴

The second home is one way to escape routine yet feel anchored at the same time. The combination of freedom of mobility and an experience of rootedness causes deep feelings of attachment. “For many, it seems that the second home plays this role, sustaining tradition, stability, and family bonding in a way that the primary home has lost the ability to do.”³⁵ For many, the second home becomes the home of the heart.

Williams and Van Patten suggest that people may not have to locate their identity in only one place but could devote themselves to several places. Home becomes flexible, not fixed to a location, but to a variety of places, dependent upon emotional investment.³⁶ Social scientists Harvey C. Perkins and David C. Thorns observe that very few people end up turning their second home into their primary home, despite their devotion to that place. “Second-home owners escape their primary homes for a simpler life during their

³³ Norman McIntyre, Joseph W. Roggenbuck, and Daniel R. Williams, “Home and Away: Revisiting ‘Escape’ in the Context of Second Homes,” in McIntyre, 115.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ McIntyre, “Introduction,” 13.

³⁶ Williams and Van Patten, 34.

holidays and, once satiated, escape their second homes to have a more challenging, complex and stimulating life for the remainder of the time. In this process, primary and second homes become extensions of each other—both in a sense home, and a place of escape.”³⁷ The two homes do not compete for emotional attention, but the two settings function cooperatively.

McIntyre and his fellow researchers recommend that the concepts of ‘home’ and ‘away’ be seen on a continuum of experience rather than as either/or.³⁸ Time spent in the primary or secondary home can have reciprocal benefit for time spent in the other locale. These two homes are not incongruent or in conflict; instead they both add to the narrative of a complex life.

The Power of Escape: Attention Restoration Theory

The yearning for rootedness and the value of an attachment to place was explored in the previous chapter. The benefit of ‘escape’, however, is worth examining in more detail at this time.

Stephen Kaplan, professor of psychology at the University of Michigan, codified the benefits of escape in his development of Attention Restoration Theory, building on earlier concepts by William James.³⁹ In his article, *The Restorative Benefits of Nature:*

³⁷ Harvey C. Perkins and David C. Thorns, “Home Away from Home: The Primary/Second-home Relationship,” in McIntyre, 80.

³⁸ McIntyre, Roggenbuck, and Williams, 124.

³⁹ Stephen Kaplan, "The Restorative Benefits of Nature: Toward an Integrative Framework," *Journal Of Environmental Psychology* 15, no. 3 (September 1995): 169, accessed April 18, 2016, [http://dx.doi.org.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/10.1016/0272-4944\(95\)90001-2](http://dx.doi.org.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/10.1016/0272-4944(95)90001-2).

Toward an Integrative Framework, he begins with distinguishing several types of attention.

Directed attention refers to the kind of attention necessary to focus on a task or object that may not, by itself, attract attention. Difficult projects at work, boring but complicated homework, or even intense or prolonged business meetings can demand this kind of directed attention. Such attention requires effort, is under voluntary control to a certain extent, and is vital in the ability to focus. It is, however, also susceptible to fatigue. Anyone who finishes an extensive project and is drained afterward has suffered this fatigue.⁴⁰

Directed attention is critically important for problem solving, especially when new or unexpected variables are introduced. While directed attention may not seem as important as knowledge or skill in tackling a problem, it possesses a certain inhibitory capacity, helping us to know when to act or refrain. When directed attention is diminished by fatigue, people say or do things they probably should not. They show signs of irritability and a lack of focus. A lapse in directed attention can be costly. Surgeons, for example, need direct attention during all aspects of surgery. They cannot afford inattention.

Directed attention fatigue and what is commonly known as stress are related but not the same. Stress is an organism's adaptive response to a potentially negative situation.⁴¹ Stress can also leave us depleted and have an impact on performance. Kaplan conjectures that what is often blamed on stress may actually be more related to directed

⁴⁰ Ibid., 170.

⁴¹ Ibid., 177.

attention fatigue. When this fatigue is addressed, individuals are more able to deal with stressful situations because their attention is restored. He also notes that attention fatigue appears more gradually than stress, but it is also slower to recover.⁴²

Directed attention is necessary for effective problem solving, but it is vulnerable to fatigue. The challenge is to ascertain the kind of rest needed to bring about the quickest and most effective recovery of directed attention. Kaplan's Attention Restoration Theory provides some answers. Sleep is a common response, but it is not sufficient on its own. Kaplan's theory proposes settings where *involuntary attention* can function in the foreground, allowing directed attention to rest. Involuntary attention occurs when attention is diverted towards something without conscious effort. It can be experienced negatively: a driver, distracted by wildflowers along the edge of the interstate, can find him/herself veering off the pavement. It can also be a positive experience: for example, stopping to smell the roses on the way to the mailbox. Kaplan chooses to substitute the term *fascination* for involuntary attention to avoid confusion.⁴³ There are several kinds of fascination that can have a restorative effect on directed attention. For example, Kaplan describes watching car racing as 'hard' fascination in contrast to walking in the woods as 'soft' fascination. For fascination to be curative, it requires a restorative environment.

Kaplan identifies four factors that make for a restorative environment, providing conditions for fascination to function in the foreground. First, the subject must 'get away' from the original environment. Natural settings are often preferred because they particularly effective at resting directed attention and provide breathing space for

⁴² Ibid., 179.

⁴³ Ibid., 172.

reflection.⁴⁴ Second, the new environment needs to be fascinating enough to engage the mind in something else in a meaningful way.⁴⁵ Third, the surroundings must have extent. In other words, the atmosphere must be rich and detailed enough to be seen as a world apart from daily life.⁴⁶

Landscape artists have long understood the restorative effects of even cultivated outdoor environments. In his development of city parks, landscape architect F.L. Olmsted employed what he called “the Beautiful ... to create a sense of the peacefulness of nature and to soothe and restore the spirit.”⁴⁷ This pastoral style was the hallmark of his park designs, which he crafted to provide a venue for “unconscious or indirect recreation.”⁴⁸

Fourth, the setting needs to be compatible with the experience the person is seeking. Surprisingly, Kaplan reports that many people find that functioning in a natural setting requires less effort even though the person may be more familiar with ‘civilized’ settings.⁴⁹ It is crucial to note that an environment that does not match intended use may prove more distracting and place more demands on directed attention. For example, a person who expects to go skiing at an alpine resort but struggles with the difficult terrain or gets lost on the mountain will not feel rested. Such ‘vacations’ do not benefit directed

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 174.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 173.

⁴⁷ Charles E. Beveridge, “Olmsted-His Essential Theory,” *National Association for Olmsted Parks*, last modified August 22, 2016, accessed September 20, 2016, <http://www.olmsted.org/the-olmsted-legacy/olmsted-theory-and-design-principles/olmsted-his-essential-theory>.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Kaplan, 174.

attention fatigue. The benefits of play are lost amidst the tension of problem solving. Vacations that leave one exhausted probably required too much directed attention.

Drawing upon Attention Restoration Theory, Lillehammer University College professor Tore Bjerke and fellow researchers propose that second homes in a natural environment have both a stress reducing and an attention restorative effect.⁵⁰

Physiological stress recovery is faster and more complete in a natural landscape. The ability to escape has a curative effect on second-home owners, especially those whose homes are in places of natural beauty.

The Lure of the Local

Tourists are taking a vacation from commitment. They are seeking to escape responsibility and relax for a moment. Yet there are times when tourists fall in love with a particular locale. They may even ‘go steady’ with that special spot for years, eventually purchasing a second home as that place takes on personal meaning.⁵¹ In contrast to tourists, second-home owners return to the same place year after year, increasing a sense of responsibility to the local community and reinforcing identity within that community.⁵² In many ways, second-home owners are more like pilgrims starting from a place of rootedness, traveling on a journey, reaching a destination and returning home transformed.

⁵⁰ Tore Bjerke, Bjørn P. Kaltenborn, and Joar Vittersø, “Cabin Life: Restorative and Affective Aspects,” in McIntyre, 89.

⁵¹ Seija Tuulentie, “Tourists Making Themselves at Home: Second Homes as a Part of Tourist Careers,” in McIntyre, 146.

⁵² Perkins and Thorns, 75.

Canadian geographer Edward Relph developed the notion of *insiderness* in relationship to place. The more powerfully a setting engenders a feeling of belonging, the more strongly it becomes a place to that person.⁵³ For Relph, existential insiderness is when place is “experienced without deliberate and self-conscious reflection yet is full with significances.”⁵⁴ This is a good description of what it means to feel ‘at home’. When tourists experience this insiderness, it is not uncommon for them to slow down and search for identity in that place. They often report experiencing a moment of epiphany when they realize home has found them.⁵⁵ In this way, leisure time can become a means to self-understanding and discovery. A second home may actually be a modern attempt to have “an authentic rooted identity somewhere.”⁵⁶ The frenzy of daily life can cause family members to lose touch with each other even while living under the same roof at their primary homes. The second home can become the place where the immediate family reconnects. This reinforces the importance of the second-home experience. In fact, *geobiography* has become a way to describe a person’s life story based on the meaning of places within their life narrative.⁵⁷

According to Pauli Tapani Karjalainen, geography professor at the University of Joensuu, Finland, geobiography recognizes that the notion of place can include “physical,

⁵³ David Seamon, “A Singular Impact: Edward Relph’s *Place and Placelessness*,” *Environmental and Architectural Phenomenology Newsletter* 7, no.3 (Fall 1996): 5-8, accessed April 20, 2016, <http://www.arch.ksu.edu/seamon/Relph.htm>

⁵⁴ Edward Relph, quoted in Seamon, 5.

⁵⁵ Tuulentie, 152.

⁵⁶ McIntyre, “Introduction,” 13.

⁵⁷ Tuulentie, 152.

sensual, emotional, social, economic and cultural” dimensions.⁵⁸ Such places exist simultaneously and are deeply personal and memory-laden. Therefore, “no two persons have ever seen the same place.”⁵⁹ Keeping such geobiographical elements in mind aids the task of the narrative self. Geobiography reflects the combination of place, memory and the self.⁶⁰ There is a recognition that place and time coincide in the life narrative.

The lure of the local is to find a place for oneself in the story of that particular place. Curiously, this locale is imbued with an air of authenticity often enhanced by the locals who already have a sense of rootedness which the second-home owner is looking for.⁶¹ The seasonal resident is often willing to trade some of their mobility for a taste of deeper relationship and community.⁶²

Where is the Church?

The church has an exceptional opportunity to satisfy this desire for community by coming alongside the second-home owner. The church must, however, be willing to let go of its traditional need for regular attendance and reliable participation. Furthermore, discipleship cannot be accomplished with a conventional programmatic approach.

⁵⁸ Pauli Tapani Karjalainen, “On Geobiography,” accessed September 20, 2016, http://www.eki.ee/km/place/pdf/kp3_05_Karjalainen.pdf.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Williams and Van Patten, 34.

⁶² Richard C. Stedman, “Understanding Place Attachment Among Second Home Owners,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 50, no.2 (October 2006): 187, accessed April 18, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0002764206290633>.

There are many examples of how the church is reaching out to people on the move in unique ways. There are trucker chapels for long distance drivers. Cruise ship chaplains—often volunteers—meet the needs of temporary passengers as well as crew. A Christian Ministry in the National Parks was founded in 1951 with a vision for providing interdenominational services for park visitors and employees. Soldiers for Christ ride the highways to minister to the biker community. These populations are highly mobile, not seeking to be rooted in any locale. However, none of these ministries directly address the dual need of mobility and rootedness that is presented most profoundly by second-home owners.⁶³

Currently, there is little training within the North American church context that speaks directly to the reality of people desiring both mobility and rootedness. Although there is not much in the literature to date to show that the church is aware of this challenge, there are isolated incidences. Copper Mountain Community Church is one of the oldest on-mountain churches in Colorado. Their open-air pavilion at 11,000 feet provides an opportunity for people to gather for worship surrounded by majestic mountains. Pastor Dale Holland reflects, “When I’m up here and I see how beautiful it is, and some of the emotions of people that are up here, it’s an absolute joy and it energizes me.”⁶⁴

⁶³ It could be argued that in the case of biker gangs, rootedness comes through the community of riders, not through place. Similarly, National Park vacationers who spend the summer in their RVs may be surrounded by a tight-knit community of fellow travelers. It would be interesting to investigate what place attachment means in these mobile populations.

⁶⁴ R. Scott Rappold, "Faithful skiers find religion at 11,000 feet," *Gazette* (Colorado Springs, CO), February 25, 2013, accessed April 18, 2016, <http://gazette.com/faithful-skiers-find-religion-at-11000-feet/article/151459>.

Nearby, other worshipers gather inside at the Vail Interfaith Chapel which hosts five different Christian groups and a Jewish congregation. One participant remarks, “We’ve met other part-time residents, which is a real plus.”⁶⁵ The church community has provided new friends for skiing and snowshoeing.

Church communities like these will provide key insights for the church of the future as this population expands. In their book *AND: The Gathered and Scattered Church*, Hugh Halter and Matt Smay are correct in articulating that the next generation of churches will not be centered on buildings, budgets or big names.⁶⁶ They believe that the gathering (in whatever form it develops), must make people want to scatter out into the world. The focus cannot be consumer-driven and inward. Instead, the future belongs to congregations who will invite people to experience their story within God’s bigger story.⁶⁷ Churches that are reaching out to second-home owners in resort communities have long understood the need to be innovative in gathering and scattering.

