George Fox University

Digital Commons @ George Fox University

Seminary Doctoral Programs | Theses and Dissertations

2-2021

A Taste of the Kingdom: Re-Imaging and Re-Articulating Kingdom Community

Jay J. Anderson

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin

Part of the Christianity Commons

GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

A TASTE OF THE KINGDOM:

RE-IMAGING AND RE-ARTICULATING KINGDOM COMMUNITY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

JAY J. ANDERSON

PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2021

Portland Seminary
George Fox University
Portland, Oregon

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

Jay J. Anderson

has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on February 22, 2021
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics, Church & Culture

Dissertation Committee:

Primary Advisor: Calvin Habig, DMin

Secondary Advisor: Jody Becker, DMin

Lead Mentor: Leonard I. Sweet, PhD

Expert Advisor: Calvin Habig, DMin

Copyright © 2021 by Jay J. Anderson
All rights reserved

EPIGRAPH

"What you should want most is God's kingdom and doing what he wants you to do…" (Matthew 6:33, ERV)

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together…" (Hebrews 10:24-25, NIV)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EPIGRAPH III
PREFACE VI
ABSTRACT XI
SECTION 1: THE PROBLEM 1
Theology: What Matters Most 5
Theology 101 5
A Theology of Culture 8
Ecclesiology: Foundation and Focus 13
A Sociologocal Collapse 18
The Collapse of Community 18
The Ongoing Collapse of Christendom 20
Context: A Taste of Place 21
Conclusion: Key (Re) Signed Metaphors 24
Bringing Two Opposite Ends Together 24
Fuzzy Dots 24
SECTION 2: OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS 26
Introduction: Joining a New Tribe 26
Theology: Emergent and Fresh Expressions 27
A Flexible and Discerning Theology 28
Renewing the Center 29
Fresh Expressions 29
Ecclesiology: Attraction, Performance and Consumerism 30
If We Build It (Attractional) 30
If We Do It Well Enough (Performance) 32
If We Provide Enough (Consumerism) 32
Sociology: Denominations, Institutions, and Regions 33
Context: Conformity and the Celts 35
Conclusion: Scriptural Metaphors in Need of (Re) Signing 38
SECTION 3: THESIS 39
Introduction: A Taste of the Kingdom in the Pacific Northwest 39
Re-Imaging Kingdom Theology 39
Theology as Art & Science 39
Theology as Story 41
A Generous Theology 43
A Theology of Kingdom Culture 44
A Relational Theology 47
Re-Articulating a Kingdom Ecclesiology 48
A Glocal Ecclesiology 48
Renewing the Center 51
Re-Signing the Ecclesia 52
The Artisan Church 56
Our Greatest Resource 58

Sociology: Experiencing Kingdom Community in the Neighborhood....59
Context: The Appropriate Flavoring of Kingdom Community....63
Embracing and Celebrating the Local....64
Imaging the Local....68
Inculturating the Local....70
Home....70
Conclusion: Key Metaphor (Re) Signs....71
Creating Kingdom Icons....73
Zip Codes....73
SECTION 4: ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION....74
Artifact Purpose....74
Artifact Layout and Design....75
Artifact Motifs....76
SECTION 5: ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION....78
Target Audience and Potential Applications....78
Those Serving Local Churches....78
University Students....79
Friends and Family....79
Artisans of all Professions....80
Oregon State Correctional Institution....80
Scope, Content, and Intentions....81
Development and Timeline of the Kingdom Trilogy....82
Publication Standards, Resources and Budget....82
Post-Graduate Considerations....83
SECTION 6: POSTSCRIPT....85
Dissertation Execution Summary....85
The Path Ahead....86
APPENDIX A: ARTIFACT....87
BIBLIOGRAPHY....207

PREFACE

As the sun was setting at Brigadoon Winery, Tim and Calvin lingered over their Pinot Noir. On the horizon lay the university town of Eugene, Oregon, a melting pot of cultures. As they enjoyed their final sips, they were considering the words of their tasting room host, who described the influence of terroir to the uniqueness of the wine. "The temperature, elevation, and soil have as much to do with the final product as the skill of the winemaker." Tim, a pastor, and Calvin, a hotelier, shared a vision for developing and experiencing life-giving kingdom culture in Eugene, beginning with their own faith community and business.

Calvin asked, "How can we better embody the Kingdom of God here in Eugene?"

"Perhaps it's just as Chris told us," Tim answered. "We embrace the *terroir*. We celebrate and cultivate the local cultures, even as we help create a uniquely kingdom community. It will be a taste of the Kingdom, right in our own zip code."

"I'll drink to that!"

"And we can eat to that as well. Have you tried this local goat cheese yet? Or these native hazelnuts? Our community has never tasted so good."

***

Oregon has always been famous for its pioneers, from its first explorers trapping the streams to the immigrants riding their prairie schooners seeking ample and fertile land to raise their families and crops. In the mid 1970's, a new brand of pioneer came to the Willamette Valley of western Oregon in a renewed search for the Holy Grail, the perfect Pinot Noir. The resulting vineyards have become world-famous, as has the Pinot.

Oregon's pioneer spirit was *re-imaged* from a prairie schooner to a bottle of Pinot Noir! Natives and visitors alike would join Calvin in drinking to that.

Kingdom community also needs to be *re-imaged* among Jesus gatherings. Notice the preceding statement did not suggest that kingdom community needs to be "reimagined." That subject and accompanying research is for another day and for another scientific artisan. The intention here is to connect the semiotic dots, as it were, of existing and emerging understandings of orthodoxy and orthopraxy in local kingdom communities. Images have always been more effective than words, and in our modern culture, it has never been more critical to communicate visually. For sure, all of the senses must be engaged if we are to properly experience and incarnate the Kingdom of God on earth, but sight and taste will garner specific attention in these pages.

It is important to note that the research insights which will be reported in this document were not exclusively discovered in the local church, nor will their applicable value be limited there either. Local businesses, charities, and other cultural institutions will not only benefit from this re-imaging, but in many cases are already displaying re-imaging in unique and inspiring ways. Northwest businesses of note that serve as great examples of the power of "local terroir" include *Starbucks, Nike,* and *The Graduate Hotels.* My son Calvin actually worked at the Eugene Graduate and was an invaluable resource for this project. Of course, Willamette Valley growers and vintners, including Chris Shown of Brigadoon, will be thrilled to share their journeys, secrets, and products with us. However, the local church, in all its dirt and divinity, will be the primary focus of this dissertation and its accompanying artifact.

Re-imaging kingdom community begins with our *theology*. Theology, according to Yale professors Volf & Croasmun, "ought to be, but today largely isn't, about what matters the most—the true life in the presence of God."[1] Kingdom community is certainly an aspect of the true life that matters most. Thus, a freshly articulated *ecclesiology* needs to be created and cultivated for modern Jesus gatherings. Please note that "Jesus gatherings" will be our intentional descriptive of choice as we navigate our way to new understandings and applications relating to the local church. Our emerging ecclesiology must image both the local and the global, or to use the term coined by Leonard Sweet, the "glocal."[2]

Further, a *sociological* approach to understanding and reaching our communities needs to be employed. Most institutions are too slow to embrace changing realities and make adjustments in real time, evidenced especially in education, government, and the church. Local Jesus gatherings returning to a distinct (though not exclusive) neighborhood approach will be strongly espoused. Our primary guide in this area will be Dr. Verlon Fosner, whose functioning dinner churches in 15 neighborhoods (and counting) of Seattle, Washington, offer an exciting and effective paradigm. He passionately asserts that the dinner church philosophy not only has a strong biblical theology as a foundation, but a strongly established sociological understanding as well.

Finally, a *contextual* positioning and practice by kingdom communities is essential to ensure a life-giving "taste of place." This takes into account the local, cultural terroir and the incarnational example of Jesus. Terroir will serve as our primary metaphor

---

[1] Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun, *For the Life of the World: Theology That Makes a Difference* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2019), 1.

[2] Leonard Sweet (lecture, Portland Seminary, Portland, OR, September 5, 2018).

for understanding the influence and sacred value of place. This is wholly appropriate as scholar, futurist, and one of the primary voices that will be engaged here, Leonard Sweet, has said, "The number one word of the future is terroir."[3] The Fresh Expressions movement, which began in the UK, offers an innovative training platform for the launch of churches in each community that are as unique as the people that inhabit them. We will discover together that proper contextual positioning and practice are as essential to Kingdom communities in our cities and villages as they have been for any cross-cultural Kingdom ambassador anywhere on the globe at any given time.

This will be an excursion, of sorts, into the cultural wine country of the Pacific Northwest. This researcher is a Pacific Northwest native, both in history and in heart. The Pacific Northwest has a unique culture that sets it apart from other regions of the country. From its roots of rugged individualism and adventure, coming from the early explorers and immigrants, to its organic and earthy connections with the environment and entrepreneurial yet relaxed spirit of the people, the Northwest is indeed, as the old Oregon license plate proclaims, a "Pacific Wonderland." Anyone who "tastes it" will see. How much more significant, then, will a taste of Kingdom culture be to connect, inspire, and empower any people in any place at any time?

An intensive focus on culture is fitting for our purposes, of both the dirt and divinity kind. Scholars and clerics of every profession, persuasion, and creed have waded in and weighed in to properly inform our perspective of and interface with culture. We'll consider the influential words of Niebuhr and Carson as they speak of Christ and culture from yesteryear, professed cultural architect Erwin McManus, and author and former

---

[3] Leonard Sweet (lecture, Portland Seminary, Portland, OR, September 5, 2018).

Harvard University campus pastor Andy Crouch, among others, in our conversation. This will lead us to a newly crafted, yet properly aged, declaration of need and opportunity: *Kingdom community needs to be re-imaged in Jesus gatherings, stemming from a freshly articulated ecclesiology and flavored by the local cultural terroir, leading to a life-giving taste of Kingdom culture in each zip code of western Oregon.* The resulting image will truly be worth a thousand imaginations. The king has invited us to wander the sacred vines and taste of the divinely intoxicating fruit. Let us neglect our departure no further.

ABSTRACT

Modern churches find themselves in liminal cultures, requiring new understandings of ecclesia *(re-imaging)* and new approaches to communication *(re-signing).* They also find themselves in the midst of a collapse of traditional community realities, including neighborhoods. The express intention of this researcher of lifetime PNW zip-codes is to encourage and inspire Pacific Northwest Jesus gatherings to re-image kingdom community. Each zip code contains unique cultural components, all of which need the life-giving inbreaking of the Kingdom of God. My contention is that when Jesus gatherings *re-image* kingdom community, freshly articulate ecclesiology, and appropriately flavor their communities with local terroir, each zip code will receive a life-giving taste of the kingdom.

Incarnating the gospel and re-imaging community in these cultures means being willing to employ appropriate changes to orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Thus, each of the first three sections, beginning with a description of the problem and potential solutions, will include research and ideation specific to *theology, ecclesiology, sociology,* and *context.* Section three presents the project thesis and accompanying convictions, including a number of recommended practical outcomes. It is important to note that the research insights which will be reported were not exclusively discovered in the local church, nor will their applicable value be limited there either.

The Appendix features the first eight chapters of a book (cultural artifact), which intends to expand and develop the findings and practical outcomes introduced in the Written Statement. The proposed thesis and project title, *A Taste of the Kingdom,* will be embraced and espoused in the artifact. Sections 4, 5, and 6 of the Written Statement will

give a brief introduction to the development, distribution, and target audience of the book and will include financial, marketing, and literary specifications.

SECTION 1:

THE PROBLEM

Introduction: A Wholesale Change of Thinking

Unprecedented times require unprecedented thinking. At the time of this writing, the United States and the entire world is facing a global pandemic, Coronavirus 2019. Planet earth is no stranger to pandemics, but to the generations and cultures experiencing the far-reaching implications of COVID-19, there has been no precedent. It has required epidemiologists, health professionals, pharmaceutical companies, national and local political leaders, business leaders, and workers in every industry to engage emergency brakes, employ draconian measures, and navigate the most perilous of paths, all without a map or guide. In short, COVID-19 has changed everything and required a wholesale change of thinking.

Spiritual leaders of every practice and persuasion also find themselves grappling with issues and realities that were, beforehand, only imagined. Yet this was true prior to COVID-19, whether it was realized or not. This viral outbreak has simply served as an accelerant. Faith communities and those attempting to guide them are caught in a *liminal* space, an uncomfortable place of "in-between." This is nothing new for the church, living in the "now but the not yet" reality of the Kingdom of God. However, this reality has perhaps never been as misunderstood and mismanaged as it has in modern manifestations of Jesus gatherings. Of the many impacts of COVID-19's fatal swath are local churches, along with numerous local businesses, shutting their doors forever.