Conclusion

Amenity migration is a recent phenomenon in North America in response to the stress of living in an increasingly complex world. Some seasonal homes are modest by today’s standards yet provide some of the same emotional benefits as second homes purchased by the more wealthy. In either case, a second home is one way these new

⁶⁵ Joanne Kaufman, "For Some Weekenders, Ski-In, Ski-Out Religion," *New York Times*, January 30, 2004, accessed April 18, 2016, LexisNexis Academic.

⁶⁶ Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *AND: The Gathered and Scattered Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 198, Kindle.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 185.

migrants temporarily escape the routine of daily life. This escape is a form of pilgrimage for their journey includes leaving a rooted place, journeying far, arriving at a meaningful destination that will transform them, and returning transformed. Furthermore, these second homes provide an opportunity to enlarge a person's identity narrative and give them a greater sense of control over their lives.

These second-home owners also have a need, however, to attach to the place to which they are escaping. Research indicates that the most significant factor for attachment to these second-homes is the extent to which they are considered a place for escape.

There is a need to not only root but also to rest. Restorative rest is accomplished best through fascination amid a natural setting. For many, this fascination is a form of play. Physiological stress recovery is faster and more complete in a natural landscape. The church that can reach these people under such conditions will have a rare opportunity to encourage them to follow the Way of Jesus. The church that can play outdoors with these second-home owners may become part of their geobiography. The church can play a role in their pilgrimage and, therefore, in their transformation. It is time to focus attention on the characteristics of play, particularly how an adequate theology of play can lay the foundation for reaching second-home owners desiring to escape the routine of daily life.

CHAPTER FIVE: UNDERSTANDING PLAY

Introduction

Leisure study experts have identified two deep, felt-needs driving the second-home owner: the need to escape from the grind of daily living, accompanied by the need to attach to a place that has personal meaning. These findings offer significant information to churches in resort communities seeking to invite second-home owners to follow the Way of Jesus.

Traditional church communities have some skill in helping people establish a connection to place. Church buildings and programs can help people feel a bond to a particular place. Church membership can encourage people to invest their time, talent, and treasure in the life of a local church. Churches in resort communities have a unique opportunity to piggyback on a well-established attachment to the resort itself. This is particularly helpful when there is no established church building, as is often the case in resort areas.

The greater challenge for churches in resort areas is to address the second-home owners' need to escape the daily grind of living. People who are trying to escape are not likely to respond enthusiastically to traditional church invitations for involvement, which typically require greater responsibility and commitment. Second-home owners' intermittent attendance will not permit ongoing consistent attendance in traditional discipleship programs. They may shy away from any participation, for fear that additional commitment will be asked of them. After several weeks absence, they will not appreciate the well-intentioned remark, "Gee, we've missed you in worship/Bible study/men's

group these past few weeks.” The felt-need identified as ‘desire to escape,’ calls for a different approach from resort churches.

Since many second-home owners arrive at their “home away from home” ready to play, it makes sense that the best way for churches to come alongside second-home owners is to play with them. The church that finds a way to play with second-home owners will become a church that can better reach them with opportunities to follow the Way of Jesus. In fact, the North American church in general would benefit by recapturing recreation as a way to connect people with Jesus.

This chapter will begin by proposing a working definition of play, gleaned from both a theological and developmental viewpoint. Several theological perspectives of play will then be analyzed. The tension between work and play will be highlighted as well as the role of play in foreshadowing the kingdom of God. A brief appraisal of ecstatic experience in the history of the church offers a glimpse into the significance of play, followed by an explanation of the patterns of play articulated by human development researchers. The chapter concludes with a catalogue of play personality types. Ultimately, this chapter sets the stage for reaching second-home owners through play by investigating the contribution of Christian outdoor adventure strategies.

Characteristics of Play

Theologian Robert K. Johnston has had a longstanding interest in the intersection of theology and play, beginning with his doctoral thesis entitled “Theology and Play,” while a Ph.D. candidate at Duke University. His work is significant because few theologians have analyzed the significance of play in Christian theology. In his book, *The*

Christian at Play, he offers a detailed definition of play that includes many characteristics identified by other play researchers as well:

I would understand play as that activity which is freely and spontaneously entered into, but which, once begun, has its own design, its own rules or order, which must be followed so that the play activity may continue. The player is called into play by a potential co-player and/or play object, and while at play, treats other players and/or "playthings" as personal, creating with them a community that can be characterized by "I-Thou" rather than "I-It" relationships. This play has a new time (a playtime) and a new space (a playground) which function as "parentheses" in the life and world of the player. The concerns of everyday life come to a temporary standstill in the mind of the player; and the boundaries of his or her world are redefined. Play, to be play, must be entered into without outside purpose; it cannot be connected with a material interest or ulterior motive, for then the boundaries of the playground and the limits of the playtime are violated. But though play is an end in itself, it can nevertheless have several consequences. Chief among these are the joy and release, the personal fulfillment, the remembering of our common humanity, and the presentiment of the sacred, which the player sometimes experiences in and through the activity. One's participation in the adventure of playing, even given the risk of injury or defeat, finds resolution at the end of the experience, and one re-enters ongoing life in a new spirit of thanksgiving and celebration. The player is a changed individual because of the playtime, his or her life having been enlarged beyond the workaday world.¹

Johnston's description, while lengthy, provides excellent grounding for a thorough discussion of play. Many researchers who study play are hesitant to offer a definitive definition, for fear of limiting the freedom of play, making Johnston's explanation even more valuable. Stuart Brown, psychiatrist, clinical researcher, and founding director of the National Institute of Play prefers to begin with identifying the properties of play, all of which are echoed in Johnston's definition. For Brown, play is done for its own sake, appearing apparently purposeless. Play must be voluntary and must have an inherent attraction. There is a sense where play is outside of normal time and space; it takes on a life of its own. Players also get lost in play; they experience a diminished consciousness

¹ Robert K. Johnston, *The Christian at Play* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 34.

of self. There is an improvisational capacity inherent in play as well as desire for it to last longer than it does.² Furthermore, Brown insists that there is no way to truly comprehend play unless you can remember what it feels like to play.³

Two of Johnston's characteristics are of particular importance for the church. First, there is the notion that the player is "called into play by a potential co-player and/or play object"⁴ which effectively creates a community. This characteristic creates instantaneous community, which is more "I-Thou" than "I-It."⁵ This characteristic of play becomes formative in a theology of play.

Second, Johnston is more willing than most to be flexible with the benefits of play. Like Brown, he insists that play must be an end in itself. He recognizes, however, that play can have beneficial consequences, which make play attractive. There is joy and release, a sense of personal satisfaction, an identification of our communal life together, and an awareness of the holy that can be experienced, and valued, by the player.⁶ Moreover, the player emerges from their play changed; their life has been broadened beyond the daily grind.⁷

As a clinical researcher, Brown was initially reluctant to investigate animal play to better understand human play. Some researchers, such as Johnston, do not believe that

² Stuart L. Brown and Christopher C. Vaughan, *Play: How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul* (New York, NY: Avery, 2009), 17, Kindle.

³ Ibid., 20.

⁴ Johnston, 34.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 44.

animals play. Johnston believes that play requires an “attitude uniquely human.”⁸ He conjectures that what seems like play in animals is merely instinct at work: it is “almost automatic movement rather than play.”⁹ Brown comes at this question from a different direction.

Neuroscientists, developmental biologists, psychologists, social scientists, and researchers from every point of the scientific compass now know that play is a profound biological process. It has evolved over eons in many animal species to promote survival. It shapes the brain and makes animals smarter and more adaptable. In higher animals, it fosters empathy and makes possible complex social groups. For us, play lies at the core of creativity and innovation.¹⁰

Brown asserts that in play, animals learn about their environment and about the rules of engagement with others. This is particularly true of the rough-and-tumble play seen in wolves, polar bears, and other mammals. Research indicates that animals that play learn how to “navigate their world and adapt to it.”¹¹

Play, as well as a lack of play, shapes the brain.¹² This is true of animals and children. It also continues to be true for human adults as they age. New cognitive combinations are experimented with during play.¹³ Even daydreaming thoughts leave an imprint on the brain.¹⁴ In a landmark study conducted in the 1960’s by researcher Marian Diamond, it was discovered that rats raised in an enriched environment—combined with

⁸ Ibid., 50.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Brown, 4-5.

¹¹ Ibid., 33.

¹² Ibid., 34.

¹³ Ibid., 37.

¹⁴ Ibid., 36.

socializing opportunities—possessed more developed gray matter in their brains than the control subjects.¹⁵ Brown acknowledges, “Play was the true key for the rats’ brain development. They tussled and chewed, wrestled with each other, explored and interacted with the toys; they investigated and invited other rats to play. Those were active things they did. The rats were not passively soaking up their interesting surroundings.”¹⁶ This activity changed their brain structure. In contrast, solitary play did not show the same results in whole-brain growth.¹⁷

Play promotes the development of new neural connections that are essential to brain organization.¹⁸ The absence of play over time can lead to a sense of stagnation, hopelessness, and listlessness. The proverb “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy,” is more than folk wisdom. Research indicates that a play deficit adversely affects the ability to sustain a sense of pleasure and well-being.¹⁹

In a rare personal moment Brown reflects on his grand vision of play:

...play seems to be an essential part of any organizing system. Without odd variations thrown in, systems proceed in lockstep fashion. On a cosmic scale, the formation of galaxies, stars, and solar systems was possible because of slight irregularities in the fabric of the universe that came into existence shortly after the Big Bang. Without these irregularities, the universe would be a homogenous soup of energy. Play is the swing off the rhythm in music, the bounce in the ball, the dance that delivers us from the lockstep march of life. It is the “meaningless” moment that makes the day memorable and worthwhile. I believe we live in a playful universe.²⁰

¹⁵ Ibid., 39.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 41.

¹⁹ Ibid., 43.

For Brown, play is not confined to humans and animals; it may even perform a role in the creation of the universe. This should come as no surprise to Christians. Since God created the universe, God's play nature should be manifest in the cosmos as well.

Sam Keen and Play

After offering his definition of play, Johnston goes on to make a detailed analysis and comparison with the play theologies of Sam Keen and Jürgen Moltmann, whose theories formed a framework for future theologies of play.

Johnston begins his study of Sam Keen's philosophy by identifying Keen's understanding of humanity.²¹ Keen locates the *dis-ease* of humanity in its fear of its own finitude and the distress of life's fragility.²² This dis-ease manifests itself in a disconnection between body and mind.²³ As a result, Keen asserts that human beings are not able to tell a coherent and meaningful story of their past, present, and future.²⁴ There is no meaningful identity without an authentic story. According to Johnston, "Keen's therapeutic psychology, his theological anthropology, is thus committed to helping an individual shed his limited identity as a 'dis-eased' person in order that he might *know* his full and balanced humanity."²⁵ Keen's prescription for this ailment is play.²⁶ Through

²⁰ Ibid., 46.

²¹ Keen is one of the respondents to Moltmann's seminal work, *Theology of Play*. His reaction is included in the English translation of Moltmann's book. He is a philosopher, not a Christian theologian. Johnston's analysis of Keen is noted here because of its impact on future theologies.

²² Johnston, 56.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 57.

play, a person may rediscover their story or discover it anew. “To tell one’s story is to incarnate one’s history.”²⁷ Keen emphasizes the freedom to trust one’s own body and do what feels good as a way to restore health.²⁸ Keen asserts that moments of play that give a person a sense of wonder and awe, are critical to health and wholeness.²⁹ Keen locates the source of healing, not in a distant God, but in our own natural story. Personal experience in play stands in for religious authority.³⁰

Johnston rejects Keen’s use of play as a means of salvation. Play, while meaningful, is an unacceptable substitute for the Christian story that Keen rejects.³¹ Johnston also finds that Keen’s play contains a “touch of madness”³² that he finds disturbing.³³ Johnston attributes this to Keen’s own biography as an educated white male workaholic who, upon discovering the liberating power of play, casts off restraint and discovers a new idol.³⁴ Ultimately, Johnston finds Keen’s theology of play to be self-focused, self-serving, and ignorant of the struggles of the oppressed.³⁵ Keen’s approach is not adequate for the church hoping to play well with others.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 57. Italics in original.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 62.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

³² *Ibid.*, 63.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

Jürgen Moltmann and Play

Keene offers play as an antidote to humanity's dis-ease. Jürgen Moltmann, in contrast, offers play as an enlivening hope in a Christian response to human suffering. Moltmann readily admits it is difficult to play while the world itself is suffering and in pain. Nevertheless, "it is possible that in playing we can anticipate our liberation and with laughing rid ourselves of the bonds which alienate us from real life."³⁶ At times, play has been utilized by ruling authorities as a way to release pent-up frustration within a population.³⁷ Such games provide a means of escape from daily toil. When play is viewed in this way, however, it becomes a tool to stabilize morale and reinforce submission to the governing powers.³⁸ Play becomes a liberating force when it opens up space for the players to realize "critical perspectives for change in an otherwise burdensome world."³⁹

At its best, Moltmann believes that play helps us to visualize an alternate future. Like Keen, Moltmann believes play has much to offer in the telling of our story: "We are then no longer playing merely with the past in order to escape it for a while, but we are increasingly playing with the future in order to get to know it."⁴⁰ Unlike Keen, Moltmann's use of story ultimately points to a future with Jesus Christ at its center.