The good news is that Jesus is doing fresh (and organic) work in our day, pre- and post-COVID. There is precedent for this in every time, place, and people. It has always included the unexpected and the impossible but has always required a wholesale change of thinking. As local pastor Tim Johnson (my current pastor) of Fifth Avenue Church in Oregon recently espoused, "It is possible to be committed yet be opposed to the new thing that Jesus is doing."[4] The strong conviction of this researcher and practitioner is that Jesus continues to, and desires to, create and cultivate *anew* in our modern cultures and communities. The main assertion of this academic endeavor is that kingdom community needs to be *re-imaged* in Jesus gatherings, stemming from a freshly articulated ecclesiology and appropriately flavored by the local cultural terroir, leading to a life-giving taste of the kingdom. Re-imaging, beginning with fresh metaphors like terroir, and re-articulating, fusing the moorings of tradition and the modern components of surrounding cultures, offer promising avenues of exploration. The true starting place, however, is given by Jesus himself as he began to declare the good news.

As Jesus came proclaiming the Kingdom of God, his first charge was to repent. The church has typically focused on repentance as sorrow for and turning away from sin. However, true repentance (*metanoia*), more accurately means to change your thinking, and not just relating to sin. This change of thinking certainly includes a call to righteousness, as Jesus makes clear in the Sermon on the Mount. He made it especially clear, however, that the way man thinks (the world) and how God thinks (the kingdom) is like the difference between darkness and light. This difference was shown in stark relief as the first followers ogled the temple, and Jesus responded by saying one stone would

---

[4] Tim Johnson, Fifth Avenue Church broadcast sermon, July 19, 2020.

soon not be left on another. He made it even more clear in the way he treated the woman at the well and the woman caught in adultery. The day for new thinking, in Jesus' name, had dawned.

Crystal Downing, in her book introducing the study of signs (semiotics), points the way past our typically dualistic (either/or) thinking. Looking for a "third option" isn't a new idea, but her primary metaphor of a coin (quarter) on edge profoundly illustrates the delicate balance of tradition and change:

> This is the position of (re)signing truth: resigned to the headship of Jesus Christ, you maintain trust in the sign to the right, where the words 'In God We Trust' still appear. But your position on the edge also enables you to look to the left, where you can enjoy and celebrate the re-signing of the coin. Just as each state of the union determines its own sign on the quarter, so each new era or state of culture determines new signs for the faith.[5]

How we position ourselves in relationship to culture is critical to our ability to influence it. She sees a proper response as one lived on the edge of the coin. She adds, "Staying on the edge therefore necessitates not only balance but also movement forward. Think of your ant-sized body rolling the quarter through culture like an acrobat rolling a barrel through an arena."[6]

One of the greatest areas where repentance (change of thinking) is needed is in our deeply ingrained institutional thinking. This is no small issue in our modern culture, which believes that the institution is the answer to most everything, from government to religion and from schools to business. Consider how different our Jesus gatherings would look if we approached them with decidedly relational and not organizational thinking.

---

[5] Crystal Downing, *Changing Signs of Truth: A Christian Introduction to the Semiotics of Communication* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 57.

[6] Downing, 61.

Consider how different our businesses and other institutions would function if our leaders truly enacted kingdom values and made those their bottom line—not the profit or advancement of the institution. Consider how different our world would be if we truly began by seeing everyone as our brothers and sisters, regardless of politics, ethnicity, geography, morality, or even religion. We must learn to look for a third option and look *beyond* the institution.

Rodney Clapp notably presents a third option for how the church responds in culture. He asserts that the typical response to the declining influence of the church is either "sentimental capitulation/relinquishment" (believing it has nothing to offer) or "retrenchment" (an attempted return to the glory days)[7]. Both of these responses represent a misguided vision. He suggests the proper response is "radicalization."[8] It's worth noting that Clapp's chosen terminology is troubling given America's current religious and political climate. But Clapp's cited work here is now two decades old, where "radical" previously had a more positive connotation, especially in church circles.

The significant point Clapp and Downing make, though, is that the "third way," often representing a wholesale change of thinking, is our modern path forward. Clapp concludes, "The radical option is nothing more or less than for the church to be a way of life."[9] This commitment to embrace a change of thinking will serve us well as we consider, in turn, the key components of re-imaging and re-articulating kingdom community and embrace this way of life. We begin with what matters most.

---

[7] Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 19-20.

[8] Clapp, 32.

[9] Clapp, 32.

Theology: What Matters Most

Theology 101

The refreshingly clarifying summary of theology by Volf and Croasmun bears repeating. Theology "should be…about what matters the most—true life in the presence of God…theology is uniquely qualified to explore what matters the most…theology will either refocus itself on what matters the most or gradually cease to matter at all."[10] The two authors further contend, "We believe the purpose of theology is to discern, articulate, and commend visions of flourishing life in light of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ."[11] Flourishing life is a great description of life in the Kingdom of God, which Volf and Croasnum directly affirm. "In Jesus' preaching, the answer to the question of flourishing life was 'the kingdom of God.'"[12] The Kingdom of God is the driving value and focus of this work, so much more will be said in the pages to come. "God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ" deserves particular attention at this juncture.

Christology. Simplicity is an attractive virtue, especially in frenetic and polarized times. Simplifying our theology is a warranted exercise in every generation, though the danger of reductionism always lurks. Leonard Sweet offers a relevant (third option) solution that he calls "simplexity." He recently stated, "As my theology has gotten more complex, my faith has gotten more simple [sic]."[13] A faith and theology that

---

[10] Volf and Croasmun, 1.

[11] Volf and Croasmun, 11.

[12] Volf and Croasmun, 150.

[13] Leonard Sweet (online lecture, Portland Seminary, Portland, OR, April 2020).

has been boiled down, or reduced to its common denominator, must begin and end with Jesus, and be filled with Jesus *most* along the way.

Of particular benefit to this discussion is Sweet's book, *Jesus Manifesto,* co-authored with Frank Viola. The authors rightly warn, "It is all too possible to emphasize a spiritual truth, value, virtue, or gift, yet miss Christ, who is Himself the embodiment and incarnation of all these things."[14] This lesson must not only be tacitly acknowledged but intentionally and personally incarnated. But the theological lesson and focus of greatest significance is their potent assertion, "God's Word is a person. The one true God has revealed Himself completely and finally in Jesus."[15] The late Doug Coe, one of the greatest evangelists that most have never heard of, is now applauding that statement with the great cloud of witnesses. His life message, to world leaders, home and abroad, including the most seminal of interactions with this researcher, was simply, "The gospel (good news) is not a plan, a book, or a place. The gospel is a person. That person is Jesus."[16]

Crystal Downing offers what she believes to be the "irreducible minimums of orthodox Christianity." This short-list includes "the Trinity, the incarnation, and the gift of salvation through Christ's atoning work."[17] The point here is not to initiate arguments, as certainly appeals can be made by all for additions. The point here is the proper

---

[14] Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola, *Jesus Manifesto: Restoring the Supremacy and Sovereignty of Jesus Christ* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 88-89.

[15] Sweet and Viola, 155.

[16] Jay J. Anderson, *Kingdom Primer: Learning to Think and Live According to Jesus* (Seattle, WA: KDP Publishing, 2020), 60.

[17] Downing, 326.

recognition and embrace of Christology as our irreducible minimum of faith, belief, and practice.

Finally, author, former university professor, and pastor Brian McLaren offers a cleverly profound picture to highlight the centrality of Christology and the person and work of Jesus. He holds up Scripture by the spine of the book, the spine representing the accounts of Jesus, noting that they are:

> the spine or backbone of the narrative, the climax and focal point toward which the Old Testament points and ascends and the peak from which the vigor and vitality of the New Testament flows. This is how Jesus can be seen…as the supreme and ultimate revelation of God, with the Old and New Testaments pointing to him like dual spotlights.[18]

Sweet and Viola encapsulate this perfectly: "Jesus Christ makes Scripture intelligible. He is the key that unlocks the entire biblical canon."[19]

Eschatology. It is beyond the scope of this project to comment on all of the significant and potentially relevant categories of Systematic Theology. However, the very nature of the Kingdom of God necessitates briefly considering eschatology. New Testament scholar N.T. Wright provides needed correction from the typical evangelical understandings of Christology and eschatology when he states, "First, it will not do to suppose that Jesus came to teach people 'how to get to heaven.' It was to tell them that God was now taking charge, right here on 'earth.'"[20] Wright continues:

> it is because he is the Son of God that Jesus must go to the cross, that he must stay there, that he must drink the cup to the dregs. And he must do so not in order to

---

[18] Brian D. McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions That Are Transforming the Faith* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2010), 168.

[19] Sweet and Viola, 29.

[20] N.T. Wright, *Simply Jesus: A New Vision of Who He Was, What He Did, and Why He Matters* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011), 144-145.

> rescue people from this world for a faraway heaven, but in order that God's kingdom may be established on earth as in heaven.[21]

Wright cannot be accused of as being a "kingdom now" theologian, as he clearly keeps the "now and not yet" of the kingdom in tension and in focus. For now, perhaps we can join Wright and utter this eschatological "sigh" in faith: "Jesus remains sovereign and will return at last to put everything right. This putting right (the biblical word for it is 'justice') is the sort of sigh-of-relief event that the whole world…longs for most deeply."[22]

A Theology of Culture

A final "theological" consideration, though certainly not on any Systematic Theologian's list, is a proper, if elementary, understanding of culture. Culture is not only the very breath we inhale as a people but is also the product of our collective exhale. We are influenced by our immediate and prevailing culture as we are influencing it. According to Andy Crouch, "Culture is what we make of the world."[23] Humankind has made much of the world over our brief history on planet earth. We have tamed and named the wild, planted and tended gardens, built and developed grand cities, and along the way have amassed tremendous knowledge and capacities as a civilization. This is all in keeping with our divine calling and identity.

---

[21] Wright, 184.

[22] Wright, 201.

[23] Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 23.

However, our experiments and adventures in the creation and cultivation of culture most often fall short of the divine. Enter the Kingdom of God, as announced by Jesus. From his initial utterance "The kingdom of God has come near" (Mark 1:15, NIV), to his final charge to his first followers to continue his work, Jesus was all about establishing the Kingdom of God on earth. I have been captivated by the concept of the kingdom according to Jesus. But I have been increasingly concerned by the seemingly growing disconnect between the dirt and the divine. As Joel Skinner, a pastor in Eugene, Oregon, lamented, "Why is there such a sharp contrast in the way that Jesus lived and his values and those of the church currently?"[24] The concern doesn't end after walking out of the foyer into the bright sunshine of the world, however. Expressions of kingdom culture should surround us with every step we take and every footprint we make, whether in the sanctuary or classroom, our place of residence or work, our local institutions or agencies of charity. Why is the kingdom more like a fading black and white portrait than a full color moving picture?

The answer lies, in part, with culture and its power to wonderfully connect, inspire, and empower a people in a given place and time. At its best, it approaches sacred ground. At its worst, it is evidenced by distorted vision, institutional thinking, and relational disconnect. The impact of this is felt throughout all of our institutions, most notably the church. Andy Crouch continues with his succinct summary:

> Culture is, first of all, the name of our relentless, restless human effort to take the world as it's given to us and make something else. This is the original insight of the writer of Genesis when he says that human beings were made in God's image: just like the original Creator, we are creators.[25]

---

[24] Joel Skinner, interview by author, Eugene, OR, March 14, 2019.

[25] Crouch, 23.

The primary metaphor pictured in the Genesis narrative, and captured by Crouch, directly addresses our calling: "…most characteristically biblical…we are to be creators and cultivators. Or to put it more poetically, we are artists and gardeners."[26] Taking the raw materials of nature and fashioning something beautiful and good for the benefit of all and the glory of the creator is a transcendental calling worthy of our highest efforts. In this respect, culture is virtuous.

Another widely respected voice sees culture in an entirely different light. Author and professor Scot McKnight believes the words "culture" and the "world" to be synonymous terms, as he does "church" and "kingdom." His critique of the world he admits is harsh, such as when he states:

> Our world is marked today by isolation, fragmentation, transience, privacy, consumerism, power, complacency, alienation, suspicion, and a host of idolatries. The church, which is a kingdom fellowship under King Jesus, counters each of these stories with the story of new creation that becomes possible through the power of the Spirit and the life of Jesus.[27]

Certainly, McKnight is correct in his observation of the world, but I would argue, along with Crouch, that culture goes beyond this narrow assessment, as does the kingdom. But McKnight does offer tremendous kingdom insights that must be carefully considered.