Moltmann also finds that play encourages us to think creatively and open our throats in laughter. When laughter strikes we may let go of fear. Freedom rises where

³⁶Jürgen Moltmann, Robert E. Neale, Sam Keen, and David LeRoy Miller, *Theology of Play*, trans. Reinhard Ulrich (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1972), 3.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 7. For example, bread and circus games in the Roman Empire.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

people discover that they no longer have to be ruled by fear.⁴¹ Johnston describes Moltmann's vision as an eschatological one: "[a] beautiful, playful God who is bringing into being our playful future with him."⁴² Humanity participates in God's future by living in the present with hope and joy. Moltmann declares, "Life is not a struggle, but preplay, not preparatory labor, but prevision of the future life of rejoicing. The elements of perishable time, which—as projection of the future—abide in eternity, are found in the moments of grace and faith, of joy and love, of openness and hope, and not in the moments of glory due to achievements and efforts."⁴³ Hope and play are intertwined for Moltmann.

Johnston is critical of Moltmann's theology of play for its inconsistency on two counts. First, Johnston decries that creation becomes subsumed in Moltmann's larger understanding of redemption. Creation (including play) becomes a subset of eschatology and therefore is diminished in its own right.⁴⁴ Second, Johnston finds that Moltmann focuses too much on the function of play, relegating it to a means for liberating humankind.⁴⁵ Ultimately, Johnston declares true play must be unnecessary, or it is no longer considered authentic play. When play becomes a means to an end, it calls into question whether the activity is still play at all.

⁴¹ Ibid., 14.

⁴² Johnston, 68.

⁴³ Moltmann, et al., 35.

⁴⁴ Johnston, 69.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 70-71. It could be that Johnston underestimates the value of play in Moltmann's eschatological perspective. Johnston highly values play's freedom from purpose.

C.S. Lewis and Play

Johnston argues that both Keen and Moltmann are so concerned with the larger issues of life they have misshaped play into another kind of work.⁴⁶ Instead, he turns to the literary work of C.S. Lewis to unfold a theology of play that he believes remains true to the spirit of play. In his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis reveals experiences of play in his childhood years that stunned him by their ability to take him beyond himself.⁴⁷ It was many years before he could articulate these experiences of “Joy.”⁴⁸ For Lewis, Joy is a technical term, which he capitalizes throughout his memoir. Lewis’ Joy is distinct from pleasure because unlike the latter, Joy is never in our power.⁴⁹ The sensation Lewis calls Joy was something he did not seek directly but that somehow found him as he was consumed in play. Joy opened him to the transcendent. Later on, Lewis came to recognize Joy’s “bright shadow” as holiness fully experienced, in a personal encounter with Jesus Christ.⁵⁰

Lewis discovered that reading stories for pleasure could be one way for people to find themselves open to the possibility of the transcendent.⁵¹ A story could embody or facilitate this Joy. A good story may not be true in the technical sense, but it could make the real more real. Johnston proposes, “When children read about enchanted woods, they

⁴⁶ Ibid., 71.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 75.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York, NY: Harcourt, 1955), 9.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 77.

⁵¹ Ibid., 76.

do not begin to despise the real woods.”⁵² They may, however, begin to experience the real woods as enchanted in a way that opens them up to the possibility of Joy.

Lewis perceives that Joy is not confined to the player’s experience but may be the result of God reaching out to the player “from the world’s end.”⁵³ This sense of touching the transcendent cannot be manufactured or manipulated. “Play need not surprise an individual with Joy, but it can.”⁵⁴ Lewis’ insightful contribution to play causes the whole of life to become full of the possibility of Joy. Johnston is clear that Lewis only recognizes his experience of Joy as an encounter with Jesus Christ in hindsight.⁵⁵ The power of the experience draws him forward, but its name is revealed much later. Johnston rightly observes,

By allowing us to transcend ourselves and enter a new time and space, play can become the avenue through which God communes with us. ...In its push toward communion with others, play can be the context wherein one is first met by the Other. As the human spirit freely gives itself in the search for kindred spirits, i.e., for “I-Thou” relationships, that experience can be serendipitously transformed by the Holy Spirit. Thus play can become an encounter with the Holy.⁵⁶

God may playfully reach out toward the player in play, transforming the entire relationship. The link between play and a divine encounter is not universal, or predetermined, or even necessary. It is, however, valuable to keep in mind that God may commune with us amidst the pleasure and joy of play. Like Lewis, we too, may be surprised by Joy.

⁵² Johnston, 76.

⁵³ Lewis, 180.

⁵⁴ Johnston, 79.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 80.

Play and Purpose

While Moltmann does find play useful for helping to liberate humankind from oppressive forces, he is also wary of a utilitarian view of play. For him the value of usefulness is a trap that needs to be tripped and rendered powerless. Moltmann argues that if religion, faith, or the church, are viewed as legitimate only because they are useful, then there will be crisis when the culture no longer finds them effective. A devastating corollary is revealed in this train of thought: a person who finds value in their life only because they are making a contribution to the greater good will find themselves in crisis when they no longer feel useful.⁵⁷ Moltmann sees this happening in our culture, but finds cause for hope, not despair. He believes that something or someone can have meaning even if they are not useful in a utilitarian sense. For instance, when we cease using God as a problem solver, then we are finally free to actually and unreservedly enjoy God.⁵⁸ “Purpose-free rejoicing in God may then take the place of the uses and abuses of God.”⁵⁹

In a similar vein, since the church is no longer needed to support the state or solidify class structure, the meaningfulness of the church in the larger culture becomes doubtful. The church increasingly finds its usefulness confined, not to addressing ultimate questions, but to “rendering service to society.”⁶⁰ Serving others is not inappropriate; it should not, however, be mistaken as the sole purpose for the church’s existence. Moltmann calls on the church to reverse this perception with a deeper

⁵⁷ Moltmann, et al., 65.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 64.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 66.

invitation to enjoy God's presence by way of play. Play is not valuable because it is useful; it is treasured because it is pleasurable.⁶¹

Moltmann observes that when it comes to the arenas of relaxation and leisure the church does not know how to respond to the culture.⁶² Even during leisure activities, people cannot leave their work behind: they continue to talk about it and complain about it. Their play looks very much like their work—full of productivity and purpose.⁶³ Moltmann encourages the church in a different direction. “That is why Christian congregations should not use their allotted portion of the time free of labor and domination entirely for educational and socioethical activities. These activities may be necessary but they are not yet free. Christians should experiment with the possibilities of creative freedom.”⁶⁴ In other words, the church can actually teach the culture how to play. He suggests that the church's commendable tendency to be-there-for-others must point toward the higher way of being-there-with-others in the kingdom.⁶⁵ Otherwise the church's posture becomes a subtle form of domination. Being-with has the greater potential for play, pointing away from us and toward God's kingdom.

Work, Play and the Kingdom

Ben Witherington, in his book *The Rest of Life: Rest, Play, Eating, Studying, Sex from a Kingdom Perspective*, makes explicit what Moltmann hints at. Witherington

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., 8.

⁶³ Ibid., 69.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 69-70.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 71.

claims that in reality, play is a foreshadowing of the kingdom of God. Play is not merely a holiday from work. Instead it is a “momentary escape into the future reality that God intended for us all.”⁶⁶ Witherington believes that play has a theological function; it is a foretaste of better times ahead.⁶⁷ Play gives us a glimpse into God’s kingdom, a “harmonious world where all manner of things are well.”⁶⁸ Therefore, play is not just a sign of the future, it is also a symbol of the future.⁶⁹ Witherington eloquently promises, “Playing now, singing now, dancing now is tuning up and practicing for eternity, for Kingdom come, for becoming God’s very music, and in small measure we experience the joy and ecstasy and music of that great communion with the One who is our joy, in advance when we do so.”⁷⁰ Through play, we catch a glimpse of the Kingdom of God on earth.

We cannot altogether avoid making play into work on occasion. Our search for meaning and purpose is embedded too deeply into our psyche, if not our souls. We can, however, be aware of the trap of transmuting play into work; we can and must ward off attempts to drain out the joy for others and for ourselves.

In North America there is a tension between work and play. In his essay, *Economy and Pleasure*, Wendell Berry contends that the pleasure industry abounds in

⁶⁶ Ben Witherington, *The Rest of Life: Rest, Play, Eating, Studying, Sex from a Kingdom Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012), 56.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 62.

part because pleasure has evaporated from our work and home lives.⁷¹ Our culture turns to the pursuit of pleasure to find respite from this sense of defeat.⁷² He reflects, “The nearly intolerable irony in our dissatisfaction is that we have removed pleasure from our work in order to remove ‘drudgery’ from our lives.”⁷³ He believes that we have been deceived into believing that hard work is toil and only play is pleasurable. Berry recalls his experience of the tobacco harvest in his home state of Kentucky. Tobacco cutting is some of the hardest work he had ever done, and yet the most satisfying. There is a good amount of drudgery but there is also an accompanying sense of community, as the work is done with neighbors and friends. He fondly recalls the “ritual of remembrance” in telling the old, old stories.⁷⁴ Co-laborers call to memory those who are no longer walking the rows with the living, the ancestors of the harvest.

Most intriguing is Berry’s recollection of the inter-generational work that is almost totally absent in our culture today. “The children play at the grown-ups’ work, as well as at their own play. In their play the children learn to work; they learn to know their elders and their country. And the presence of playing children means invariably that the grown-ups play too from time to time.”⁷⁵ The adults reminisce in play and the children taste the possibility of joy in labor.

⁷¹ Berry, 215.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 216.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 217.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Berry concludes this essay with a story of spending a day with his five-year old granddaughter.⁷⁶ One morning they hitched up a team of horses and hauled loads of dirt for the floor of the barn. It was a long, cold day but one spent together, grandfather and granddaughter. Towards dusk on the long ride back to the house his granddaughter was extremely quiet. He was unsure of her thoughts. Was she exhausted? Cold? Homesick? Then she turned to him and proclaimed, “Wendell, isn’t it fun?”⁷⁷

Some will argue that play is not as important as work or rest. After all, without sleep we die and without work we starve. Others, such as Witherington, argue that play may be even more crucial than these because it is an end in itself, not just a means to some other end.⁷⁸ It has the capability to birth its own joy. Johnston insists that players do not escape the everyday world through play because the real world remains in the back of their minds. Nevertheless he does believe they step into a different space in time in order to play.⁷⁹ There can be a sense in which time even seems to stand still. Witherington believes that play opens the door for the kingdom to break into our world. When the kingdom arrives in its fullness, the end will have arrived in glory. There will be no more work; instead we will enjoy God forever.⁸⁰ Play today is a foretaste of the kingdom.

On the other hand, there are those who must work even in their play. They find it impossible to simply be in the moment; their work mentality breaks into even the most

⁷⁶ Ibid., 218.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Witherington, 63.

⁷⁹ Johnston, 35.

⁸⁰ Witherington, 63.

pleasurable play pursuits. They feel complete only when they are producing something. They are workaholics, a serious affliction that requires copious doses of good play. They also seem to never be at rest.⁸¹ Witherington perceives work, play, and rest as a balanced trinity:

In the nexus of work, rest, and play, maintaining a creative balance, like a ballerina on her toes, we dance back and forth among these three poles, realizing we have not merely been saved to serve and for good works; we have been saved to rejoice in the freedom we have to be mini-creators like God, and, yes, we have been saved to relax and appreciate what we have accomplished at the end of a long week.⁸²

After all, God demonstrates a balance of work, rest, and play. In creation, we understand that God worked and rested. Witherington posits that God, in creating the universe, also played. God's humor is evident in the platypus, God's eye for beauty in the Painted Desert. God did not need to create the universe; God's activity had great meaning but it was not necessary. This is play.⁸³ It is time for the church to proclaim that human beings are created in the image of a playful God and lead the way in re-creating healthy and holy living through recreation.

Play and the Church

Some might question whether the church has ever played well. Barbara Ehrenreich, in her work, *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy*, argues that the church has a long and complicated history with expressions of joy, including play.

⁸¹ See Attention Restoration Theory in chapter four.

⁸² Ben Witherington, *Work: A Kingdom Perspective on Labor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011), 135.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 150.

Her study focuses on the loss of ecstatic pleasure, historically found in dance and music in ritual celebrations across cultures and religions.⁸⁴ She wonders why there is so little ecstatic ritual remaining, particularly in western culture, and what such a loss might mean for the future.

Ehrenreich points out that ecstatic experience was found in both early church culture and Roman cultic worship.⁸⁵ It was not uniform, however. It appears that Paul's church was more restrained than other gatherings.⁸⁶ Ehrenreich ponders why. Perhaps Paul set a rubric for keeping such occurrences manageable, in order to attract less attention from the authorities. It could also be that Paul desired a deeper sense of community that would outlast any temporary ecstatic state.⁸⁷ Indeed, the early church became known for how they cared for one another. By the end of the first century, the church begins to build form and structure and ecstatic experiences are edged to the margins of ritual experience. By the middle of the fourth century, religious dancing was severely curtailed, especially for women.⁸⁸ More changes were to follow. Ehrenreich explains, "'Prophesying' became the business of the priest; singing was relegated to a specialized choir; and that characteristic feature of early Christian worship—the

⁸⁴ Barbara Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, 2007), 19.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

communal meal or feast—shriveled into a morsel that could only tantalize the hungry.”⁸⁹
 This movement away from ecstatic ritual continued gradually for centuries.

In the Middle Ages, Catholic churches across Europe had no pews and few seats. Ehrenreich asserts this made room for dancing and celebrating.⁹⁰ Religious authorities discovered that they had very limited control over such experiences, which led to a sense of anxiety. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, church officials began to ban such ecstatic joy from church buildings. They metaphorically sent the joy out of the church. The laity could still frolic and play, even celebrating saint days, but only outside of the church. Ehrenreich contends, “In its battle with the ecstatic strain within Christianity, the Church, no doubt inadvertently, invented carnival.”⁹¹ There had long been festive activities outside the church, but Ehrenreich insists that the dramatic increase in outdoor festivities during this time was due to prohibitions within church structures.⁹²

Scholars use two different words to delineate this shift: *festivity* connotes celebrations happening outside the church, and *ritual* speaks of those occurring inside.⁹³ Understandably, something crucial was lost in this transition. Ecstatic experience was no longer tethered to a religious event resulting in a “certain secularization of communal pleasure.”⁹⁴ The opportunity for communion with the transcendent was now restricted to

⁸⁹ Ibid., 76.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 77.

⁹¹ Ibid., 78.

⁹² Ibid., 78-79. She also contends that in an effort to make up for the loss of freedom, the church at this time began to beautify church buildings in earnest, adding such controlled pageantry as incense.

⁹³ Ibid., 92-93.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 93.

the ritual of a “morsel of bread and sip of wine.”⁹⁵ In addition, the secularization of festivity led to awareness that such festive moments of joy were not only the result of divine encounters, but also occurred because of human planning and activity.⁹⁶

Even secularized festivity became more subdued during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for various reasons. The state may have curtailed such experiences, in part to stabilize the work force, as the influence of capitalism grew.⁹⁷ Others, including Ehrenreich, suppose that those in power viewed such festivities as increasingly vulgar and dangerous.⁹⁸ Originally, these festivities encompassed all social circles and classes in a mingling of the masses. Over time, however, such celebrations were seen as gathering places for rebellion and sedition.⁹⁹ Furthermore, the medieval nobleman, who once enjoyed cavorting with the locals, was now required to take up residence at the court and make small talk. “Once a warrior, he became a courtier.”¹⁰⁰

The Protestant Reformation also played a part in carnival’s dissolution. Martin Luther did seek to expunge the superstitions surrounding saints, and thus their holidays, but he did not object to pleasurable communal gatherings, in general.¹⁰¹ Initially, the movement surrounding Luther utilized carnival gatherings to their advantage, a fact that

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 94.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 100.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 102.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 103.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 114.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 106.

infuriated the power structures of the time.¹⁰² Calvin, in contrast, disparaged all festive behavior from the outset, including dancing, drinking, and sports.¹⁰³ Under this influence, Christian behavior became increasingly serious.

Ehrenreich concludes that ecstatic ritual threatens social hierarchy and therefore the powerful believe they must control it at all costs. “At the height of the festivity, we step out of our assigned roles and statuses—of gender, ethnicity, tribe and rank—and into a brief utopia defined by egalitarianism, creativity, and mutual love.”¹⁰⁴ Some identify this as anarchy; others might perceive in it a glimpse of the Kingdom of God. A church that dares to offer an opportunity for collective joy through direct experience with the transcendent will be on the journey into play.

Patterns of Play

In truth, this journey begins at our creation; we begin to play while still being formed by God in our mother’s womb. Even secular researchers agree that the grounding basis of all play begins in the womb as the fetus kicks and pokes.

Play emerges when the infant makes eye contact with a caregiver (often the mother) and each experience a spontaneous surge of emotion. “As they lock eyes, both mother and child are synchronizing the neural activity in the right cortex of each brain.”¹⁰⁵ Research shows that their brain currents are falling into sync with one

¹⁰² Ibid., 107.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 108.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 253.

¹⁰⁵ Brown, 81-82.

another.¹⁰⁶ This is called *attunement play* and is incredibly intimate. Abused children who missed this critical stage of play can become extremely brittle emotionally.¹⁰⁷ I propose that this attunement can also happen during worship when the worshipper senses God's pleasure in times of adoration. Mystical experiences may be one facet of attunement with God's immanent presence.

The second pattern of movement is *body play* as the infant discovers their toes and the rest of their body.¹⁰⁸ Learning through movement joins with all the other patterns of play and continues throughout the rest of life. "Movement play lights up the brain and fosters learning, innovation, flexibility, adaptability, and resilience."¹⁰⁹ Throughout Christian history, physical posture and movement have been part of worship. Since the Reformation, however, certain branches of the Western church have steadily moved away from embodied worship. This is unfortunate and hampers play with God.

Object play, the third pattern of play, is observed when a toddler drops their spoon from their high chair. Later on as an adult, they will attempt to throw a ball through a hoop over their heads. Such movement prepares the brain for the unexpected and unusual.¹¹⁰ It begins with manipulating how a spoon works to provide nourishment and develops into creativity. (What else can I do with a spoon?)

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 82.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 83.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 84.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 85.

Object play is found in many Sunday school classrooms. It is often lacking, however, in adult spiritual formation. Tangible objects can concretize conceptual learning. They can also enhance transcendent experiences with the divine as seen in the Lord's Supper and foot washing rituals.

Imaginative play represents a fourth pattern, and is the key to innovation and creativity. It also helps develop coping skills for problems that arise. Pretend play gives practice in thinking outside the box. The ability to suspend belief and enter into imaginative play begins early. A three year old will feed her doll a bottle and then exclaim with dismay, "Oh, my, dolly spit up her milk." The ability to imagine is central to emotional resiliency and empathy throughout life.¹¹¹

Acting out a Bible story is not imaginative play. The characters are set and the end of the story is fixed. The church—and especially evangelical Protestant churches—struggles with imaginative play because of rigid commitments to the biblical story line. The limited liberty in biblical interpretation discourages the reading of scripture with curiosity and wonder. Imaginative play could include improvising what might happen if Moses and Paul met at a Christmas party. Everyone present understands the encounter is not real, but thinking imaginatively opens up the possibility for new insights.

Brown astutely observes, "Humans are social animals, and play is the gas that drives the engine of social competence."¹¹² *Social play*, the fifth pattern, contains several variants. Friendship and belonging play begins as parallel play in toddlers and develops into mutual play over time. The sophisticated friendship pattern exhibited by mutual play

¹¹¹ Ibid., 86.

¹¹² Ibid., 87-88.

teaches empathy and cooperation and extends throughout life.¹¹³ Rough and tumble play develops social awareness, fairness, and cooperation.¹¹⁴ Superhero play, good guy/bad guy play, and even tag fall into this subset of play.¹¹⁵ Lack of experience with this kind of play has been linked to poor impulse control later in life.¹¹⁶ Children do not initiate celebratory and ritual play, though such play can foster good memories and are important in adult play.¹¹⁷

The church does incorporate ritual and celebratory play into its habits. Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost, Saint days and feasts all incorporate this facet of social play. We know Jesus attended weddings and he describes the kingdom of heaven as a banquet. Yet, much of the culture does not find the church to be a fun-loving place. The church can lead they way in reclaiming festive play in our culture.

The vast domain of *storytelling and narrative play* constitutes a sixth play pattern. Storytelling is a key distinctive to being human, separating us from the rest of the animal kingdom. Telling stories is a fundamental way that humans make sense of the universe and find meaning in their lives.¹¹⁸ The church does grasp the value of this kind of play. We enter into the larger stream of human history when we tell our story. God is the

¹¹³ Ibid., 88.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 90.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 89.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 91.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 92.

original storyteller. When we tell our story we become a part of God's great story. Testimony can be play if we stop taking it so seriously.

The final pattern, *transformative-integrative and creative play*, emphasizes the use of fantasy to transcend the reality of daily life. In the process, creative new ideas come to the forefront; new inventions emerge. Einstein, using his imagination to ride a streetcar at the speed of light to gain insight into his theory of relativity, is a good example of this pattern.¹¹⁹ Daydreaming and escapism are highly valued in this type of play.

Those in the church who treasure the words “we have never done it that way before,” will find this pattern of play most threatening. Trying on new ideas and living within them imaginatively for a time can create fertile ground for change to occur. Transformative-integrative play entails the possibility of transfiguration for both individuals and the church community.

Play Personalities

Many activities that adults consider play, are actually work, in disguise. The church needs to be aware of this temptation. Some of the characteristics of genuine play include the sense of losing time, letting go the consciousness of self, and the joy of doing something for its own sake, without a seeming purpose. Therefore, intent and attitude often define when play is occurring. For example, one person runs to burn calories, one runs to beat others, a third runs for the pleasure of the feeling of their muscles work and

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 93.

their lungs fill with fresh air. The internal experience of each person is different; not all are experiencing the benefit of play. “Play is a state of mind, rather than an activity.”¹²⁰

One of the chief characteristics of authentic play is its social nature. For example, art that encourages community participation can bind people together, allowing them the opportunity for deep connection. For Brown, it can be “literally a communion.”¹²¹ Brown misses community dances that have been traded in for individual television watching.¹²² One more opportunity for play is now missing from our repertoire.

Brown identifies eight play personalities. He does not claim this to be a scientific assessment, but it may still be helpful for the church as it seeks to connect with the players around us in our context. First, the *Joker* is fairly self-descriptive. He is the one playing practical jokes and enjoying nonsense.¹²³ The *Kinesthete* is Brown’s second type and includes those people who find themselves most happy when their bodies are moving. This may include dancers and athletes. There are certainly children who need to move in order to quiet their minds enough to learn.¹²⁴ Third, the *Explorers* among us are those who keep searching for new places, experiences or even ideas.¹²⁵ The *Competitor* truly enjoys playing to win. This fourth may seem like a contradiction to the properties of

¹²⁰ Ibid., 60.

¹²¹ Ibid., 62.

¹²² Ibid., 63.

¹²³ Ibid., 65.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 67.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

true play, but the Competitor loses herself to the euphoria of winning. Unfortunately, what is play for the Competitor can quickly become anything but, to those around her.¹²⁶

Fifth, the *Director* is a born organizer. Play for this personality type involves planning events and gathering people. At their best, they throw great parties. At their worst, they become social manipulators.¹²⁷ The *Collector* is the sixth in this series; he is thrilled by the discovery of adding a new coin to his collection or a new ski area to his list.¹²⁸ The *Artist/Creator* has fun making things.¹²⁹ In contrast, the eighth type engages her imagination as the *Storyteller*. Novelists as well as those who read novels with joyful abandon are both included here. They find great pleasure in enlivening characters in a story.¹³⁰ They tend to be incredibly flexible players for they can find a story in any situation.

Research indicates that those who continue to play into adulthood are not only less likely to develop dementia and other neurological problems, they are also less likely to develop other health issues.¹³¹ Those who stop playing as they age become less flexible mentally, less able to think creatively, and find less pleasure in the world around them.¹³² Brown declares, “When we stop playing, we start dying.”¹³³ Ultimately,

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 68.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 69.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid., 70.

¹³² Ibid., 71.

Christians who stop playing also become rigid and lose the ability to be open to the transcendent presence of God. They are certainly less fun.

Many congregations conduct spiritual gifts inventories as part of their discipleship programs. Imagine the benefits of offering a play personality assessment as well. Such a survey would help prepare the church hoping to reach their surrounding neighborhood with opportunities to follow the Way of Jesus.

Conclusion

This chapter articulated the essential characteristics of play as well as analyzed several theologies of play. The following chapter will build on this research by adding the contribution of Christian outdoor adventure strategies. Together, these two chapters will provide a solid foundation for churches seeking to engage others in play as one way to follow the Way of Jesus.

¹³³ Ibid., 76.

CHAPTER SIX: LEARNING TO PLAY WELL

Warm Up Run: Introduction

Sugarloaf has been a part of my life since the age of two. It's been my lifelong playground. A place where I can escape the pressures of the world and be one with the elements.

—Amy Taisey
Sugarloafer since 1985

Sugarloafers love to play. Recreation re-creates their bodies, minds, and spirits. For these people, nature is a playground as well as a setting for transcendent experiences. They work hard and then they want to play hard. Returning to the wild is their remedy to escape the daily grind. This chapter investigates play as it relates to the natural environment and resort ministry opportunities. It begins with a brief exploration of the Three Ages as adapted and presented by Leonard Sweet, which will provide a useful frame of reference for those seeking to play. The chapter continues with an exploration of the role of nature and play, especially as they relate to Christian outdoor adventure principles. The distinction between various learning styles utilized by outdoor adventure programs will be examined. There will be reflection on the link between the outside environment and transcendent encounters with the Divine. The role of play in pilgrimage will be explored as well. The chapter concludes by describing a number of play ideas for resort area ministries seeking to encourage others to follow the Way of Jesus. David Miller contends that any theology of play should be playful.¹ Therefore this chapter seeks to embody a playful spirit.

¹ David L. Miller, *Gods and Games: Toward a Theology of Play* (Mill Valley, CA: Stillpoint Digital Press, 2013), 407. Kindle.