Many others, of course, have weighed in on the meaning and value of culture. Ecumenical professor Roland Chia articulates it well:

> A theology of culture must therefore be formulated in the light of the Pauline understanding of Christ and the powers. To speak of culture is to speak of the sum

---

[26] Crouch, 97.

[27] Scot McKnight, Kingdom Conspiracy: Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church (Grand Rapids, MI, Brazos Press, 2014), 106.

> total of the values and activities which shapes a community. Human culture is never monolithic or static.[28]

Crouch emphasizes this non-monolithic nature of culture when he asserts, "We talk about 'the culture' even though culture is always cultures, plural: full of diversity, variety, and history."[29] We must be careful, therefore, not to succumb to the twin temptations of over-generalizing our understanding of culture on the one hand and limiting this understanding to a singular expression on the other.

Though the expressed intention of this project is to get beyond the walls of the church, in both understanding and application, the church is a tremendously important expression of and influence upon the culture of any community. Several years ago, two pastors from opposite poles of the United States (Hawaii and Arkansas) offered helpful images to aid in our understanding of church and culture. They compared the culture of the church to the soul of the human body; culture giving "color and flavor to everything your church is and does;"[30] and culture as "the lens through which you view your life."[31] But their primary metaphor, of special interest to a Pacific Northwesterner, is the totem pole, which "announces to residents and strangers alike, 'This is our culture. This is who we are.'"[32]

---

[28] Roland Chia, "Resident Aliens: Some Reflections on Church and Culture," *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 17, no. 3 (July 2000): 93.

[29] Crouch, 10.

[30] Robert Lewis, Wayne Cordeiro, and Warren Bird, *Culture Shift: Transforming Your Church From the Inside Out* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 3.

[31] Lewis, Cordeiro, and Bird, 12.

[32] Lewis, Cordeiro, and Bird, 42.

More recently, Christian historical professor Robert Louis Wilken espoused that distinctive Christian culture was formed by 1) a creation of material space and with it art; 2) the calendar and with it ritual; and 3) grammar and with it language, forming the "thick texture of Christian culture, the fullness of life in the community that is Christ's form in the world."[33] He asserts, "The Church is a culture in its own right. Christ does not simply infiltrate a culture; Christ creates culture by forming another city, another sovereignty with its own social and political life."[34] This is certainly true, though his conclusion that "Nothing is more needful today than the survival of Christian culture,"[35] is certainly short-sighted. Kingdom culture, yes. Distinctly "Christian" culture in its modern sense, no. Which leads us to an important clarification.

Our understanding of kingdom culture obviously demands a proper definition of kingdom. The Kingdom of God is much better described than defined, which led Jesus to communicate the kingdom by using stories and pictures that his audience could immediately relate to. Library shelves are replete with sources contemplating and declaring the wonders of the kingdom. Its scope and significance cannot be minimized.

However, there are legitimate concerns regarding the ongoing use of this primary metaphor of Jesus in our current cultures. The audience that was walking the dusty paths and narrow alleys with Jesus immediately understood what Jesus was alluding to. Like it or not, it was staring them in the face, day in and day out. They were reminded of their oppression at the hands of the Romans every time a squadron of soldiers passed them by,

---

[33] Robert Louis Wilken, "The Church as Culture," *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life* 142 (April 2004): 31-32. Gale Group.

[34] Wilken, 31.

[35] Wilken, 31.

or they saw the palace of the local king, such as the dreaded Herod. No one had to teach them of the realities of caste, slavery and tyranny.

Yet Jesus persisted in his use of kingdom, despite it being fraught with issues, past, present and now future. Added to the inherent "baggage" of the term would be the coming Christendom beginning in Rome, the misguided imperialism of the Crusades and the later colonialization of the ancient and modern worlds. We must surely recognize and acknowledge this in our current cultures if we persist in using this metaphor as Jesus did. It is my strong conviction that using this term allows a powerful juxtaposition to be communicated. It must also be noted that the "childlike" component of kingdom actually began not with Walt Disney, but with Jesus.

Suffice for now to underscore the obvious point that there is a wholesale difference, night and day, between the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world. There is a different starting point, different values, and a far different outcome. But the bottom line is that there is a different king. Scot McKnight gives us a pithy definition that will serve us well, stating *"the kingdom of which Jesus speaks is a people governed by a king"*[36] (emphasis original). This king, of course, is Jesus himself.

Ecclesiology: Foundation and Focus

An ecclesiology of the local and global church needs to be re-imaged and freshly articulated. Ecclesiology is, of course, an important branch of theology. For our purposes, providing categorical separation is necessary to give appropriate emphasis and clarity. The church matters in every community. The church matters to Jesus. The church should

---

[36] McKnight, *Kingdom Conspiracy*, 74.

matter deeply to us, leading to intentional scholarship and fresh expressions. Two modern scholars who reside in the Pacific Northwest have done just this in a joint effort. They state "…we believe that a systematic study of the church be framed by the Bible, historical theology, ecumenical concerns, and cultural considerations."[37] This framework is helpful, but I would again hasten to clarify that any such study of the church should ultimately be framed by Jesus himself. This is not mere semantics, as the scriptures are clear that life is found *only* in him.[38]

McKnight, once again, provides a definition to inform our understanding. "The church is the kingdom called Israel now expanded to include gentile believers."[39] His strong contention is that the Christian church has not replaced the nation of Israel but rather completed it. Once again, his conclusion that the kingdom and the church are essentially one in the same in my opinion is a theological reach. To be sure, he has the credentials for such a reach and makes a compelling case, but this conclusion isn't especially helpful in our modern culture, where church most often refers to an institution, activity, or place. Perhaps describing the church as *a taste of the kingdom* better captures the essence of our calling and identity.

The church of Jesus, as with its king, is alive! This is where our tendency to employ business principles to the structure and function of the church poorly communicates this reality. In a field research conversation with Ray Schmidt and Phil Zahn, they shared the vision of *The Fellowship,* a group that silently coordinates events

---

[37] Brad Harper and Paul Louis Metzger, *Exploring Ecclesiology: An Evangelical and Ecumenical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 10.

[38] See John 5:39-40.

[39] McKnight, *Kingdom Conspiracy*, 90.

like the National Prayer Breakfast annually. They make every effort to be "a family of brothers and sisters following Jesus together, not an organization, institution, or religion."[40] This is an exceptional statement that shouldn't be the exception in our corporate Jesus gatherings. To underscore this point, it is quite interesting to note that,

> the word for 'church' is rarely used in the Gospels, but they contain much significant material for a treatment of the topic of the church, including the notion of the kingdom as embodied in the lives of people on earth, the calling of the twelve disciples to be with Jesus, and the frequent use of communal language such as family, fraternity, little flock and city.[41]

Harper and Metzger add to this, "the church is a living, growing organism that responds and reacts to the multitude of cultural environments in which it finds itself…both as products of given cultures and as prophetic voices over against those cultures."[42] Chia adds, "This church knows that its most credible form of witness (and the most 'effective' thing it can do for the world) is the actual creation of a living, breathing, visible community of faith."[43] It is especially sobering that Phil Zahn, as a younger voice in *The Fellowship* said, "My generation sucks at community. It's a buzz-word laden with guilt and shame."[44] Community must be much more than a catch-phrase, or the church will lose not only its relevance but its successive generations. This assessment from the International Synod of Bishops on the Family (1980) states it well, "Unless the faith is

---

[40] Ray Schmidt and Phil Zahn, interview by author, Skype, February 27, 2019.

[41] Derek J. Tidball, "Church," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology,* ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 6.

[42] Harper and Metzger, 12.

[43] Chia, 97.

[44] Schmidt and Zahn, interview.

incarnated in our culture, our children will never come to see it as truly their own, not a foreign importation, and the church will remain marginal in their lives."[45]

In laying the foundation of an effective and compelling ecclesiology, there are no shortage of premium subjects. Canadian pastor Michael Mawhorter, in his recent dissertation, identifies concepts related to a theology of organizational culture. He suggests such a theology be informed by anthropology, christology, and ecclesiology.[46] And no ecclesiology would be complete without considering the missional calling of the church. Fuller professor William Shenk believes the church must be missional, or it shouldn't be considered as a properly functioning church of Jesus Christ. He presents evidence of the central mission of the church being deformed by the transition of the church from the persecuted outcasts to a fully embraced political and social entity in Constantinian times.[47]

No survey of culture from a Christian perspective would be complete without considering the near immortal words of H. Richard Niebuhr. His seminal work, *Christ & Culture,* now seven decades old, is still influencing the thinking of researchers and practitioners. He offered breakthrough understandings of how Christ, and by extension the church, relate to surrounding culture. Specifically, his five typologies have the appearance of being timeless: 1) Christ Against Culture; 2) The Christ of Culture; 3)

---

[45] Note reference to the article "Inculturation: the Communion of Particular Churches," *Origins* 10 (October 23, 1980): 311 as quoted in Carl F. Starkloff, "The Church as Covenant, Culture, and Communion," *Theological Studies* 61, no. 3 (September 2000): 428.

[46] Michael E. Mawhorter, "How Understanding a Church's Culture Enhances Ministry and Community Engagement" (DMin. diss., Trinity Western University, Langley, BC, 2015). ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[47] Wilbert R. Shenk, "New Wineskins for New Wine: Toward a Post-Christendom Ecclesiology," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 29, no. 2 (April 2005): 73-82.

Christ Above Culture; 4) Christ and Culture in Paradox; and 5) Christ the Transformer of Culture.[48]

However, many modern scholars, including D. A. Carson, have taken issue with many of Niebuhr's assertions, including questioning the scriptural veracity of his categorical interpretations. Carson's response will be specifically noted in Section 3. But as a true giant in the land in our understanding of culture, we would be remiss not to allow Niebuhr's voice to educate our understanding of culture: "Culture is the 'artificial, secondary environment' (Malinowski), which man superimposes on the natural. It comprises language, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, social organization, inherited artifacts, technical processes, and values."[49]

It is only appropriate to end this initial consideration of culture with Crouch's own contribution of categories. He asks, "What is our 'attitude' toward culture?" The potential options available include: 1) Condemning; 2) Critiquing; 3) Copying; 4) Consuming; 5) Cultivating; or 6) Creating.[50] It comes as no surprise that Crouch strongly advocates for the last two.

---

[48] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ & Culture* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1951).

[49] Niebuhr, 32.

[50] Crouch, 68-75.

A Sociologocal Collapse

The Collapse of Community

Virtually everyone agrees that our modern cultures are divided and dysfunctional. The most alarming reality is what Todd Didline calls the collapse of community. Church leaders have long lamented this, but Didline makes a significant correlation:

> The collapse of the American church and the breakdown of the American community are tied together. When you take a critical look at our society you will discover that America in 2018 is one of the loneliest and most fragmented cultures that has ever existed, and the church has been dramatically *infected* by this.[51]

The community problem that churches struggle with is also symptomatic of modern culture at large. Didline stresses the need to focus on the root causes, not on cosmetic changes. Didline calls these roots anti-community forces, which include the following:

Sprawl. "Sprawl has become particularly relevant through the mass production and marketing of cars since the 1950s, which has allowed and encouraged human populations to decentralize." Didline asserts (emphasis his) "*Sprawl has stolen our concept of 'place*.' This restructuring of our lives has made it such that we merely inhabit *space*, with no concept of or regard for *place*." The sobering result is, "The less we care about the place we cultivate, the less we invest in it."[52]

Screens and Technology. Didline further espouses,

> Today, nearly 98% of homes have a TV at their center, and 77% of Americans have a smartphone, just 10 years after their introduction. We have swallowed the

---

[51] Todd Didline, "The Death of the Church, Part 1," *Jesus Creed* (blog), *Patheos,* April 11, 2018, http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2018/04/11/the-death-of-the-church-1/.

[52] Todd Didline, "The Death of the Church, Part 2," *Jesus Creed* (blog), *Patheos,* April 18, 2018. www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2018/04/18/the-death-of-the-church-2-the-acf/.

> promise and pleasure of personal technology whole hog, without first evaluating whether it's good for human flourishing.