The Bunny Hill: Godplayers and other Playmates

In his book, *The Well-Played Life: Why Pleasing God Doesn't Have to Be Such Hard Work*, Leonard Sweet adapts sociologist Peter Laslett's classification of the ages of life for his own use.² Sweet's concerns revolve around developing Christian disciples as *Godplayers*: those who "make the world a better place simply by being in it."³ He contends that the way people participate in Godplay is related to age; however, not chronological age, but play age. In the First Age of life (0-30) Sweet proposes that the critical questions include: "How do I learn to live in God's pleasure? and How do I learn to play in my relationship with God?"⁴ The tasks of this age take us from birth well into traditional adulthood. Nevertheless, Sweet discovers people spend many years settling on answers to these questions. According to Sweet, the Second Age of life (30-60) has a different set of questions to address. "How can I retain or regain my sense of play amidst the complexities of my life? How can my relationship with God help me find joy in my relationships with family, church, community, and creation? How can I become a 'real' player in a culture of FEAR (false expectations and assumptions of what's real)?"⁵

Godplayers living in the Third Age of life (60-90) continue to engage life by asking how they may be world changers, coaches for others, and healers in a hurting

² Leonard I. Sweet, *The Well-played Life: Why Pleasing God Doesn't Have to Be Such Hard Work* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2014), 24.

³ Ibid., 15.

⁴ Ibid., 26.

⁵ Ibid.

world.⁶ Godplayers do not retire; they allow God to re-create them for new play. Sweet reflects, “Third Agers are not called to save the world. But Third Agers are called to show the world the way in which it can be saved.”⁷ Organizing life’s questions into these three ages provides a framework for discipleship, and can help churches discern the life stage of those whom they are trying to reach.

Sweet’s Third Age Godplayers sound similar to Dan McAdams description of generative people. In his essay, “An American Life Story,” psychologist McAdams takes his lead from Erik Erikson, defining generative people as those who seek to promote the good for future generations and the well-being of others.⁸ Erikson believed that generativity was the prime virtue of adulthood.⁹ McAdams studies what he calls generative superstars, those who are exemplary in their service to others, especially the next generation. He is fascinated with his discovery that highly generative Americans tend to tell their life story around the theme of redemption. Their personal stories begin with a realization that they were blessed early in life, that others were not similarly blessed, and that they could do something about it.¹⁰ Generative people develop a set of core beliefs, often within a religious framework, that become key to their self-identity.¹¹ Experiencing setbacks along the way only proves to make them stronger. Their lives are

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 26.

⁸ Dan McAdams, “An American Life Story,” in *Leading Lives That Matter: What We Should Do and Who We Should Be*, Mark R. Schwehn and Dorothy C. Bass, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006), 473.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 476.

¹¹ Ibid.

viewed as works in progress, even if that progress is small or slow, and they believe that change will happen, though maybe not in their lifetimes.¹² These super generative people are willing to invest themselves in the big picture over the long haul for the benefit of others. McAdams concludes that generative people make a difference in the world because they believe they can: they tell a better story.¹³

I envisage that many generative people find their center in the redemptive story of Jesus Christ and are indeed Godplayers. For them, changing the world brings joy and a deep sense of satisfaction. Though McAdams does not use the word play specifically, many play elements can be seen throughout his description. Imagine the impact that a church full of such Godplayers would make if they were fully released to play in God's garden of earth.

Humans are not meant to play alone. Play begins right after birth with attunement between the newborn and her caregiver. Even what is often perceived as solitary play still contains an element in which the player is playing with an object or idea.¹⁴ Likewise, God invites the church to play with those nearby, in their community. The Celts practiced intentional hospitality, reaching out to their neighbors, even inviting the community into their space for conversation and worship. Today's church can make a similar invitation to come out and play.

Steve Hoekstra, pastor at Vail Chapel, was pleased to discover that play could be a vehicle for ministry.

¹² Ibid., 474.

¹³ Ibid., 476.

¹⁴ In a sense there is no solitary play. Even what we think of as individual play has been formed corporately.

At Vail, it was different. I discovered that relationships are built through play, so I skied with them. People at Vail aren't concerned so much with where you come from or what you do; their first question is often, 'where did you ski today?' Later on might come the questions 'what do you do?' and 'where are you from?' This was a real revelation for me. Yes, people still want to talk about themselves, but they want to begin with where and how they've been playing: 'Have you tried these new skis or taken that new trail?'¹⁵

Hoekstra discovered that play is a universal language, at least in ski resorts. Play builds bridges between people in ways that merely talking and listening cannot. Moltmann understood the difference between being there for others and being there with others.¹⁶ Sometimes the church misses the power in simply being with others, especially being with others in play.

Trekking In the Backcountry: Playing in Nature

"The early church was a product of the great outdoors. The contemporary church is a product of the not-so-great indoors."¹⁷ Outdoor settings enlivened Jesus' parables. The mountains were God's first temples, and Jesus often retreated uphill to pray. Currently, most church programming occurs indoors in climate controlled spaces with room darkening shades, if there are even windows at all. Such settings limit play possibilities. This retreat from nature echoes the nature-deficit disorder identified by Richard Louv, and experienced by many in our culture today.

¹⁵ Skip Schwarz, *Servants on the Slopes: Stories of Faith Over Failure, and the Miracle of Changed Lives* (Hampden, ME: SkiRev Press, 2016), 252.

¹⁶ Moltmann, 71.

¹⁷ Leonard I. Sweet, *Eleven Genetic Gateways to Spiritual Awakening* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 101.

In his book, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder*, Louv declares that our current lack of direct experience with nature has several unintended consequences including a “diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, and higher rates of physical and emotional illnesses.”¹⁸ Well-established research also indicates a connection between lack of access to green space and higher rates of crime, as well as depression.¹⁹ Louv declares that North American children know quite a few facts about the natural world, but the culture discourages them from actually playing in nature.²⁰

Louv reinvigorates the theory of “loose parts” developed by architect Simon Nicholson in the 1970’s. The idea is that loose parts—materials that can be moved around, tinkered with and changed—provide the most stimulating environment for creativity. There are plenty of loose parts in nature including: flowers, grasses, pinecones, leaves, water and dirt.²¹ Louv exclaims, “Nature, which excites all the senses, remains the richest source of loose parts.”²² Well-meaning adults will sometimes level a seemingly neglected meadow to build a soccer or baseball field. In doing so, however, they further limit the loose parts available for creative, self-directed play. “Indeed, research suggests that children, when left to their own devices, are drawn to the rough edges of such parks, the ravines and rocky inclines, the natural vegetation. A park may be neatly trimmed and

¹⁸ Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-deficit Disorder* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2008), 36.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 1.

²¹ Ibid., 87.

²² Ibid.

landscaped, but the natural corners and edges where children once played can be lost in translation.”²³ Leonard Sweet often reminds his students: Jesus spent his life living at the edges.²⁴ To join him, Christians must head to the margins as well. How fascinating it is to realize that the curious children are already there.

Direct exposure to the natural world is critical for the healthy development of all of our senses.²⁵ Without personal contact with the natural environment, senses atrophy and children lose their sense of wonder.²⁶ Unfortunately, experiencing life through technology is becoming of higher value than direct experience with physical landscape. Louv exclaims, “Not surprisingly, as the young grow up in a world of narrow yet overwhelming sensory input, many of them develop a wired, know-it-all state of mind. That which cannot be Googled does not count.”²⁷ A recent National Geographic article is a case in point. In *Unplugging The Selfie Generation*, author Timothy Egan recounts his trip rafting down the Grand Canyon with his son, Casey, a millennial. A recent survey reports that 71 percent of millennials indicate they would be “very uncomfortable” on a one-week vacation without connectivity to the web.²⁸ In fact, Egan was dismayed by his own son’s frustration with being “unplugged,” and his perceived lack of enchantment

²³ Ibid., 117.

²⁴ Leonard I. Sweet, Zoom Meeting Chat transcript October 26, 2015. “In some ways, Jesus didn’t come to ‘center’ you but to de-center you (as I call it)...to decenter you and to push you to the edges, to the margins.”

²⁵ Louv, 55.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 68.

²⁸ Timothy Egan, “Unplugging the Selfie Generation,” *National Geographic* (October 2016): 39. The baby boomer figure was much lower: 33 percent.

with the natural environs. Casey replied, “Everyone I know likes to share—publicly—what we’re doing. We are social travelers. If you can’t share it now, is it really happening?”²⁹ The National Park service is quite concerned about millennial attitudes toward nature. Director Jonathan Jarvis observes that this generation is farther removed from the natural world than any previous [American] generation.³⁰ Louv, Egan, and Jarvis would agree there has been a shift from valuing real-world experiences to virtual experiences.³¹

Not only are millennials reticent to unplug, many are fearful of nature. Jarvis experienced an epiphany when he heard young people respond negatively to a classic national park poster depicting Grand Teton National Park: “It looked scary to them. Empty. Forbidding. Not welcoming. They said, Where are all the people?”³² The church in a resort ministry setting will be dealing with people more inclined to appreciate nature. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that not all members of the family feel the same way about a trek into the backcountry, or a ride up the chairlift. The resort church has a unique opportunity to invite people to follow the Way of Jesus through God’s creation. Dislocation experiences—in this case spending time in the natural environment—can be pivotal opportunities for spiritual encounters with the Divine.

²⁹ Ibid., 46.

³⁰ Ibid., 38.

³¹ Barbara Ehrenreich echoes this shift from direct experience to passive observation in her concern for the loss of ecstatic experience. See chapter five.

³² Egan, 40.

Tilted Pond Ice: Outdoor Adventure, Play and Risk

Louv maintains that nature offers something the urban landscape and technological connectivity cannot: a setting where young people can “easily contemplate infinity and eternity.”³³ Providing such an environment is one of the chief goals of Christian outdoor adventure.

In his book, *God of Adventure: Exploring How God Teaches Through Adventure and Calls Us to Do the Same*, outdoor adventure leader Bruce Dunning defines Christian outdoor adventure as a “Bible-based strategy that leaders use to design and guide controlled risk experiences where people are encouraged to say yes to God.”³⁴ Dunning explores the Bible searching for circumstances where God uses adventure to teach his people. He concludes that God does indeed use adventure as a teaching tool.³⁵ Curiously, Dunning does not include a natural setting in his definition, perhaps because it is assumed. He challenges the church to acknowledge that “adventure is God’s idea and that the God of the Bible is a God of adventure.”³⁶ This way of thinking opens creative avenues for the church.

Dunning identifies five core concepts that are key to Christian adventure programming, including willingness to risk, trust, experience testing, embrace the presence of the Holy Spirit, and follow God. These concepts provide the framework that facilitates Christian outdoor adventure experiences that change lives. The first concept is

³³ Louv, 98.

³⁴ Bruce A. Dunning, *God of Adventure: Exploring How God Teaches through Adventure and Calls Us to Do the Same* (Belleville, ON: Essence Publishers, 2012), 26.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

the willingness to risk. The word *risk* is a variant of *risco*, which includes in its definition, “the possibility of suffering or loss.”³⁷ This word was first expressed among sailors and tradesmen in fifteenth century Italy and Spain, who put their cargo at *risco* each time they set out on a journey, hoping to make a great profit.³⁸ There is no true adventure without the possibility of risk. It is little wonder that the church is perceived as boring, since risk is minimized at every turn. Understandably, in Christian adventure programming, there is a difference between perceived and actual risk. The leaders certainly do not want their participants to die. Nevertheless, God uses risk to teach us how to live: risk requires faith and challenges us to reach out to God.³⁹

In his definition of play, Johnston acknowledges the importance of risk.⁴⁰ Sweet remarks that humans, and even organizations, can mature when they are willing to take risks.⁴¹ “When there is no indication that we are up and about and active at the edges, pushing the envelope, taking risks, playing with fire and water, the prognosis of a healthy future is doubtful.”⁴² One of the challenges for Sweet’s Third Agers is the willingness to take risks. Comfort and complacency hinders growth; risk opens the doors to growth. Jesus himself is a risk-taker and invites his followers to join him in the world of risk.⁴³

³⁷ Ibid., 31.

³⁸ Ibid., 71.

³⁹ Ibid., 77.

⁴⁰ Johnston, 34.

⁴¹ Sweet, *The Well-Played Life*, 168.

⁴² Ibid., 169.

⁴³ Ibid.

In her book, *Deep Play*, naturalist Diane Ackerman declares that play is risk.⁴⁴ She finds that the word *play* itself has roots in the Indo-European *plegan*, which means “to risk, chance, expose oneself to hazard.”⁴⁵ Additionally, Ackerman observes the word *prayer* is a derivation of the Latin *precarious*, which speaks of risk and uncertainty.⁴⁶ In a way, play and prayer are two sides of the same coin.⁴⁷

Trusting, the second core concept of Christian outdoor adventure, is more readily understood as part of the biblical tradition. God is the only one worthy of our full, unconditional trust, but we must learn to trust others in our lives as well. Trust takes a long time to gain but it is also fragile—hence the dilemma. Adventure experiences present opportunities to build trust with others and with God. There are many in our culture today who have lost their trust in the church and then, by extension, in God. Carefully crafted adventure experiences can help people regain this trust over time.