Didline is not dismissive or ignorant of technology's value, but rather is shining the spotlight on its eroding qualities relating to community. He continues,

> researchers are discovering the adverse effect the smartphone is having on social engagement…America has not bounced back from its decline in community engagement, in large part due to the combining effects of the smartphone, social media, and the internet. These disruptive technological advances are reinforcing the community disengagement trend.[53]

Hyper-Individualism (Me Culture). Didline's third and final "ACF" is the most insidious, but perhaps the easiest to observe. His pointed assessment is worth considering at length:

> We have moved from a "we" culture to a "me" culture. Since the 1950s, American society has been reorienting markedly toward valuing individualism, and it's reached a point where it has become a prime factor responsible for pulling our Church community apart. We are more likely to understand ourselves in relation to ourselves than in how we affect and are affected by others…Humans are necessarily both individualistic and collectivistic. This argument is not intended to fillet people for thinking about themselves. The problem, however, is that we've reached such an extreme — the "hyper" in hyper-individualism — that it's having significant impacts on our communities, even our faith, and our systems are beginning to reflect and perpetuate that problem. The pH of the water around us has become so imbalanced that we don't even realize we're swimming in acid.[54]

Didline's metaphor is apt, adding a corrosive component to community erosion and lack of investment. Given these realities, collapse is no hyperbole.

---

[53] Todd Didline, "The Death of the Church, Part 3," *Jesus Creed* (blog), *Patheos,* April 25, 2018. www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2018/04/25/death-of-the-church-3/.

[54] Todd Didline, "The Death of the Church, Part 4," *Jesus Creed* (blog), *Patheos,* May 9, 2018. www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2018/05/09/death-of-the-church-4-todd-dildine/.

The Ongoing Collapse of Christendom

Unfortunately, society and the church are dealing with this concomitant collapse of community. The historical rise and fall of Christendom, post-Constantine, is well documented. But the lessons learned by the early church must seemingly be repeated in successive generations. Noted sociologist and Protestant theologian Peter Berger notes that "All three major branches of the Reformation—Lutheran, Anglican, and Calvinist—sought to set up facsimiles of Christendom in their respective territories."[55] He posits "secularization" as the modern version of Christendom's ongoing collapse. "By secularization we mean the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols."[56] He concludes that "secularization has resulted in a widespread collapse of the plausibility of traditional religious definitions of reality."[57] This certainly has ramifications for the church and society, of which includes waning influence in the public sector and a corresponding relegation to the private. This is certainly a cause for concern but not for the misguided and deafening cries for a return to the falsely claimed "America as a Christian nation." Christendom's marrying of man's political and religious power and influence has never been the answer or an accurate portrayal of the values and realities of the Kingdom of God as introduced by Jesus.

Yet, secularization's impact on faith communities is real and is cause for alarm. Verlon Fosner, in a research interview cited the following statistics:

---

[55] Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (New York, NY: Open Road Integrated Media, 2011), 209.

[56] Berger, 145.

[57] Berger, 170.

- 53,000 leave US churches every week
- 96 US churches close every week
- 85% of churches are stalled or in decline
- .5% of churches are growing by conversion[58]

The institutional church of the US is in serious decline, and the professionals who serve it (including me) have been undeniably served notice by our cultures. The Kingdom of God, however, continues to "forcefully advance"[59] and cannot be confused or linked to this institutional collapse. Kingdom community is imminently possible in the midst of secularization and *especially so* in the midst of persecution, as we see from powerful examples throughout history.

Context: A Taste of Place

At the very heart of my argument regarding re-articulation and re-imaging is the modern agricultural concept of terroir. Terroir is most often attributed to wine making and was introduced to the world, appropriately, by France. It refers to the surrounding elements (climate, elevation, temperature, soil) and the effect it has on the grapes in the vineyard and thus the resulting wine in the bottle. Professor Amy Trubek expands the concept of terroir beyond wine and into cuisine and culture more broadly. The questions she explores, from a decidedly "foodie" perspective, include how we can regain the taste of place and how it can mediate between our local desires and our global reality.[60] The answers have parallel ramifications for the local church.

---

[58] Dr. Verlon Fosner, interview by author, Seattle, WA, October 26, 2019.

[59] See Matthew 11:12.

[60] See Amy B. Trubek, *The Taste of Place: A Cultural Journey Into Terroir* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009).

Trubek offers another outstanding metaphor that illuminates the connection between local and global, key issues to consider concomitantly in our modern cultures. She sees "modern stories of farming, cooking, and eating" as stories "to be considered together, as if they were individual squares of a quilt stitched together."[61] In considering the local church either as a franchise or purveyor of local taste, this picture offers a rich insight that could well inform meaningful applications.

Leonard Sweet captured the relevance of these metaphors when he said:

> There will always be money to be made in franchise. We are a lemming species after all. We herd and mob to the same places and there will always be room for that. That's not what we're about with semiotics and the church. We need the home baked and artisanal church. Franchise is so not Jesus! We need the 'one of a kind, unique, original.'[62]

A fellow classmate and Northwest minister, in a follow-up cohort discussion, said it this way:

> In fact, one of the most disheartening things about the institutional church today is that so much of it looks exactly the same. Cute and pithy phrases that are intended to stick in your head (but hardly hold any meaning). So many churches singing the same couple songs, using the same backing graphics and not telling the story of their community.[63]

What is true in the vineyard, the kitchen and the sanctuary is also true in some of the Northwest's most famous local and now international businesses. Nike changed the athletic shoe, apparel, and equipment business not just because of its superior products but because of its unique culture. The local terroir of Oregon, its rebellious streak and persevering spirit, and the fabled "Mighty Men of Oregon" (University of Oregon track

---

[61] Trubek, 37-38.

[62] Leonard Sweet, (lecture, Portland Seminary, Portland, OR, September, 2019).

[63] Heath Hollensbe, in an online forum of Portland Seminary, fall semester, 2018.

and field) helped to form their corporate culture and brand identity.[64] Interestingly, Nike not only reflected the terroir of Oregon culture but also *created* culture. That the church should do both is part of this claim.

Just to the north in Seattle, at a similar place in time, another local business would also create culture and change the world. Starbucks started as a provider of high-quality coffee beans, perfectly roasted and ready for the perfect cup. From humble beginnings, the Starbucks siren is now one of the most recognized logos in the world (along with the Nike swoosh). Howard Schultz, the second CEO, took this initial "taste of Seattle" and combined it with the social culture he witnessed in Italy to form a distinctively Northwest experience. "It's the romance of the coffee experience, the feeling of warmth and community people get in Starbucks stores."[65] Like Nike, Shultz and Starbucks were fanatical about their values and culture, locally influenced and now internationally applied.

Another fascinating study was conducted looking at artistic schools. The data they amassed suggests "that in almost every instance, artists identified with a certain school tend to live in the same region or city during its emergent period," and that the same is true into the 20th century, despite changes in communication and transportation that would suggest otherwise. Specifically, they assert, "A place has meaning, along with its

---

[64] Phil Knight, *Shoe Dog: A Memoir by the Creator of Nike* (New York, NY: Scribner, 2016).

[65] Howard Schultz and Dori Jones Yang, *Pour Your Heart Into It: How Starbucks Built a Company One Cup at a Time* (New York, NY: Hyperion, 2012), 10.

material and social qualities, and those attributions and understandings figure consequentially in how place structures social and cultural life."[66]

In section three, we will further consider how a *contextual* positioning and practice by Kingdom communities is essential to ensure a life-giving "taste of place." Terroir is the perfect contextual metaphor to aid our understanding of culture, pregnant with potential to change our thinking and inform our understanding.

Conclusion: Key (Re) Signed Metaphors

The concept of (re) signing, introduced earlier by Crystal Downing, is perhaps the most essential understanding in the field of semiotics. In addition to terroir and Downing's coin on edge, other helpful (re) signed images include the following:

Bringing Two Opposite Ends Together

Leonard Sweet offers this image as an antidote to polarized and dualistic thinking. He believes it is possible to hold "two opposing views at the same time."[67] This is a powerful (re) signing of the divinely commissioned assignment of peacemaking that will be taken up in earnest in the accompanying cultural artifact.

Fuzzy Dots

Modern thinking most often celebrates clean lines and connections, similar to the four corners area of the United States (a "perfect dot" on the map where Utah, Colorado,

---

[66] Kathleen C. Oberlin and Thomas F. Gieryn, "Place and Culture Making: Geographic Clumping in the Emergence of Artistic Schools," *Poetics* 50 (June 2015): 21.

[67] Leonard Sweet (lecture, Portland Seminary, September 2018).

Arizona and New Mexico come together). How altogether different, and apt, is the mathematical concept of *fuzzy sets theory* discussed by Hiebert. He states: "Fuzzy sets are mathematical sets which have no sharp edges. Instead, there are degrees of inclusion."[68] He continues, "Fuzzy sets provide us with not only another way of viewing the world but also a new system of logic. Along with fuzzy-set theory have emerged fuzzy algebra, fuzzy geometry, and fuzzy logic."[69] Perhaps it is past time to add fuzzy theology and all of its antecedents to the mathematical equations? Many would argue this has already been unsuccessfully attempted.

---

[68] Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections On Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 118.

[69] Hiebert, 119.

SECTION 2:

OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Introduction: Joining a New Tribe

We began Section One with the assertion, "Unprecedented times require unprecedented thinking." However, as an amateur historian, it is also true to the point of triteness that "we're doomed to repeat history if we don't learn from it." Certainly, we can learn a lot from the experiences and beliefs of faith communities who have come before us and who wrestled with similar issues of *theology, ecclesiology, sociology,* and *context*. But the voices of the past and accompanying traditions can easily overwhelm the palate, as it were, and spoil the taste of the sumptuous meal the Spirit has in mind for our day. So, we will briefly listen, and simply sample some of the sweet and sour, the salty and bland, the bitter and pleasing, from the table of yesteryear's solutions to re-imaging and re-articulating kingdom community.

Some of these solutions still maintain their flavor and their relevance. Some point to a day of greater fulfillment, while others valuably instruct of times and cultures past. Caution must be employed, yet each generation is responsible for incarnating the gospel in culture and employing appropriate changes to orthodoxy and orthopraxy. As commissioned kingdom ambassadors, Jesus followers are tasked with being faithful, careful, and purposeful. A significant part of this calling, according to Leonard Sweet, is to "understand the times like the tribe of Isaachar."[70] This makes pausing to consider and

[70] Leonard Sweet (lecture, Portland Seminary, Portland, OR, September 5, 2018).

analyze the thinking and practice of ministry practitioners, and their accompanying paradigms, an essential activity. Perhaps it is also time to consider *joining* that eclectic tribe of "seers," the Isaacharians.

Theology: Emergent and Fresh Expressions

My Master's coursework was done during the height of the Emergent movement. An unlikely and influential voice emerged from the forests (literally) of the Pacific Northwest. Here is how I captured his contribution to the conversation in my thesis:

> Donald Miller of Portland, Oregon, has a story that has deeply resonated with many post-modern seekers, making him somewhat of a "poster child" of a new kind of believer. His rambling journey and his spiritual conclusions have not been without controversy, with his involvement in anti-Bush protests, his many conversations over a beer in a local pub, his many more conversations over a pipe, or his stint with a hippie encampment in the Oregon woods. Not the typical spiritual journey of one the church would embrace as a guru of spirituality. But then, this postmodern generation bristles at the mention of typical or normal… Miller's signature illustration, both for his book and his spiritual experience, is a lesson learned from jazz music: "I never liked jazz music because jazz music doesn't resolve. But I was outside the Baghdad Theater in Portland one night when I saw a man playing the saxophone. I stood there for fifteen minutes, and he never opened his eyes. After that I liked jazz music. Sometimes you have to watch somebody love something before you can love it yourself. It is as if they are showing you the way. I used to not like God because God didn't resolve. But that was before any of this happened."[71] So begins Miller's diary of spiritual experiences…[72]

Miller was part of a large chorus of postmodern voices, calling for a new understanding and practice, not only of spirituality (Miller's focus), but the church as a whole in the midst of cultures that changed (emerged), mostly without the institutional church in tow.

---

[71]Donald Miller, Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003), ix.

[72] Jay J. Anderson, "Emerging Ministry in a Pre-Postmodern Age" (master's thesis, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary of Evangel University, 2008), 8-9.

Somewhere along this postmodern path, however, the Emergent movement seems to have lost its footing and its voice. Documenting the reasons for this is beyond our available scope, but a comment from Dr. Verlon Fosner, is enlightening:

> My take on the Emergent Church wave is that it came and went because it still primarily functioned as a traditional church, only cooler. Whereas Fresh Expressions was willing to walk away from everything we like and do church for the "never-been-churched-crowd" in a way that fully fits their sociology.[73]

The Emergent movement made some important contributions to orthodoxy and orthopraxy that can be celebrated and applied, even today, specifically in our continually emerging theology.

A Flexible and Discerning Theology

Emergent voices called for a re-visiting of our established, cherished, and systematic theologies. Many evangelical voices believed this was a "siren's call" that would shipwreck the church on the rocks of relativity. Author and scholar D. A. Carson is one of those, who sounded the alarm: "If an unchastened postmodernism extends its claims toward raw relativism and denies the possibility of knowing the big picture, it is not only idolatrous and anti-Christian but borders on the self-refuting and silly."[74] Duly noted. However, not all of the voices were "unchastened," and not all of the theological contributions were leading the church to its prophesied doom. The need for "flexibility" of theology within the context of cultures has been affirmed by generations of scholars, including Carson, with the noted caution flag at full mast and wise discernment, as always, required.

---

[73] Verlon Fosner, personal e-mail response to researcher, April 2020.

[74] D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisisted* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 94.

Renewing the Center

A theology that images and articulates "what matters most" must start with a renewed center. Prominent emergent theologian Stanley Grenz urged, "The way forward is for evangelicals to take the lead in renewing a theological 'center' that can meet the challenges of the postmodern…situation in which the church now finds itself."[75] For some, a unifying center violated the very essence of postmodern thought, and its rejection of metanarratives, captured by Hunter: "As the Enlightenment has faded, postmodern people are increasingly suspicious of people and institutions that claim authority, and they are increasingly dubious of ultimate explanations."[76] Fortunately, there were many in the emergent camp who affirmed a unifying center, including Grenz, who recognized "the single metanarrative that encompasses all peoples and all times."[77]

Fresh Expressions

Phyllis Tickle has been prolific in chronicling "Emergence Christianity." In her tome of that name, she charts the unlikely roots of Fresh Expressions, which she categorizes as "…an international subset within Emergence Christianity."[78] She credits the influence of Brian McLaren's book *A Generous Orthodoxy* and, of all things, an Anglican Church sub-committee report entitled *Mission Shaped Church*, chaired by

---

[75] Brian McLaren quotes Stanley Grenz's *Renewing the Center in his book, A Generous Orthodoxy.* See Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 28.

[76] George G. Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West…AGAIN* (Nashville: Abingdon Press 2010), 143.

[77]Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 164.

[78] Phyllis Tickle, *Emergence Christianity:What It Is, Where It Is Going, and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 118.

Graham Cray, Bishop of Maidstone. Most significantly, "Bishop Cray argued that there could no longer be a standard form of church. Contextualization, he wrote, has a time-honored presence within the historic church's history, just not in the history of the Western church."[79]

In response to these findings, and his own research, Verlon Fosner of the Dinner Church Collective, a part of the Fresh Expressions movement, developed *The Fosner Triad* (discussed in Section 3). This understanding is perhaps the most revolutionary articulation that this researcher has uncovered to date. Bishop Cray's simple articulation gives an excellent summary of a contextual kingdom community: "…the people of God in *this* place and in *this* time"[80] (emphasis mine).

Ecclesiology: Attraction, Performance and Consumerism

If We Build It (Attractional)

The movie quote that became the ecclesiological mantra of the church growth movement of the 1990's comes compliments of *Field of Dreams* (released in 1989). Those who have seen the movie can clearly hear the voice from the Iowa cornfield whispering, "If you build it, he will come,"[81] referring to deceased baseball superstar Shoeless Joe Jackson. Unfortunately, church growth experts believed this to be true beyond the "diamond," and many pastors believed the fictional whispering voice to be the Holy Spirit. So, began (or continued) the evangelical arms race, leading to all manner

---

[79] Tickle, 118.

[80] Tickle, 119.

[81] *Field of Dreams,* directed by Phil Alden Robinson (Universal Pictures, 1989).

of modern cathedral, state of the art sanctuaries, and culturally themed ministry centers. The coffee shops would come later.

Such cathedrals, of course, were nothing new to Christendom, but what *was* new and what *was* betrayed was the new working philosophy of ministry: "If we build it, *they* will come." In many cases, they did. One of the biggest (and best) examples of this attractional approach was (and is) Willow Creek Community Church and Pastor Bill Hybels. My first class in pursuit of a Master's in Church Ministries actually began at Willow Creek's *Prevailing Church Conference,* and thus can I testify to the attraction. The facilities, the resources, the preaching, and the music (including a rendition of *Good Vibrations* that would make the Beach Boys proud) were sensational! Hybel's and Willow Creek's philosophy also included the introduction of controversial "seeker-driven" ministry with its attractional approach. The result was one of the biggest evangelical congregations of its time.

Certainly, there was much to celebrate emanating from Willow Creek and other evangelical success stories. Indeed, my fellow vocational ministers and I cut our ecclesiological teeth on the *Purpose-Driven Church* of Rick Warren and the leadership teaching of John Maxwell. It was all well-intended, of course, and happily there was fruit that lasted, at least for a season. But as with any working ministry philosophy, the true north focus, trust and reality of lasting kingdom community often got lost in great sound bites. One of these I discussed in my first book, *Kingdom Primer:*

> "The hope of the world is the local church, and its future rests primarily in the hands of its leaders…" (Hybels). In fact, I remember enthusiastically sharing this with Steve (my mentor) at a coffee shop—where else? I especially remember the

> long pause, and then the response that began to forever change my perspective: "Oh, really? And here I thought the hope of the world was *Jesus!"*[82]

Many such lessons of the Church Growth Movement were painfully learned and best not repeated.

If We Do It Well Enough (Performance)

One of these lessons that we have trouble shirking in modern cultures is our performance mentality. The deep-seated belief continues to be, "If we do it well enough, they will *stay*." And many do, again, for a season. We've been well-trained by the "seasonal" mechanisms of modern cultures, and thus are inclined to listen to *Kingdom* Idols and to believe the *Kingdom's* Got Talent. And it does. But this "talent" pool, according to the Fosner Triad, only has the attractional power for an estimated (and maximum) one-third of our communities. More on this later. But for now, as we repent of this illusion, we can take comfort that following Jesus and following the presentations, activities and idols of a church are *not* the same thing.

If We Provide Enough (Consumerism)

The driving value and necessity of capitalism is consumerism. In the spirit of John Maxwell's leadership mantra, we can say that "everything rises and falls on *consumption."* Since this is the cultural air we breathe and water we swim in, it is understandable that this core value makes its way into our modern orthopraxis. "If we provide enough of what our customers want and need, on time and at the right price

---

[82] Bill Hybels as quoted in Anderson, *Kingdom Primer,* 84.

points, they will continue to consume our spiritual products." Appropriately, the authors of *Slow Church* remind us of the "four dimensions of McDonaldization: efficiency, predictability, calculability (quantifiable results), and control—or at least the illusion of control."[83] These values have largely driven the western institutional church to a smaller market share. Leonard Sweet aptly reminds us, "God did not put us here to consume, but rather to conceive and conserve."[84]

Sociology: Denominations, Institutions, and Regions

The church growth movement and the advent of mass transportation have brought about significant *sociological* changes in each community. These strange bedfellows have led to a regional Jesus gatherings approach that have often been "successful." Pastor Todd Didline makes the direct connection between the erosion of the neighborhood and the modern commuting phenomenon:

> My brother David Jenzen illustrates this phenomenon: "*We work ten miles away with people who live twenty miles beyond that, buy food grown a thousand miles away from grocery clerks who live in a different subdivision, date people from the other side of town, and worship with people who live an hour's drive from another…we serve soup to the poor folks on the other side of the tracks, but we don't know the person on the other side of the fence*." This is the environment we have created for ourselves, and we have unintentionally embraced the consequences. The data is clear: Sprawl has created bad soil for growing closely knit communities.[85]

Unfortunately, as Didline asserts, the organized western church, driven by growth, has far too often been a significant part of the problem of collapsing community. But

---

[83] C. Christopher Smith and John Pattison, *Slow Church: Cultivating Community in the Patient Way of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 13.

[84] Leonard Sweet (online lecture, Portland Seminary, Portland, OR, December 12, 2019).

[85] Didline, "The Death of the Church, Part 2," *Jesus Creed* (blog), *Patheos,* April 18, 2018. http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2018/04/11/the-death-of-the-church-2/.

there are a growing number of pastors and parishes that are seeing the sociological light. The Pacific Northwest has played host to a number of significant movements, including the very roots of the church growth movement. Donald A. McGavran, the founder of the Institute for Church Growth, originally set up shop at Northwest Christian University in Eugene, Oregon (now Bushnell University) in 1961 before moving on to Fuller Seminary.

Happily, new expressions of growth are coming out of Silverton, Oregon, home of the famed Oregon Garden. The *Slow Church* movement fully embraces the influence of local terroir as it gives spiritual expression to the patient and organic practices of the slow food movement. Smith and Pattison (himself a resident of Silverton) state, "Slow Food wasn't started by farmers. It was started by eaters who stood up and declared that they were no longer content to be passive consumers of industrialized food."[86] The application for kingdom communities in small communities such as Silverton become readily apparent.

Industrialized food is an apt metaphor for the prevalent influence and practice of denominationalism. According to Newbiggin, "It is the common observation of sociologists of religion that denominationalism is the religious aspect of secularization. It is the form that religion takes in a culture controlled by the ideology of the Enlightenment."[87] The Enlightenment's celebration of reason saw a corresponding elevation of the influence of institutions as purveyors of logic, structure, and control. The aforementioned postmoderns have been swift and decisive in rejecting the overbearing

---

[86] Smith and Pattison, 20.

[87] Leslie Newbiggin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 145.

oversight and restrictions of institutions, especially denominations. The answer is not found in the "blow up the system" mentality of the anarchists that are inflaming the protests currently filling the streets of America (another movement with strong ties to Eugene). According to Leonard Sweet, this isn't necessary, because the cracks have already formed, and the crumbling already begun. His prophetic warning is sobering, "What will go away are the middle/mediating structures (denominations). We need to put on our hard hats for the collapsing structures of the institutions and denominations!"[88]

Context: Conformity and the Celts

Modern expressions of kingdom community will continue to be practiced and debated for the conceivable future, as the spiraling decline continues unabated. Many postmoderns however appeal for us to return to the *pre*-modern practices of the early church. One of the groups garnishing renewed interest and attention are the Celts of the fifth century and their patron Saint Patrick. There appears to be much worth celebrating, beyond the music, dance, and spirits.

Hunter traces and chronicles the amazing spread of Christianity throughout the predominantly pagan land of Ireland. The missionary strategies, the training of lay ministers, and the aggressive development of parishes and monasteries transformed the cultural landscape as it transformed the people. Patrick and his protegés also developed innovative methods of communication that are still studied and lauded to this day. Particularly relevant to a study of semiotics is that "…Celtic Christianity was rooted even

[88] Leonard Sweet (online lecture, Portland Seminary, Portland, OR, September 30, 2019).

more in the imagination than the intellect and spoke in images more than in concepts."[89] Perhaps no greater example exists than Patrick's use of the shamrock to illustrate the Trinity.

What was most striking about the story of Patrick's return to Ireland (he was a former slave abducted from England) was his method of carrying the gospel. "Celtic Christianity had adapted to the people's culture; the Romans wanted Roman cultural forms imposed upon all churches…the Roman way should be followed everywhere."[90] Understanding and respecting the local culture and using cultural prompts and props in communications traces back to Paul and the altar to the unknown God on Mars Hill.[91]

In Patrick's day, this courageous "stance" was similar to Luther's at Worms. The Roman establishment expected conformity and had precious little tolerance for adaptation. The "Roman Way" wasn't just about carrying the gospel of Jesus to cultures yet to hear but was about carrying and establishing their superior culture as well. Worship was to be conducted in Latin, and often non-Latin speaking cultures were simply ignored. Unfortunately, there are myriad examples of this colonialist approach throughout Christendom, past and present. But Patrick persisted and the resulting fruit was breathtaking, in Ireland, and later in other parts of these island nations.

The establishment pushed back, however, and the Celts appear to have eventually fallen back in line, as the movement faded into history. Institutional conformity is difficult to resist, after all. Hunter rightly observes that "…the deeper issue of conformity

---

[89] Hunter, 100.

[90] Hunter, 55-56.

[91] See Acts 17:22-31.

is still much with us. The churches in most denominations and networks are expected to comply with certain customs and with the directives from headquarters or from some leader or leader group; the penalties for not complying vary from one tradition to another, but consequences follow."[92] He concludes, "Old paradigms change their appearance, but they resist serious change."[93]

Fortunately, not only have the former colonies of Rome and Great Britain thrown off their imperialistic yoke but, in many cases, have also rejected these "superior" cultural overtones and overthrows. Hunter reports on "…African Independent Churches, who insist on the right to do church in African ways for Africans, and who are now growing much more than the African denominations still tied to Euro-American denominations."[94] As a high school student, James A. Michener's epic *Hawaii* left an indelible impression on my emerging young soul. The message of Jesus was carried to these islands with the trappings and expectations of English culture attached, leading to natives worshipping (and sweating) in 3-piece suits and in proper edifaces of English architecture. Perhaps we shouldn't complain about the incredible Gothic cathedrals throughout the world, but by now we should have gotten the idea about exporting our cultures attached to the gospel message. But yet, we persist.