Testing, the third core concept of Christian adventure, reveals strengths to be celebrated and weaknesses to be improved upon.⁴⁸ Many people have an aversion to being tested, but God does test individuals for their own good. Tests are powerful learning experiences, and God has used them throughout history. The church will develop a healthier theology of failure by embracing testing as way to growth. God’s Story is

⁴⁴ Diane Ackerman, *Deep Play* (New York, NY: Random House, 1999), 7.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 18.

⁴⁷ Healy’s understanding of a theodramatic approach to understanding Scripture and the movement of God in history affirms the value of risk in the Christian metanarrative. See Chapter two.

⁴⁸ Dunning, 100.

replete with people learning from their mistakes or weaknesses and maturing in their relationship with God during times of testing.

Dunning advises Christian adventure leaders to affirm the Holy Spirit's role in outdoor activities as the fourth principle. This is something that the church can readily support as it invites the community into adventure. Play can help people discover their interdependence with one another and with God. The surrounding culture's emphasis on self-esteem often leads people to think they can live life without God.⁴⁹ The church can be more intentional in sensing the Holy Spirit at work in the lives of others and affirm this presence.

Christian outdoor adventure leaders and participants both need to learn how to follow, the final core concept. While pilgrimage is a key metaphor for growth, it is important to realize that both the journey, and the destination are vital. Leaders and participants together follow God in the adventure. Although we are on the journey together, we must keep in mind that everyone is at a different stage in the adventure and in their relationship with God.⁵⁰ Leaders who do not follow, who are not willing to learn new things or to be transparent, rob participants of the opportunity to witness the humility necessary for growth. They do not provide a safe space for the self-discovery inherent in learning by doing.

These five core values—the willingness to risk, trust, experience testing, embrace the presence of the Holy Spirit, and follow God—provide the framework for building authentic outdoor adventure experiences. These principles should be a part of any

⁴⁹ Ibid., 110.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 127.

church's palette, but are especially critical for those working in a resort context where outdoor adventure is part of the thrill of play.

In another approach, outdoor leadership expert Ashley Denton also challenges the church to embody Jesus' message by taking it outdoors. More than half of Jesus' teachings happened outside, drawing upon his surroundings to lead others toward the kingdom of God.⁵¹

Denton suggests Five Smooth Stones of Wilderness Theology that frame his approach to outdoor learning experiences.⁵² The first stone is tempo: Jesus' life had a rhythm of hard work coupled with rest. This tempo should be emulated as we seek to engage our context.⁵³ Secondly, Denton identifies terrain and timing. Jesus took his disciples to the mountains and the sea, providing settings that inspired awe in God.⁵⁴ Once there, Jesus allowed times of trial (third stone), struggle and challenge. Environmental factors such as stormy seas and mountain hiking increased the stress.⁵⁵ Offering such adventure to others expands their comfort zone through precarious situations. Such situations can form character and develop community.⁵⁶ The fourth stone

⁵¹ Ashley Denton, *Christian Outdoor Leadership: Theology, Theory, and Practice* (Fort Collins, CO: Smooth Stone Publishing, 2011), 289.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 937.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 363.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 1366-1367.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1265-1268.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 379.

of trust can grow from such situations. The last stone, training, speaks to the multiplication of disciples that arises as a natural result of this process.⁵⁷

Jesus also took his disciples on journeys, which facilitated teachable moments. While these journeys often involved risk, Denton prefers to focus not on risk, but on trust.⁵⁸ He insists that there is no actual risk to trusting God, only perceived risk. He notes that Jesus did not push his disciples over the edge of risk. “There is a point where, if people are over-stressed, the learning curve goes down because survival becomes the focus.”⁵⁹ However, a journey that moves from orientation to disorientation to reorientation in a posture of trust, can produce deep and lasting change. Louv concurs: time spent in nature builds self-confidence because it offers opportunities for risk.⁶⁰

Denton challenges the church to let go of attractional models of evangelism and discipleship and embrace Jesus’ model of apprenticeship.⁶¹ Apprenticeship is incarnational rather than attractional; our models should be as well. Jesus was not giving people information, he was giving himself.⁶² His model of apprenticeship involved experiential learning in the natural environment.⁶³ Jesus’ classroom was primarily

⁵⁷ Ibid., 1377-1378.

⁵⁸ Dunning puts more emphasis on the role of risk in spiritual growth but the overall thrust is compatible.

⁵⁹ Denton, 910-912.

⁶⁰ Louv, 180.

⁶¹ Denton, 701-706.

⁶² Ibid., 899-902.

⁶³ Ibid., 839-847.

outdoors in a truly dynamic venue. Unlike an indoor, static classroom, the setting became part of the experience.⁶⁴ Jesus went into the wilderness to reconnect with his Father.

Denton insists that not every outside venue meets the definition of ‘wilderness’ for the purpose of spiritual transfiguration. He defines wilderness primarily “in terms of its remote proximity to civilization and its limited habitation.”⁶⁵ For a setting to function as a crucible for outdoor adventure, there must be a sense of seclusion.⁶⁶ Louv, in his definition of nature, goes one step farther, stressing the importance of the setting to engage our capacity for wonder.⁶⁷

For those seeking to reach out to second-home owners in resort settings, a hike or short drive can provide a ready wilderness setting. Those who minister in a ski resort can provide a sense of wilderness with a little imagination. Denton suggests that many of Jesus’ teachings were remembered and passed along because he connected them with unforgettable surroundings.⁶⁸ The environment cemented the teaching.

Denton classifies the five most common spiritual outcomes he finds in biblical journeys. He challenges those engaging in outdoor experiences to aim for these outcomes as well. He sees these as “spiritual fruits that seem to ripen through outdoor adventures.”⁶⁹ He offers them as an acrostic for ease in memorization, but hopes that

⁶⁴ Ibid., 881-884.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 1529-1530.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 2021-2022.

⁶⁷ Louv, 9.

⁶⁸ Denton, 2536-2541.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 4736.

leaders will not feel boxed in by his observations.⁷⁰ First, he challenges leaders to provide opportunities that may evoke an *awareness* of God's existence and presence through surveying his creation.⁷¹ *Belief* in Jesus Christ is the second fruit he calls leaders to look out for.⁷² Third is an appreciation for Christian *community*.⁷³ Denton hopes leaders will mold experiences that highlight the centering power of spiritual *discipline*; the fourth outcome.⁷⁴ Finally, Denton hopes outdoor adventure experiences will lead participants toward what he calls *examen*, referring to daily Christ-centered contemplation.⁷⁵ These five outcomes are not unique to outdoor adventure experiences; they should be a part of every church community's goals. Denton recognizes, however, that outdoor settings are well matched for these fruits. The church in a resort setting has more freedom in planting seeds for these results, allowing programing to serve outcomes.

Time for Ski School: Learning Styles

Dunning recognizes four diverse methods for learning, including learning by telling, by facilitating, by thinking, and by doing.⁷⁶ Traditionally the church has emphasized learning by telling through sermons and lectures as well as learning by

⁷⁰ Ibid., 4758-4759. ABCDE Model: Awareness, Belief, Community, Discipline, and Examen.

⁷¹ Ibid., 4807.

⁷² Ibid., 4808.

⁷³ Ibid., 4811.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 4814-4815.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 4817.

⁷⁶ Dunning, 18.

facilitating in the forms of Bible studies and Sunday school. Both these methods require heavy involvement by the leader and can unwittingly teach the participant to be passive.

In contrast, learning by thinking and by doing emphasize self-discovery and reflection. Both methods emphasize direct involvement, not passive assimilation of information. Learning by doing can be a cousin to play because it is experiential.⁷⁷

Chapter two included Sweet's description of his two children studying birds: one studying a dead bird in a paraffin tray, the other listening for bird calls in the meadow.

Sweet articulates that for his son to study birds in the wild his class had to travel to a place where they could experience birds as subjects, not objects. He writes, "And if you treat something like a subject, there is no *understanding* without *standing-under* it."⁷⁸

The church has traditionally been more comfortable with objective learning, i.e., dissection. However, "God did not send us a point to make: He sent us a person to know. God didn't send us a statement; God sent us a Savior. A living Lord."⁷⁹

Ackerman is critical of the church's emphasis on learning by telling. In her view, "Organized religion is an attempt to communicate religious mystery to people who have not experienced it, and most often the task falls to people who haven't experienced it either."⁸⁰ She claims that ritual and dogma are poor substitutes for direct experience and may even become idols. They too often function, not as a means to ecstatic experience,

⁷⁷ See chapter two: The Celtic tradition has long understood this approach to understanding theology, particularly in the experience of God as Creator.

⁷⁸ Sweet, "The Untold Story of the Road to Emmaus," 14.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ackerman, 105.

but as an end in themselves.⁸¹ Ackerman concludes, “As a result, the biggest threat to religious experience may well come from organized religion itself.”⁸²

Learning by doing, in an outdoor setting, is one way to help people awaken to the living story of God, and should be more expansively used by the church as a way to connect with the second-home owner culture. The growing field of Christian Outdoor Adventure can assist the church in its desire to invite others to follow the Way of Jesus.

Powder Dreams: Transcendence and Deep Play

Ackerman focuses on deep play, an ecstatic form of play, where all play elements are taken to an intense level.⁸³ She admits that transcendence, rapture, and ecstasy are not deep play themselves but are components of it.⁸⁴ Philosopher Jeremy Bentham is credited with coining the term *deep play*. He often used the phrase negatively to describe actions that were so risky it was considered irrational to attempt them; the risks of deep play outweighed the benefits.⁸⁵ Ackerman has re-signed this concept, embracing deep play for the same reasons Bentham rejected it. For her, heightened risk can lead to incredible possibilities.

Ackerman discovered that spiritual experience “offers a passionate form of deep play, whose peak moments are as subjective as they are intense.”⁸⁶ For this reason,

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 106.

⁸³ Ibid., 12.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 15-16.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 18.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 106.

Ackerman does not support organized religion, because she believes most creedal institutions actually disconnect us from the passion and sacredness of life.⁸⁷ Instead, Ackerman points to the power of nature, “Playing in nature rejuvenates the spirit while deepening insight.”⁸⁸ In her work, *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church*, Dean is adamant that transcendent practices, even in traditional religious settings, can have a lasting impact. Even after the intensity fades, “a track has been laid that once led to a holy place.”⁸⁹ That path may be traveled again. Dean agrees that natural settings, such as those found in outdoor adventure, are ideal for such encounters with the divine. She cautions, however, that these experiences must be framed within the Christian community, otherwise even these awe-inspiring moments can be hijacked by the culture and reinterpreted as self-focused and self-generating occurrences.⁹⁰

Louv is also more supportive of religious experience than Ackerman. He believes that separating children from nature separates them from their creator.⁹¹ Awe-inspiring natural surroundings can introduce children (and adults) to transcendence, instilling awareness that something larger is molding and shaping the universe. He agrees with Dean and outdoor adventure leaders, “Most people are either awakened to, or are

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 170.

⁸⁹ Kendra Creasy Dean, *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 201.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 201-202.

⁹¹ Louv, 299.

strengthened in, their spiritual journey by experiences in the natural world.’⁹² Churches cannot just talk about nature and the Creator God; they must provide ways for people to directly experience the Creator in nature.⁹³

Going Off-Piste: Pilgrimage and Play

Outdoor adventure can provide opportunities for such transcendent experiences to occur. Hiking, cycling, rock climbing, or skiing to a new location can be a kind of pilgrim journey, awakening a hyper-awareness to the possibility of a divine encounter. Ideally, such adventuring pilgrimages offer both an outward journey and an inward one. Second-home owners are seeking to get away from their daily routine as well as secure a deep attachment to place. Pilgrimage, as mentioned in chapter four, proves to be a powerful mechanism for meeting both needs. Dean claims that, at least for young people, play can function as pilgrimage. Play can shelter liminal spaces, allowing the young person to escape temporarily from the challenges of daily life.⁹⁴ Youth retreats, summer camp, conferences, intense worship experiences—all such play spaces—afford the chance to change a person’s vantage point, which also transforms how they experience God.⁹⁵ Dean cautions, that it is sometimes tempting to settle for simply an emotional experience rather than journeying farther out to a place that permits space for God to move.⁹⁶

⁹² Ibid., 302.

⁹³ For more information visit: National Religious Partnership for the Environment <http://www.nrpe.org>

⁹⁴ Dean, 207.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 205.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 206.

Sweet reminds us that the path is not a trail; it is a person.⁹⁷ The company we keep on the Way is also crucial. “Godplay is a group hike,”⁹⁸ Sweet reveals, “playing with God is an incarnational pilgrimage with relational requirements as well as missional directives.”⁹⁹ Who we travel with impacts the nature of the journey. Godplayers find joy in the journey even as it traverses through the wilderness. They play their way through life, encouraging other players to join them on the path that is Jesus Christ.

Like most living organisms, Godplayers need to grow down and up. Roots grow deep into the dark soil, which provides nutrients only the deep, dark can provide. Branches stretch toward the sun, seeking food only light can give. They grow in two directions at once. This image echoes the needs of second-home owners to deeply attach to place as well as reach out to new experiences, to escape. Understanding life as pilgrimage can do both. Sweet explains, “followers of Jesus always find themselves playing on two fronts. The pilgrim journey of playing with God is one that is both rooted and shooted, both backward and forward, both spiritual and corporeal, both unseen and seen. The dance of tradition and innovation, continuity and change, memory and imagination, is the pilgrim way to move through time.”¹⁰⁰ This is pilgrim play.

Mountains have long been perceived as sacred places, close to heaven. Many a pilgrim journey has led to the mountain. It is beneficial for people to have a holy place, set apart from regular routine that may trigger a state of radical openness to God. The

⁹⁷ Sweet, *The Well-played Life*, 51.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 76-77.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 77-78.

Celtic tradition understands the power of “thin places” and recognizes the immanency of the divine. “Sacred places are playgrounds for deep players.”¹⁰¹ Be aware, however, that truly authentic pilgrimages do not take people away from community but rather increase a sense of connection.¹⁰²

First Tracks: Novel Ideas For Resort Ministry

Sugarloaf Christian Ministry is aware that it has a unique opportunity to encounter those on pilgrimage to their sacred mountain. The ministry seeks to minister primarily to the self-identified Sugarloafer. This designation can include employees, locals, one-time visitors, or second-home owners. By definition, the ministry’s purpose is to reach beyond those who participate in Ministry programming to those we encounter on the hill and the après ski venues. The ministry seeks to let go of the attractional model of church in favor of being with and among the community. Those who are active in the ministry view themselves as fellow travelers, journeying with the Sugarloafers they meet along the pathway of faith. They understand that not everyone is on the same leg of the journey but everyone is on a journey. Our calling is to walk with others and encourage them on a journey toward Jesus. The ministry seeks to form temporary community with fellow travelers. Sometimes we journey together for weeks or months, sometimes it is just a day or an hour. This kind of ministry requires an open-handed understanding, always releasing people into God’s care.

¹⁰¹ Ackerman, 65.

¹⁰² Dean, 206.

Churches in resort communities are uniquely situated in the sacred play space for many people. Getting out on the playground is the key to inviting others on the pilgrim play-way of Jesus. It is important to remember, however, not everyone likes to play in the same way. One person's play is another person's work; play is often in the attitude. Some like the monkey bars; others prefer the swings. A multitude of play structures will be needed to reach such a diverse culture.

Before concluding this chapter, it is important to present a few concrete ideas for the playful church to consider. To begin, it is critical to recall that every church is a local church, and ideas are often not directly transferable. Beware the idol of technique.

Perhaps we all need to ask some prophetic questions regarding our own god of technique. "Why isn't technique bringing us the life we thought it would? Surely the god of technique must be powerful. Maybe he is daydreaming or using the toilet or traveling somewhere. Or maybe he's asleep, and we have to wake him up?" It's time to stop believing the lies about technique's capacity to control the outcomes. It's time to laugh at this false god and stop paying it so much respect. It's time to return to faith in the living God.¹⁰³

Techniques and programs are no substitute for discerning and following the faithful presence of God out into your own nearby playground.

Having offered this caution, it is time to consider several ways to play well with others. First, it is vital that Christians recapture the joy of play in their own lives and communities. Years ago, when the Sugarloaf ministry was discovering a rhythm for itself, it offered hiking trips and canoe adventures for folks connected with the church. It was hoped that the regulars might bring a friend or two with them, but that was not the focus. The intent was to build community among the very few local participants. Several friends still remember the hike up Little Cranberry and the low cloud cover that day

¹⁰³ Sparks, Soerens, and Friesen, 65.

which prevented the hikers from viewing the promised vista at the summit. All that work and no reward! Years later, they probably remember that adventure more vividly because of its challenges, not its mountaintop experience. The journey together built a community, playing their way toward Jesus.

The second stage is to invite others to play with us. After all, we are most comfortable in our own setting. This is a good intermediate step for churches that are unsure of how to enter another group's playground. Furthermore, Jesus calls us to hospitality; there are those just waiting for a sincere invitation they feel comfortable accepting. There are many churches, for example, that offer a Blessing of the Animals service once a year. This is a low-threshold event where the local community is encouraged to bring their pets with a playful attitude to the nearby church, trusting that both they, and their furry playmate, will be accepted. Do realize, however, that such play involves risk!

The third option is a corollary of the second. The church offers its idea in someone else's play space. Jesus invites us to "come and see" but also to "go and tell." At Sugarloaf, the Blessing of the Skis and Boards is becoming a local tradition. Similar to the Blessing of the Animals, skiers and riders are encouraged to come to a gathering place on the mountain—accessible only by skiing/riding—for a blessing. The service includes several short prayers for various groups on the mountain during the winter season including racers, ski patrollers, and vacationers. Prizes are awarded for the oldest set of equipment as well as the youngest and oldest Sugarloafers present. Everyone receives an "I've Been Blessed" sticker and together we recite a Mountain Blessing, which has become a favorite at Sugarloaf Christian Ministry:

May the mountain rise to greet you.

May the wind be always at your back.

May the sun shine warm upon your face,
and snow fall softly on the trails.

And with each run you take,

May God hold you in the palm of His hand.

This event melds the local culture's play space with the local resort church's outreach.

The blessing is also beginning to find its way into the lives of Sugarloafers, being used as a blessing for mountain weddings and funerals.

Several years ago, the Sugarloaf Ministry designed another event that reached out to resort vacationers in their play space and then invited them into church space. Working with the local chapter of Skiers and Snowboarders for Christ and the mountain's snowboard park staff, the Ministry hosted a rail jam outside the base lodge after the lifts closed for the day. Participants and observers were then invited to warm up at the Chapel with hot cocoa while viewing the premier of a high-quality snowboard movie produced by a Christian group aimed at reaching the snowboard population. Over two hundred young people attended the event held at the mountain chapel and the evening was considered a success. It certainly introduced those in attendance to the idea of following Jesus. While strategic follow-up was lacking, the evening presented the ministry as players willing to play in one of Maine's great playgrounds. The ministry traveled with young snowboarders by doing something the snowboarders love; rail jams and snowboard movies. Not everyone loves these activities but the journey together was worth it. For a short time, the entire room was on a pilgrim journey together.

The ministry worked cooperatively with several groups, including the mountain corporation, to conduct this event. Churches in resort areas must endeavor to have a good working relationship with the resort itself. Cultivating rapport with staff up and down the corporate ladder will make all the difference when it comes time to enter the playing field.¹⁰⁴

Coming alongside others while they play is the fourth strategy to be employed by an adventurous church. God calls us to not just to be there *for* others but to be present *with* others. For instance, snowmobile clubs sponsor ride days in their local areas. A local church could come alongside the local club and provide a hot cocoa stop at one of the trail intersections on four different Saturdays throughout the winter. No, this will not increase Sunday morning attendance. However, it will show the local club members that you are a fun and adventurous gang, willing to play and serve.

At Sugarloaf, there is an active and historic ski club that provides much needed volunteer labor to run alpine ski races on the hill. This can limit Sunday worship attendance. Rather than making volunteers feel guilty for missing worship, the church can support and celebrate their volunteer service in the community by providing hand warmers courtesy of the church replete with a note of gratitude for their service reading, “Thanks for your warm hearts and hands.” Such affirmation can help people feel they are truly being the church in the world.

One more idea to support others in their play: Skiers and Snowboarders for Christ is an international organization seeking to be a light to the snow-riding culture.¹⁰⁵ Local

¹⁰⁴ This topic calls for the writing of a manual entitled, “So you think you want to start a ski resort ministry?”

SFC groups will sponsor wax nights, providing wax, snacks and a location for snowboarders to gather and wax their boards. For a group that is often misunderstood and occasionally maligned by the Christian culture, snowboarders who attend these low-key evenings are pleasantly surprised by the warm welcome they receive. Sugarloaf Christian Ministry partners with SFC Maine chapter to support such endeavors.

A fifth, but in no ways final, approach is to integrate play and service. Despite the need for play to exist “without outside purpose,” I think it is still legitimate to link play with service.¹⁰⁶ After all, there can be great joy in serving others. For example, a local ski resort ministry can help organize and sponsor a ski-a-thon on the mountain with proceeds going to a local food closet or, better yet, the adaptive ski program. Partnering with the local ski club, a dual slalom course could be set up one day and for a \$2 donation to the local food pantry a young person can race their friend (or parent) down the course. In such a race, everyone wins!

Here is another enterprise linking play and service. For over thirty years Sugarloaf Christian Ministry has been working cooperatively with Sugarloaf Mountain Corporation to promote an annual Tin Mountain Round-up. Skiing enthusiasts are encouraged to donate 4 cans of food and ski for \$40 during one early winter weekend. The ministry provides volunteer labor to receive the donated food and deliver it to the local food closets while the for-profit corporation offers the reduced-price lift ticket. I think the success of such play/service endeavors is found in having the events benefit a local third

¹⁰⁵ “What Does SFC Do?” *Skiers and Snowboarders For Christ USA*, last modified November 8, 2014, accessed November 29, 2016, <https://sfcusa.org/about-us/who-is-sfc-usa/what-we-do>.

¹⁰⁶ Johnston, 34.

party non-profit, something broader than the local community church. In this way, the local church blesses the larger community, not just itself.

Ultimately, the church in a resort setting seeks to invite others to follow the Way of Jesus. The church can attempt this by inviting others to play with them, but the church will probably find that joining in the play of others will have a deeper effect. Most local congregations are out of practice when it comes to great play. In general, they are ill-equipped to compete with the play possibilities presented by the culture at large, especially in a resort area. If the church wants to invite others to play with them, opportunities to connect need to be unique and compelling so that competing events pale in comparison. It can be done, but the church must be extremely creative, and be aware of the challenges. Shoddy play is boring play. Additionally, local congregations are often more comfortable being there *for* others than simply being present *with* others. Play is more about being with others; at its best, play is egalitarian. This is a particular challenge to the church that views itself opposed to, or outside of, culture.

Authors of *The New Parish. How Neighborhood Churches Are Transforming Mission, Discipleship and Community*, highlight four facets of the Jesuit discernment process they find helpful in decision-making. These values can guide a congregation seeking to play well with others. The congregation must be willing to go where God leads; it must be radically free. Second, it must be willing to share whatever it has; it must be radically generous. Third, it must be willing to endure difficulty; it must be radically patient. Fourth, it must pursue God in prayer; it must be radically spiritual.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Sparks, Soerens, and Friesen, 128.

Coupling these qualities with key outdoor adventure concepts such as the willingness to risk, trust, be tested, and follow Christ can frame the communal discernment endeavor.

Last Chair: Conclusion

This chapter continued the discussion of play and its role in inviting second-home owners to follow the Way of Jesus begun in the previous chapter. The contributions of Christian outdoor adventure leaders, as well as naturalists, spoke of the power of the natural environment for spiritual encounters with the Creator. The chapter concluded with offering a play structure for the local church interested in playing well with others, as well as several specific ideas illustrating these principals.

CONCLUSION: MOUNTAIN MINISTRY ON THE MOVE

It is good for us, too, to touch the earth. We, and our children, need the chance to walk the sacred earth, this final abiding place of all that lives. We must preserve our sacred places in order to know our place in time, our reach to eternity.

—N. Scott Momaday, *The Man Made of Words*

One day in early fall, a quiet gentleman named Mark walked into the Sugarloaf Chapel with a small plaque tucked under his arm. Several winters before, he had attended one of our Downhill Worship services and was deeply touched by the intimacy he felt with God.¹ The very next day Mark left home for Iraq where he served faithfully for several years. He never forgot his experience on the mountainside, recalling those intimate moments while serving in harm's way halfway around the world. He so appreciated the service that, upon his return home, he came to the mountain to give the Ministry a challenge coin he carried during his deployment. This coin, nestled in its commemorative plaque, now serves to encourage the Ministry as it continues to reach out to others who cross its path.

The beauty and challenge of resort ministry is that one never knows what the day will bring. Most people who attend our services we will never see again. Others, like Mark, may travel far and wide, and yet find their way back to a place that holds their heart. My deep desire to connect with Mark and others who own second-homes here at Sugarloaf propelled me to undertake this study project.

During my time serving as a pastor in a resort area I have observed that people who own and utilize their second homes frequently live in such a way that they rarely

¹ While a true story, this man's name has been changed.

intersect with the local church in either locale, limiting opportunities to follow the Way of Jesus. A deeper understanding of this population could help the local church in a resort community engage these second-home owners. Through my research I discovered many second-home owners have two driving needs: the longing to escape the daily routine found in their primary home community, and the desire to significantly attach to a place of personal meaning. Play is one key way that they meet these essential needs. I assert that the resort church that learns to play well will discover openings to invite these friends and neighbors to follow the Way of Jesus.

Reflection

For many years I had been told that New England, and Maine in particular, is a highly unchurched region. My research confirmed these assumptions and reinforced my longing to reach out to those around me. Study also confirmed my impression that many outside the church perceive Christians as hypocritical, disingenuous, sheltered, and judgmental. Too often the church is known for what it is against rather than what it is for. Churches across North America must decide how to respond to this perception. Those serving in New England face these dual obstacles of ambivalence and skepticism.

When I turned my focus to second-home owners in particular, I deepened my understanding of a population I thought I knew. While wealth enables their lifestyle of amenity migration—traveling between two or more homes on a regular basis—the two identifiable needs of this population are not defined by their wealth. Their need to both escape the daily grind of living and to attach to a place of personal significance are not wealth-driven desires. To a certain extent, everyone has these needs at one time or

another. It is their wealth, however, that enables them to meet these needs in a significant and particular way.