---

[92] Hunter, 129.

[93] Hunter, 130.

[94] Hunter, 62.

Conclusion: Scriptural Metaphors in Need of (Re) Signing

If we are to offer awaiting cultures "a taste of the kingdom," however, we must *persist*, as Patrick, with (re) signing images and re-articulating kingdom community. We must repent of our cultural superiority complexes and consider the unique beauty, goodness, and truth of those we are called to love. This means forsaking the ubiquitous use of military "conquering" and athletic "defeating" metaphors to describe our gospel carrying activities. This means real growth, not just church growth. This means adaptation not conformity. This means, as the tribe of Issachar, that we understand the times and what we should do.[95]

[95] See 1 Chronicles 12:32.

SECTION 3:

THESIS

Introduction: A Taste of the Kingdom in the Pacific Northwest

The express intention of this researcher of lifetime PNW zip-codes is to encourage and inspire Pacific Northwest Jesus gatherings to re-image and re-articulate kingdom community. Each zip code contains unique cultural components, all of which need the life-giving inbreaking of the Kingdom of God. My contention is that when Jesus gatherings *re-image* kingdom community, freshly articulate ecclesiology, and appropriately flavor with local terroir, each zip code will receive a life-giving a taste of the kingdom. Incarnating the gospel and re-imaging community in these cultures means being willing to employ appropriate changes to orthodoxy and orthopraxy. We have established that theology speaks to what matters most. Consideration now must be given to ways Jesus gatherings can re-image kingdom theology in community.

Re-Imaging Kingdom Theology

Theology as Art & Science

We do terrible disservice to theology when we relegate its value to the dusty systematic offices of academia or the irrelevant high towers of the pontificators of religion. The kingdom, as we'll soon discover, is all about flourishing life and the accompanying theology, expressly for the people, robes and titles not required. One of the most significant lessons of the truly educated (robes or not), is that art and science aren't mutually exclusive, along with a multitude of other dualistic false choices. If this is

true, then can our theology engage *all* of our senses? Can it go beyond our thinking to our *vision?* Can it go beyond our preaching and teaching to our *hearing?* Can we *taste* it? Scripture certainly leaves no doubt. The psalmist tells us, "Taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8, NIV), and the revelator John when he ate the little scroll given by the angel said it was "as sweet as honey in my mouth…" (Revelation 10:10, NIV).

Can we *smell* it too? The oft quoted Leonard Sweet seems to think so. In a classroom lecture, he pointed out that many cathedrals (such as Notre Dame) have their own distinct candle fragrance that can be ordered online. He stated that incense and spikenard were markers "of holiness in the past, but we're afraid of [such things] today."[96] Scripture again declares, "For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing" (2 Corinthians 2:15, NIV). We can only hope this includes our theology.

We saved the best sense for last, because the best art is *felt.* Perhaps we can touch it, or perhaps not if we're in the Louvre. But it touches *us*. Kingdom theology as art, not just the life-killing science of the historical critics, is an educational and experiential agenda worth pursuing. To be sure, theology is not only science, but according to Volf and Croasmun, "Theology was among the founding disciplines of modern universities, the queen of sciences."[97] As the queen of the sciences, it wears the most beautiful of artistic crowns.

This puts "simplexity" in a whole new light. Incredible art and science, as a finished product, can often appear deceptively simple. Denmark architect Tue Full built a

---

[96] Leonard Sweet (lecture, Portland Seminary, Westcott House, Cambridge, UK, June 2019).

[97] Volf and Croasmun, 44.

giant tree tower, allowing for unique and unmatched vistas of the forest. His words perfectly capture the essence of simplexity: "You can't imagine how much work there is to get the simplicity perfect."[98] Indeed, sometimes the simplest and most profound perspectives on theology come from the unlikeliest places. In a recent interview, actress Melissa Gilbert, appropriately of simple *Little House on the Prairie* fame, said, "The keys are going to be compassion, community, faith (whatever that faith looks like), and love. That's it. That's all that matters."[99] Thus should we approach all manner of simplexic, systematic topics, again beginning with Christology and eschatology.

Theology as Story

Systematic Theology is not the desired end of the kingdom theology being espoused here, nor is it the best of traveling companions. Enter biblical theology, especially as posited by New Testament scholar and prolific author, D. A. Carson. "Carson understands biblical theology as a bridge discipline from exegesis to Systematic Theology."[100] Klink and Lockett quote Brian S. Rosner in further defining this bridge discipline: "Biblical Theology may be defined as theological interpretation of Scripture in and for the church… maintaining sight of the Bible's overarching narrative and Christocentric focus."[101] These are the most critical areas to keep in focus when affirming a kingdom theology, and to avoid some of the inherent pitfalls warned against by Carson

---

[98] Tue Full, interview on *CBS Sunday Morning*, spring 2020.

[99] Melissa Gilbert, interview on *CBS Sunday Morning*, July 12, 2020.

[100] Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 80.

[101] Klink and Lockett, 60.

himself, saying "…a robust biblical theology tends to safeguard Christians against the most egregious reductionisms."[102] Carson gives a great summary of biblical theology and also a significant application for our purposes:

> When some hear the expression 'biblical theology,' they think of how various themes can be traced right through the Bible, or through large parts of it. These themes constitute the ligaments that hold the canon together: rest, temple, sacrifice, priesthood, kingdom, covenant, and so forth…the commitment to think about all of them at the same time that preserves us from forging very different patterns of the relationships between Christ and culture, and commends one complex reality that can nevertheless be worked out in highly different contexts.[103]

As with systematic theology, there are a number of "camps" that scholars occupy, each providing helpful perspectives. It is the narrative approach to biblical theology that this project seeks to underscore. Theologians Bartholomew and Goheen have said, "…narrative biblical theology can play a role in making the church—including biblical scholars—aware of the grand story that *ought to be shaping their whole lives."*[104] This will inevitably lead us to affirm Carson's pledge of "…allegiance to the Bible and its story line, culminating in Jesus Christ and his gospel."[105]

This narrative understanding and approach has significant ramifications, including no less than our perspective on biblical inerrancy and infallibility. When pressed in a lecture at Westcott House, Cambridge, to declare his conviction on the aforementioned

---

[102] Carson, 82.

[103] Carson, 44-45.

[104] See the quote by Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen in Klink and Lockett, 97.

[105] Carson, 115.

topics of systematic theology, Professor Leonard Sweet answered very much as Jesus himself might have if pressed on the same issues: "We can trust the story."[106]

A Generous Theology

Prolific author and primary emergent voice, Brian McLaren, has consistently promoted the value of the ongoing conversation. It has been noted that emergent contributions to the theological conversation have often been met with skepticism or outright rejection in both evangelical and mainline circles. However, at times these voices have been a gift to our understanding and practice, and ironically in appealing to our ecumenical unity. Of special note is McLaren's magnum opus, *A Generous Orthodoxy.* For many, any such headline is seen as the seedbed of universalism or other egregious heresies. The subtitle well sums up his convictions, and is worth noting here:

> WHY I AM A missional + evangelical + post/protestant + liberal/conservative + mystical/poetic + biblical + charismatic/contemplative + fundamentalist/calvinist + anabaptist/anglican + methodist + catholic + green + incarnational + depressed-yet-hopeful + emergent + unfinished CHRISTIAN.[107]

The intention here is not to choose a corner from which to enter the theological ring. There are simply too many corners available to allow for a proper fight! The marvelous contribution of McLaren, in this particular case, is his starting (and ending) place. He espouses "a humble rediscovery of the simple, mysterious way of Jesus that can be embraced across the whole Christian horizon (and beyond)."[108] In fact, the first chapter, entitled "The Seven Jesuses I Have Known," features a survey of lessons and

---

[106] Leonard Sweet (lecture, Portland Seminary, Westcott House, Cambridge, UK, June 2019).

[107] See McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy.*

[108] McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy,* 23.

perspectives learned across the spectrum of faith communities from Eastern Orthodox to Liberation Theology and from Pentecostal to Anabaptist. All along the way there is a spirit of generosity worthy of emulation, and a resulting good news that is succulently seasoned. For McLaren, the bottom line of his personal following is "a sustained and sustaining confidence in Jesus Christ."[109] This is the true center and the sure way forward.

A Theology of Kingdom Culture

A theology that addresses what matters most has already been discussed and lauded. But that such a theology should be contextually informed is potentially incendiary. Yet, Stephen Bevans boldly asserts, "…a theology that is not somehow reflective of our times, our culture, and our current concerns—and so contextual—is also a false theology."[110]

What matters most in the development of our theology is the focal point. The answer is Jesus, who *is* the Gospel. According to Leslie Newbigin, this needs to be declared in modern cultures with conviction. "To affirm the unique decisiveness of God's action in Jesus Christ is no arrogance; it is the enduring bulwark against the arrogance of every culture to be itself the criterion by which others are judged."[111] An additional word of caution from fellow missiologist Paul Hiebert: "It is important that Christianity stand

---

[109] McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy,* 49.

[110] Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (New York, NY: Orbis, 2002), 5.

[111] Newbigin, 166.

in prophetic critique of the times in which we live, that we not allow our faith to become just another version of the West's preoccupation with success, health, and the present."[112]

Our previously introduced theology of culture must now expand to include a theology of *kingdom* culture. Kingdom culture needs to be both created and cultivated by kingdom communities. To be sure, local communities *and* Jesus gatherings often lack genuine kingdom culture. Again, they certainly won't lack culture. Michael Mawhorter suggests, "Culture is like water to a fish: it is not only what they swim in, but what they breathe."[113] Andy Crouch succinctly defines culture as "what we make of the world."[114] What we have made of the world often bears little resemblance to the kingdom we have been called to declare and inhabit. Crouch continues:

> Culture is, first of all, the name of our relentless, restless human effort to take the world as it's given to us and make something else. This is the original insight of the writer of Genesis when he says that human beings were made in God's image: just like the original Creator, we are creators.[115]

Imago Dei. This appeal to the *Imago Dei* provides a helpful focal point for differentiating kingdom culture from the counterfeits. We've been tasked with the sheer joy, yet sobering responsibility, of bearing God's image in our world. The calling to bear, create and cultivate is not only shared with fellow believers but is exampled for us by God himself. He was the original creator and cultivator and continues to be "restless" in his divine efforts to make something far different of our world. And he invites us to join him. A kingdom community is followers of Jesus together bearing the image of God.

---

[112] Hiebert, 228.

[113] Mawhorter, 102.

[114] Crouch, 23.

[115] Crouch, 23.

Incarnational. Kingdom community assumes the presence of a king. A kingdom is ultimately wherever the king or queen is, as the flag of their realm follows them. From the first heartbeat of the immaculate conception, God's kingdom flag has flown on earth. John declares, "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood" (John 1:14, The Message). New Testament scholar Dr. Nijay Gupta has said, "John's language here alludes to a tabernacle or tent. Jesus literally pitches a tent and wanders around with us!"[116]

A kingdom community is a group of followers of Jesus living incarnationally in their own neighborhood. Just as the fully-God yet fully-man Jesus moved into the neighborhood of earth, he invites us to move into all of the zip codes of earth, people of dirt and divinity, working the soil that heaven might touch earth.

Inclusive. "Jesus lived a life of radical inclusiveness."[117] This is a loaded assertion that a radically divided people are prone to not just silently dismiss but loudly reject. We are much more inclined to develop "boxes of exclusion" than "circles of inclusion," like Jesus drew. Jesus powerfully exampled the "degrees of inclusion" in his dealings with Zacchaeus, the woman caught in adultery, and at Jacob's well in the heat of the day. Jesus removed the clean lines of religious culture. He calls us to do the same, as we keep in mind the church,

> is in fact by its nature exclusionary…As a consequence, the church confronts something of a paradoxical mission. It must preach the most exclusive of

---

[116] Nijay Gupta (lecture, Portland Seminary, Newberg, OR, December 2, 2019).

[117] Kevin Palau, *Unlikely: Setting Aside Our Differences to Live Out the Gospel* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 95.