Second-home owners and people of significant financial means continue to be underserved by local churches. I was disappointed to find that the church has not given more attention to this population. The wealthy, well educated, influential, and highly mobile in our North American context are distancing themselves from the church and the church has not made a compelling case to cause them to draw near. These people are beloved by God, and for that reason, the church is called to love them and invite them to follow the Way of Jesus.

The Way Forward

This research has highlighted several concepts that will be useful to local churches seeking to invite second-home owners to follow the Way of Jesus.

Taking Context Seriously: The Call to BLESS

The North American church is now serving within a post-Christendom context where culture itself is no longer informed by historic Christian convictions. Not surprisingly then, the church is often perceived by the surrounding culture as being against most things the culture finds pleasurable. This perception could change if the local church captures Leonard Sweet's invitation to be Godplayers in their community. The church needs to heed the call to celebrate what it can affirm in the local culture and play well with others in the neighborhood.

The North American church is also faced with the reality of pluralism. It is no longer the only option for those who desire to be spiritual. The post-modern context presents a religious marketplace full of choices. This research proposed investigating the way early Celtic Christianity dealt with its surrounding culture, an environment where Christianity was not assumed. Early Celtic monasticism expressed a willingness to learn from the local context. Monastic communities also welcomed seekers as guests, allowing them to experience a level of belonging within the community without a prior affirmation of belief. The church today can adapt and adopt this kind of open and intentional hospitality.²

In early Celtic Christianity, there was a practice of small teams of missionaries going to new locations and establishing small monastic communities. Today, this may seem unrealistic to many, but it is a model worth investigating. New monasticism is a potential bright spot in the current North American church landscape.³ One challenge lies in the willingness to stay in place long enough to understand the local culture. In some ways, the local church in a resort community embodies this model; the church provides a stable place to attach, amid the transitory lifestyle of the surrounding environment.

Michael Frost speaks of the need for ritual in our lives as a way to embody spiritual practice. He is also concerned with articulating structures that can bind community together while remaining life-giving, not life-draining. Frost ponders what it

² George Hunter identifies the Alpha Course concept as a good example of this hospitality. The leader is more host than teacher, more facilitator than lecturer. Those attending are treated like guests not pupils. Hunter, 123.

³ Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *The Wisdom of Stability: Rooting Faith in a Mobile Culture* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2010). Wilson-Hartgrove is experimenting with these practices in his own community.

would look like if local churches viewed themselves as monastic communities, where people gathered for encouragement and training, and scattered back into the world for service. He imagines a rhythm of release and return that would bind the community together for the greater good of the neighborhood. He is not talking about a literal monastic order, but does envision a “rule” of common values. His church has developed such an order for their communal lives utilizing the acrostic BELLS: Bless, Eat, Listen, Learn, and Send.⁴

This concept could be adapted to fit a resort church that desires to encourage second-home owners to follow the Way of Jesus. It is important to invite people to participate in these values without a prior commitment to Jesus Christ. Early Celtic monastic communities excluded nonbelievers from participating in some aspects of the community, but they did not require right belief in order for outsiders to be embraced by the community. Here is one way to adapt BELLS for a resort ministry where people are not together on a regular basis. I envision inviting both second-home owners who have a connection to the local resort church, and second-home owners who do not, to join with local church attenders, to experiment for a winter season with a new way of being community. At the end of the season, the church would host a party for all those who joined the experiment. I have chosen BLESS for my acronym but my explanations borrow heavily from Frost.

⁴ Frost, 211-213.

Bless

This includes a commitment to bless one family member and one neighbor every week. A note, a phone call, or an act of service are several blessing ideas. The “weekly rhythm of performing acts of kindness and generosity”⁵ can be a value for all people, regardless of spiritual commitment.

Listen

This includes a pledge to listen for God intentionally, and deliberately set aside time for solitude each week. There is encouragement simply in knowing others are doing the same.

Eat

This includes a promise to eat with one neighbor each week, as well as to eat with their family or close friends (if they do not live with family) once a week. This commitment enlarges the circle of care and concern beyond intimate kin.⁶

Study

This includes a vow to specifically read the gospel stories of Jesus weekly. While this is a value some non-Christians might want to decline, the invitation to try such an experiment for a season could yield great blessing. God’s Word is powerful and transforming.

Send

This includes a promise to begin to live life with an understanding that they are sent by God into the world to bless others. Those who are spiritual but not religious are likely to find this value appealing.

⁵ Frost, 211.

⁶ In Frost’s model there is also a call to weekly common meals together with the faith community. This is not realistic in a resort community, though the end of season party is a good addition.

These common values are more about scattering than gathering. There would need to be a way to share this life of blessing together. Use of technology could be helpful here (Facebook page, Instagram, Twitter, etc.). Inviting people to a seasonal commitment of belonging and blessing could bear fruit that would last. Even if a person decides not to follow the Way of Jesus after this season of commitment, kingdom values would have been presented into their lives that might produce the fruit of faith at a later time.

Living the Kingdom: Learning by Doing

For too long, the North American church has relied on communicating the good news of Jesus Christ primarily through didactic methods. Sermons, Sunday school lessons, Bible studies, and worship have leaned too heavily on the passive modes of learning by telling and learning by facilitating, rather than more active learning by thinking and doing. Those who employ methodologies that rely mainly on teaching by telling fail to realize that our present culture no longer communicates primarily by words.⁷ Sweet insists that our culture now communicates via story and soundtrack, both active methodologies.⁸

Furthermore, Sweet's vivid image of studying a dead bird in a pan vs. a live bird in a bush is a cautionary tale reminding us that when you dissect something, you must kill it.⁹ With respect to scripture, objective study of the Word (dead words on a page), must

⁷ Sweet, "The Untold Story," 13.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 14.

be tempered with an experience of the Word made flesh in Jesus Christ (the living Word). I argue that, for far too long, the church has emphasized a bird in pan approach to Christianity. This has resulted in a religion that is truncated and unappealing, and not entirely biblical. The gospel gets distilled into a set of intellectual assertions about Jesus Christ as personal savior, limiting the gospel's power. Such a belief system is disembodied, not incarnational. It is time to rediscover the full gospel as the arrival of the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ, a truth the church sometimes neglects. As Reggie McNeal observes, "Until we get the relationship between Kingdom and church [and Christ] rightly sorted, we will continue to practice a church-centered Christianity that is detrimental to the Kingdom. We will continue to work against the Lord's Prayer sentiment that the Kingdom show up on earth!"¹⁰ It is time to tell a better story.¹¹ Finer yet, it's time to experience a better story.

Go Outside and Play

One pivotal way to make the shift toward learning by thinking and doing is to gather the church outdoors somehow, someway. Much of Jesus' ministry occurred outside, utilizing the natural environment to speak kingdom values. Jesus also took his disciples back to nature for times of refreshment and deeper learning, as well as times of challenge.

The North American church has prioritized the practice of assembling indoors and emphasized that only communities who congregate in houses of worship are legitimate

¹⁰ Reggie McNeal, *Kingdom Come: Why We Must Give Up Our Obsession with Fixing the Church—and What We Should Do Instead* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2015) 61-62. Kindle.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

expressions of the church. Church buildings can be a great asset to both the congregation and the neighborhood community if handled correctly. However, they can also become places of retreat, and fortresses to protect inhabitants from the world outside. In addition, the modern desire to control the worship environment with stage lighting and central air conditioning brings with it unintended consequences, cutting worshipers off from the natural world. When these requirements rule the experience, houses of worship are no longer a blessing; they become a curse. It is time to move out doors!

This is especially true for churches in resort areas. Second-home owners in particular are not interested in coming inside. They travel to the mountains and lakes to relax and rejuvenate; for them escape does not include sitting inside. There is healing power in escaping to nature. These people are outside playing; it is time for the church to join them! I argue that providing opportunities in tune with Attention Restoration Theory can be a significant gift to those the church is trying to reach.¹²

The methods and values of Christian outdoor adventure ministry can teach the local church how to draw on God's great creation to change lives. In particular, the concepts of risk and trust become avenues to invite others to follow the Way of Jesus. There is no true adventure without the possibility of risk. The invitation to trust in God helps make risk-taking possible.

The North American church's aversion to play prevents it from acknowledging that understanding play is necessary in order to understand our culture. The church needs to lighten up! Play is not a dirty word, though we often get dirty while playing. The mud, dirt, and grime of playing outside is not only a great metaphor, it is great fun. The best

¹² See Chapter four for description of Attention Restoration Theory.

play is often unplanned, spontaneous, and free. Those seeking to reach second-home owners need to be outside playing on a regular basis.¹³

Playful Pilgrims following the Way of Jesus

Church buildings are not the only things that keep local churches inside and out of touch. Another element of the problem lies in the loss of a sense of pilgrimage. The church building can be likened to an airport; it is necessary for the journey but it is not the destination.¹⁴ At its worst, the local church edifice—disconnected from pilgrimage—becomes a hiding place. At its best, however, the local house of worship can be a shrine that pilgrims travel to, enjoy for a time, and then leave changed and refreshed.¹⁵

I have found the pilgrim metaphor a lively expression of both the yearnings of second-home owners, and the local resort church seeking to reach them. Pilgrimage meets the need to escape the daily routine of life with a challenge and a promise. It also creates the possibility of a destination worth reaching.

To call oneself a pilgrim is a poignant life metaphor for those seeking a sense of connection with the divine in a particular place. It counters the tendency toward disembodiment, displacement, and disconnection that is so often experienced within today's culture.¹⁶ It is not a new metaphor but it currently has a positive association in our culture. It is used by many different religious faiths with a similar connotation of

¹³ The ability to ski is part of my job description. The church expects to see me out skiing on a regular basis meeting and greeting people who are also out skiing.

¹⁴ Frost, 17.

¹⁵ Hjalmarson, 2956-2958.

¹⁶ Frost, 215.

journey and enlightenment. There is great benefit in the church reclaiming this metaphor, before it is entirely subsumed by the culture, losing its power for transformation. Sweet is correct in declaring that the pathway through life is not a trail; it is a person.¹⁷ Godplayers are playful pilgrims inviting others to join them in the journey through life on the path that is Jesus Christ.

Pilgrimages do not have to be long to have a lasting impact. This chapter began with the story of Mark attending Downhill Worship at Sugarloaf. Downhill Worship is a specific example of being together as community. Those who desire to go on this short pilgrimage gather each winter Sunday at the Downhill Worship sign near the base of the chairlift. They meet outdoors and stay outdoors. The group rides the chairlift together, providing a chance to converse with at least three other people on the ride uphill. The party then takes a ski run together, stopping four times to rest, encounter the natural beauty of the surroundings, and, through discussion, bring to life the biblical theme of the day. They also learn by doing, because the theme often includes reflection on the ski experience as well. The guide might, for example, invite the group to practice trusting the downhill ski and then connect that experience with what it's like to trust God. Downhill Worship concludes with a recitation of the Lord's Prayer, an anchor point for the experience. It is hoped that each participant finishes this time with an experience of God's presence. Downhill Worship is just one example of a mini-pilgrimage. Envisioning the local church as a place for playful pilgrims, opens many creative avenues for the church seeking to follow the Way of Jesus with others.

¹⁷ Sweet, *The Well-played Life*, 51.

Further Study

As previously mentioned, the need to escape the routine of daily life and the need to attach to a place of special meaning are not unique to second-home owners. Local churches that are not in a resort setting might also use this study to develop ways to address these needs in their own communities. Ultimately the desires for escape and place are fulfilled by a vital relationship with Jesus Christ.

In addition to the research provided in this paper, more work remains on how to reach the wealthy with an invitation to follow the Way of Jesus. This is an increasingly unreached population in North America. The church ignores this demographic at its peril for several reasons. First, it is clear the wealthy possess resources that can be devoted to kingdom work. No one, however, likes to be used, and the wealthy are often used as a means to an end. Those with significant financial resources need to feel loved by God and God's church, not just seen as a money machine. Second, the wealthy are often well educated, and the church profits from wise and knowledgeable input. In addition, the wealthy are often influential in their communities, businesses, and spheres of influence. Great good can happen when people of faith sit in positions of influence and power.¹⁸

Finally, millennials are beginning to be represented in the second-home owner population. It remains to be seen if they will follow the pattern of previous generations with a similar need to escape and attach. If the answer is no, what will their presenting needs be, and how will the church seek to respond to those needs in a way that invites them to follow the Way of Jesus? If the answer is yes, it is still unclear if they will seek to

¹⁸ Michael D. Lindsay and Mary Grace Hager, *View from the Top: An Inside Look at How People in Power See and Shape the World* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), xxi.

meet these needs through second-home ownership or through some other vehicle. In either case, the mobility of this millennial generation is significant. Millennials are proving to be highly transient in terms of employment and housing. It will be interesting to watch how the innate need for place attachment expresses itself in this next generation. Clearly, the use of technology to build and maintain community will be significant.

Last Word

I have been involved in resort ministry for over twenty-six years and am passionate about the distinct opportunity such ministry provides to reach people in a setting quite different from their regular routine. This project has given me the opportunity to test assumptions and focus my research. I hope my findings will be a jumping off point for future interest in the unique resort population, especially second-home owners. I am curious to see how my findings may be applied to other ministry settings, and how they will continue to affect and enhance my own ministry environment.

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