> messages, yet do so with the most open of hearts, while modeling the most inclusive of communities.[118]

It is only fitting, after all, that a proper theology of kingdom community looks to the king first and most. Volf and Croasmun say it this way, "We believe the purpose of theology is to discern, articulate, and commend visions of flourishing life in light of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ."[119] And just what is a flourishing life? Their answer is ours to incarnate: "In Jesus' preaching, the answer to the question of flourishing life was 'the kingdom of God.'"[120]

We'll let the powerful summative words of Paul Hiebert provide the last word here on kingdom culture: "The kingdom of God *has come to us* in the person of Christ. It is found wherever God's people are obedient to the King. But the kingdom will come *in its fullness* only with Christ's return (Rev. 12:10). Until then, we live, as it were, between two worlds."[121]

A Relational Theology

A final brushstroke must be added to this beautiful, yet obviously incomplete, "impression" of theology. Our modern cultures are experiencing a revival of the most biblically significant kind. We are re-discovering and re-incarnating the relational priority of Jesus. What we refer to as the Great Commandment[122] is his relational manifesto. Jesus

---

[118] Jonathan Cole, "The Catholicity of the Church: Reconciling the Call for Exclusive Doctrine and Inclusive Community," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 39, no. 2 (April 2005), 178.

[119] Volf and Croasmun, 11.

[120] Volf and Croasmun, 150.

[121] Hiebert, 235.

[122] See Matthew 22:37-40.

was the greatest of theologians yet provided the ultimate example of a relationally driven life. Leonard Sweet says it simply, "I am a relational theologian."[123] Those who would lead and serve local kingdom communities have no higher calling.

Re-Articulating a Kingdom Ecclesiology

The heart of our theological considerations here lies in determining in what ways Jesus gatherings can freshly image, articulate, and embody kingdom community. Rodney Clapp asserts, "It is important for the church in each time and place to embody and communicate the life of Christ exactly where it is…what we need is not a new path but better language and sharpened imaginations to discern the path we are already following."[124] We begin this most significant of quests by returning to the idea of bringing two opposite ends together, specifically the fusion between the global and the local.

A Glocal Ecclesiology

An ecclesiology of the local and global church needs to be re-imaged and freshly articulated. Some will be resistant to considering changes to established ecclesiology and default to dualistic thinking. However, Sweet, strongly suggests, "The success of the future is to authentically particularize your story and voice in a particular context."[125] Caution must be employed, yet as has already been stated, each generation is responsible

---

[123] Leonard Sweet (online lecture, Portland Seminary of George Fox University December 9, 2019).

[124] Clapp, 188.

[125] Leonard Sweet (lecture, Portland Seminary, Westcott House, Cambridge, UK, June 20, 2019).

for incarnating the gospel in their cultures and employing appropriate changes to orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

The primary metaphor of a coin (US quarter) on edge, advanced by Downing, has become a primary image of this researcher for understanding how the church is to position itself in modern culture:

> This is the position of (re)signing truth: resigned to the headship of Jesus Christ, you maintain trust in the sign to the right, where the words 'In God We Trust' still appear. But your position on the edge also enables you to look to the left, where you can enjoy and celebrate the re-signing of the coin. Just as each state of the union determines its own sign on the quarter, so each new era or state of culture determines new signs for the faith.[126]

Downing also employs other images in her challenge to rise above dualistic thinking. This is especially relevant for modern churches that struggle balancing tradition with change. She states, "Rather than 'either/or' thinking, pitting a preferable past against the pernicious present, I will urge 'both/and' thinking: past and present in constant communication with each other."[127] She continues, "Note how my image of the coin throughout this book is triadic: in order to avoid the coin falling onto one side or the other we must balance on the third part—the edge."[128]

This triadic principle directly applies to the concept of glocal. Leonard Sweet is the expert guide to help us navigate out of an either/or dualistic understanding to a both/and positioning relative to cultures. He recently taught, "Our culture is going

---

[126] Downing, 57.

[127] Downing, 41.

[128] Downing, 230.

opposite directions at the same time (more global/more tribal). We need to start with the particular and then go to the universal."[129]

This is a prevalent theme for Sweet, both in lecture and in print, so we'll allow him to continue to unpack this concept as he introduces a significant modern example:

> Our current culture hyper-centralizes on one hand and decentralizes in another. Starbucks hyper-centralizes their products, logo and brand, but decentralizes the locations so they fit right in the neighborhood/zip code. Christianity will get more global in music and thought, even global in celebrations, but at the same time there will be more particularities.[130]

Sweet sounds the alarm regarding the casualties in this new reality. He continues, "That means any Christian structures that want to regulate you will fall away. We need to put on our hard hats for the collapsing structures of the denominations."[131] He concludes with an alignment challenge: "If it becomes anything other than Jesus in the transition of de-centralizing/hyper-centralizing then we are in trouble. This is our north star. Our southern cross. It's not polity. It's not mission. It's Jesus."[132]

Donald Bloesch joins the triadic chorus, offering a compelling and insightful picture of the both/and incarnational reality of the church:

> The church is essentially neither a sociological institution nor a divine organism but a divine-human fellowship animated by faith and love and sustained by hope. It is a paradoxical event with two sides – the human and the divine. These sides are never to be identified but always held together in creative tension.[133]

---

[129] Leonard Sweet (lecture, Portland Seminary, Portland, OR, Sept. 6, 2018).

[130] Leonard Sweet (lecture, Portland Seminary, Portland, OR, Sept. 30, 2018).

[131] Sweet, September 30, 2018.

[132] Sweet, September 30, 2018.

[133] Donald G. Bloesch, *The Church: Sacraments, Worship, Ministry, Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 75. See Bloesch as quoted in Mawhorter, 101-102.

Kevin Palau recently released a memoir of the work he and his family and the churches of Portland, Oregon have been involved in for over two decades now. It is an inspiring testimony of the impact people of faith can make when they love their community well. He, and Pastor Rick McKinley of Imago Dei Community, make some paradigm changing observations and assertions. Here is their working ecclesiology:

> What I learned is that Jesus doesn't really ever teach a specific way to be the church. He challenges. He encounters. He disciples. He sends. He empowers. But essentially, people learn by simply being with him and watching him. He leaves it up to individuals and communities to figure out what it looks like in their contexts.[134]

Renewing the Center

The theological concept of renewing the center, espoused by the late Stanley Grenz and other emergents, is also an important ecclesiological metaphor. The western institutional church has surely struggled with its central focus in modern cultures. The reason for this is often a faulty default mechanism. "Our biggest default, in religion and otherwise, is to see the institution as the answer. The problem is not always the institution. The problem is the institutional *thinking."*[135]

This leads to what I call the "Inverted Bulls-Eye,"[136] where the rings on the ecclesiastical archery target are backwards, most especially the center. Instead of Jesus occupying the center yellow, and moving out to rings of scripture, fellowship, and culture respectively, modern churches substitute culture as the center, and move outwards

---

[134] Palau, 19.

[135] Anderson, *Kingdom Primer,* 81.

[136] Anderson, *Kingdom Primer,* 79-80.

through fellowship and scripture and give a cursory nod to Jesus on the outer ring. To be sure, this is often not done crassly but rather *carelessly*. We must take renewed care to keep the King of the Kingdom truly enthroned in the center of our thinking, activity, and affection.

What does this mean for modern kingdom communities? Just this: "*The Kingdom can't be defined by a building, theology or tradition. It is always about Jesus and genuine relationships. We must think and live with a decidedly relational and not institutional lens."*[137] One of the "gifts" of the COVID-19 pandemic is the forceable reminder that the work and life of the church are not "centered" on Sunday morning or at a physical address. In a recent podcast, Leonard Sweet summed this up perfectly, in saying "The building of the church is not a building."[138] The aforementioned "If you build it, they will come" philosophy that fueled the overbuilding of the church must be (re)signed immediately.

Re-Signing the Ecclesia

This leads us to some critical new praxis for the modern Ecclesia:

Community Understandings. An important reminder regards our understanding of the historical ecclesia. Alexander states, "The usual Greek word for church is *ekklesia,* a non-technical word which means 'gathering' or 'assembly.'…It is used of ordinary crowds…but also designates the assembling of Israel before God to hear the reading of

---

[137] Anderson, *Kingdom Primer*, 85.

[138] Leonard Sweet, "The Blessings of Pandemic*,*"August 19, 2020, in *Preach the Story*, podcast.

the law, confess their sins, express repentance and renew the covenant…"[139]Surprisingly, it is an appeal to the "secular" aspect of these gatherings that I am making, and not to a theocratic and temple-centric culture often hinted at by well-meaning but misguided modern purveyors of religion. Certainly, there are "sacred" aspects of our modern gatherings, as there were in the noted ecclesias. We are called to be a worshipping, eucharistic, confessional, and scriptural kingdom community. The question is not whether these elements are essential aspects of our corporate gatherings but rather how these elements find expression in modern cultures.

For instance, there are many who subscribe to a "line by line, verse by verse" public dissemination of scripture in order to ensure the presentation of the "whole counsel of God." While this is admirable, it doesn't appear to be the practice of Jesus or the early church. It also doesn't appear to be an effective way of engaging our culture in significant issues and discussions. Nor was the Eucharist celebrated in the same fashion as our ornate tables of remembrance in sacred spaces. The early church "remembered" the completed work of Jesus by breaking bread together around ordinary tables, as they "rehearsed" the stories and words of Jesus in their home gatherings.

What I am suggesting is a return to a more secular understanding and practice of the public gatherings of kingdom communities. A recent church billboard in a small community of Oregon reminds us that "The church, [is] the original community center." In its quest to be wholly faithful to our sacred callings, modern churches have far too often been guilty of neglecting an embrace and engagement of their communities.

---

[139] See Tidball, 408.

"Advancing" with a decidedly hospitable *community center* philosophy of ministry versus "retreating" to a *sacred space* on a hill is perhaps a place to start.

Community Facing. One of the greatest practices of my current faith community during the COVID-19 pandemic regards our "position" in relation to our community. Fifth Avenue Church leadership has challenged us to be decidedly "community facing." This is no small point of order. In fact, At the root of the Greek word for church, *ekklesia,* is the verb meaning 'to call out.'"[140] So it is only appropriate that we position ourselves "facing out." Tragically, much of the messaging of the institutional church during this crisis has been a litany of demands, an often a blatant disregard and disrespect of civic leadership, and a predictable "turning in." What this often says (shouts) to our local communities is that we don't care about them, or perhaps more accurately that we care *more* about ourselves and our religious activities. This is *not* the example Jesus gave us, nor the commission he left us. Pastor Tim Johnson, in the early days of the shutdown of all public gatherings in Oregon, declared, "We are going to do *more* than is required of us by the letter of the law, because we love our community."[141]

Community Practices. The following values and practices will be more thoroughly unpacked in the accompanying artifact:

- The Value and Practice of Hospitality. Leonard Sweet makes a strong case for the value and centrality of "the table." He asserts, "Christianity in the West is suffering from an identity crisis. Instead of finding our identity in Jesus, we have tried to build an alternative identity on a Christian

---

[140] Smith and Pattison, 33.

[141] Tim Johnson, Fifth Avenue Church Staff Meeting, March 3, 2020.

worldview, on biblical values, or on Christian principles."[142] Symptomatic of this is our default to "devise new methodologies and strategies for how we do church. This is a misdiagnosis of the problem."[143] The problem, ultimately, is a relational one. His remedy for bringing back "vigor to Christianity" is to "bring back the table."[144]

- The Value and Practice of Conversation. There is tremendous value in the ongoing conversation within community. McLaren states, "The bad news: *the Christian faith in all its forms is in trouble*. The good news: *the Christian faith in all its forms is pregnant with new possibilities*."[145] McLaren values the ongoing conversation above all else and invites all, especially the church, to humbly and enthusiastically join in. The question is, "Is it possible to bring them into conversation rather than allowing them to define distinct perspectives or movements in tension with or in opposition to one another?"[146]
- The Value and Practice of Healing, Help and Hope. These three words can actually be boiled down to one: *Wholeness.* Jesus, the author of life and the Lord of compassion, is all about wholeness. He died to make it possible and he sent the Holy Spirit to ensure it. He has called us to be

---

[142] Leonard Sweet, *From Tablet to Table: Where Community is Found and Identity is Formed* (Colorado Springs, CO, NavPress, 2014), 2.

[143] Sweet, *From Tablet to Table,* 2.

[144] Sweet, *From Tablet to Table,* 19.

[145] McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity*, 6.

[146] Thomas H. Schattaeur, "God's Mission and the Christian Assembly: The Search for an Alternative Practice of Worship," *Dialog* 50, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 150.

> "essential workers" in our communities and "agents of healing." The early church, and later figures such as John Wesley, rightly understood this calling and made it a central ministry activity. As ambassadors of a kingdom of wholeness, we do well to follow this "healthy" example. The bottom line of all of our activities, dirt and divine, is "Jesus has all kinds of projects up his sleeve and is simply waiting for faithful people to say their prayers, to read the signs of the times, and to get busy."[147]

The Artisan Church

"…whenever something is described as 'artisan,' it is usually identified with something small and local and intimate."[148] This is the idea Sweet was getting at in his previously quoted, "We need the home baked and artisanal church. Franchise is so not Jesus! We need the 'one of a kind, unique, original.'"[149] Smith and Pattison add the important distinction, "You can't franchise the kingdom of God."[150]

Sweet introduces the idea of home baked that McManus expands as he describes the making of artisan bread. You can almost smell the results:

> The defining characteristic of artisan bread is that the ingredients are simple and pure—pure in their essence—and everything goes in the direction of simplicity…Artisan bread is the result of a craft; nonpartisan bread is nothing more than a product…For a bread to be considered artisan, it must be handcrafted.

---

[147] N.T. Wright, 230.

[148] Erwin Raphael McManus, *The Artisan Soul: Crafting Your Life into a Work of Art* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2014), 22.

[149] Leonard Sweet (lecture, Portland Seminary, Portland, OR, September, 2019).

[150] Smith and Pattison, 41.

> Artisan bread comes from a process and environment that reflect imagination and intimacy.[151]

In this same lecture, Sweet shared with his cohort that when he is a guest in a community that he wants to *taste the local*, not go to a chain restaurant. Experiencing and celebrating the local is both laudable and delicious! There is simply no substitute for fresh, local, and organic. However, Sweet is also quick to point out that while this is a best practice, there will always be a place for the chain. Previously mentioned companies, including Starbucks and Nike, representing the best of local terroir have gone on to be staples in every community. But what can possibly replace the kingdom values of "small, local, and intimate?"

Making artisan cuisine is an art form, and McManus, Sweet, and many others are challenging local kingdom communities of our day to join the local guild. Michael Polanyi suggests that each potential artisan needs the expertise and experience of a master:

> An art which cannot be specified in detail cannot be transmitted by prescription, since no prescription for it exists. It can be passed on only by example from master to apprentice…we find accordingly that craftsmanship tends to survive in closely circumscribed local traditions.[152]

Point well taken, and I would add *especially* for leaders of faith communities that have wholeness on their menu. Polanyi's observation regarding the absence of "prescription" for craftsmanship is a sobering reminder for those who would rely on the sole counsel of traditional or denominational praxis and praxy instead of the fresh bread being prepared

---

[151] McManus, 22.

[152] Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 125.

by the Spirit and those who have joined him in the kitchen. McManus drives this point home:

> How did it happen that religion and conformity became bedfellows? Far too often, spirituality has been replaced with standardization, and discovering the unique divine image within each person is replaced with a version of discipleship from the Industrial Revolution.[153]

The artisanal metaphor, which serve our twin purposes of re-imaging and re-articulating the church exceptionally well, provides a couple additional outtakes. McManus notes that *all* artisan bread contains only four ingredients (water, salt, flour, and yeast), versus commercial breads that often contain more than twenty. Lists of "essential ingredients" for the local church are rich and varied but are rarely (if ever) under twenty. Could it be suggested here that the three *transcendentals* of "Beauty, Goodness and Truth," presented by James Bryan Smith,[154] indeed serve as the main ingredients of the gospel narrative and essence of kingdom community? As we consider heeding the calling of the local kingdom craftsman, McManus provides a final word of encouragement, "…creation is the reflection of the very nature of God…At his core God is an artisan."[155]

Our Greatest Resource

Jesus made a jaw-dropping statement prior to his ascension that two-thousand years later we still struggle to believe, understand and practice: "Nevertheless, I tell you

---

[153] McManus, 14.

[154] James Bryan Smith, *The Magnificent Story: Uncovering a Gospel of Beauty, Goodness, and Truth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 6.

[155] McManus, 17.

the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7, ESV). To state the obvious, the fullness of this promise has yet to be realized in kingdom followers and kingdom communities. Yet the promise remains, as does the presence of Jesus.

Our theologies and ecclesiologies, our orthodoxies and orthopraxis, must ultimately yield and submit to the presence of God. There is no kingdom without the king, and he has chosen to stay and reign, despite what we might see and believe. Pope Francis, in his first encyclical, *Luman Fidei* (#17), powerfully underscores this point and his extended statement provides a fitting ecclesiastical benediction:

> Our culture has lost its sense of God's tangible presence and activity in our world. We think that God is to be found in the beyond, on another level of reality, far removed from our everyday relationships. But if this were the case, if God could not act in the world, his love would not be truly powerful, truly real, and thus not even true, a love capable of delivering the bliss it promises. It would make no difference at all whether we believe in him or not. Christians, on the contrary, profess their faith in God's tangible and powerful love which really does act in history and determines its final destiny: a love that can be encountered, a love fully revealed in Christ's passion, death and resurrection.[156]

Sociology: Experiencing Kingdom Community in the Neighborhood

Perhaps there is no better example of a neighborhood approach to Jesus gatherings in recent days than Verlon Fosner. We have discovered that the true essence of repentance is a change of thinking. When it comes to our cities, this pastor, author and innovator has demonstrated the fruit of a significant change of thinking. Perhaps we could call it an *urban repentance.* The church growth movement and the advent of mass

---

[156] See Edward T. Oakes, *A Theology of Grace in Six Controversies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 188.

transportation, as we've seen, have brought about significant sociological changes in each community and have led to a *regional* Jesus gatherings philosophy. But, according to Fosner, this "proclamation" model of church that is in sharp decline must be addressed by returning to our apostolic roots and returning to the neighborhood. Is it realistic to point back to an expressly, yet not exclusively, neighborhood approach? Fosner has demonstrated that it is.

Fosner's journey began as a struggling pastor in north Seattle, Washington. Like most other urban churches around him, Westminster Assembly was dwindling numerically. But instead of retreating to the suburbs where he knew numeric success awaited, Fosner developed the concept of *Dinner Church* as his doctoral dissertation. Now, instead of one shrinking congregation, he oversees 15 locations with a vision of adding locations in 12 more of Seattle's established neighborhoods within the next decade.

Fosner's research, experience, and example has unearthed and underscored a guiding principle. A *sociological* understanding of our communities needs to be pursued and practiced. Leonard Sweet, in his newly released book, *Rings of Fire*, says, "Every great city has distinct small-town neighborhoods with the soul of a village. Every great church is a community with the soul of its neighborhood and the mind of Christ."[157] In Seattle, this includes neighborhoods that have an existing Dinner Church like Freemont, Ballard and Pike Place, and others that don't including Queen Anne Hill and Pioneer Place. In his dissertation Fosner asserts, "The major metropolitan areas of the United

---

[157] Leonard Sweet, *Rings of Fire: Walking in Faith Through a Volcanic Future* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2019), 67.

States need the church, but they need it in a form that fits urban sociology."[158] He continues, "This project reveals a dinner church approach that has recovered the theology of place and understands that various places in the city differ from each other."[159]

Most churches fail to consider not only the sociology of their city but the sociology of their own communities of faith. They rightly believe "Sociologically, the Church is a fact of observation, accessible to persons who do not have faith. Theologically, the Church is a mystery of grace, not knowable independently of faith."[160] But most often they fail to fully consider whether the current models of church are truly accessible to those outside of the faith community. "To be sure, the church cannot be understood solely as a social organization. It is the body of Christ, and the Spirit of God is at work within it."[161] Fosner argues, "Few leaders question the sociological construct of their churches; they simply accept the Reformation model as an enduring assumption."[162] This lack of sociological awareness has surely contributed to the continuing demise and growing irrelevance of urban congregations.

This disconnect is not only apparent in urban settings of the Pacific Northwest, but also in suburban and rural areas. However, there are those, like Rev. Jamie McCallum of Belfair Community Church, across Puget Sound from Seattle, who are connecting and thriving. Belfair is a small-town representative of communities greatly impacted by

---

[158] Verlon Fosner, "Dinner Church: An Urban Proposal" (DMin diss., Evangel University Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, 2014), 129, WorldCat.

[159] Fosner, "Dinner Church," 132.

[160] Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1991), 115.

[161] Hiebert, 160.

[162] Fosner, "Dinner Church," 79.

cultural shifts and depressed economies. BCC's philosophy is to be intentionally involved in the community and for their church gatherings to be a reflection of Belfair, for better or for worse. On one occasion Jamie lamented that a regional church had come to Belfair and immediately attracted the largest gathering yet weren't fully invested in the Belfair community. This church currently has eight regional campuses and has experienced meteoric growth. Again, "either/or" thinking must be replaced with a "both/and" approach moving forward. Repentance is still required. To this end, the three-fold philosophy referred to here as "The Fosner Triad" needs to be explored further.

During private interactions and a public training, Verlon introduced a pie-chart that is a paradigm buster. Verlon's post-doctoral research helps the local church to target their *entire* community, not just a "slice" of it. According to his findings, a "proclamation" church will only be relevant to a third of the community with Judeo-Christian values or experience. A "contextual" church will reach a second third of the community who are secular minded and socially connected. The final third, who are secular minded but socially isolated, will be reached through a dinner church model.[163]

Todd Didline, who as a pastoral practitioner in the Midwest, was quoted extensively in Section One, offers some practical conclusions to the ACFs (Anti-Community Forces) he introduced. He believes the realities of *Sprawl, Technology* and *Hyper-Individualistic (Me culture)* "are actually poisoning our communities." He asserts, "In my humble opinion, the churches that will most successfully and faithfully navigate the 21st century challenges the ACFs present are churches that follow the 3 W's:

---

[163] Verlon Fosner, private interview with researcher, October 28, 2019, Seattle, WA.

- **W**alkability – The congregation living closer together.
- **W**isdom – The congregation discerning careful, intentional practices with technology.
- **W**e – The congregation prioritizing gatherings that cultivate family."[164]

Context: The Appropriate Flavoring of Kingdom Community

Finally, a *contextual* positioning and practice is essential to ensure a life-giving "taste of place." Dr. Sweet reminds us, "The ultimate act of communication in history, the Incarnation, means that Christ became a part of culture and can't be understood apart from culture."[165] As stated earlier, the people of God have been called to incarnate our cultures as well. To this end, the primary metaphor that has riveted the attention of this researcher is what Leonard Sweet has called "the number one word of the future: terroir."[166] The concept of terroir is simply that you can taste in the wine where it came from. Gisela Kreglinger, a winemaker from a long line of vintners, devotes an entire volume to discussing the spiritual lessons derived from the origins, production, and consumption of wine. Regarding terroir, she states, "Crafting a wine of high quality that reflects the *terroir* of a specific place is a vocation. The vintner's vocation is to produce, to the best of his/her ability, wines that reflect the bounty of their particular place."[167] Indeed, Smith and Pattison provide an exceptional introduction to this paradigm shifting concept:

> …the seventeenth-century French phrase, *le gout de terroir,* which can be translated "the taste of the place." Carlo Petrini, the cofounder of Slow Food,

---

[164] Didline, "The Death of the Church, Part 4," *Jesus Creed* (blog), *Patheos,* May 9, 2018. http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2018/04/11/the-death-of-the-church-1/.

[165] Leonard Sweet, *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 14.

[166] Leonard Sweet (lecture, Portland Seminary, Portland, OR, Sept. 6, 2018).

[167] Gisela H. Kreglinger, *The Spirituality of Wine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 103.

> writes often about *terroir* as "the combination of natural factors (soil, water, slope, height above sea level, vegetation, microclimate) and human ones (tradition and practice and cultivation) that gives a unique character to each small agriculture locality and the food grown, raised, made, and cooked there." Thus, a Pinot Noir from Oregon's Willamette Valley takes on the taste and texture of the grape, the soil, the barrel and the late frost.[168]

The implications are readily apparent for churches of *all* speeds and zip codes. Smith and Pattison espouse being "rooted in the natural, human and spiritual cultures of a particular place."[169]Another church in the Willamette Valley wine country of Oregon, is perfectly named *The Church of the Vine.* This Anglican congregation is led by Father Sean Flannery, who, in a recent interview said, "Terroir tells a *story.* You can actually taste the stories of the local community in the wines. The recent catastrophic fires in Oregon and California will be captured in upcoming vintages, for instance."[170]

Embracing and Celebrating the Local

Dr. Sweet has further stated, "There is a field of study called *psychogeography:* the effect of place on human emotion and behavior. We need a new branch of study called *theogeography:* the effect of place on faith, community, and mission."[171] This understanding of place has been beautifully exhibited by a hotel chain that has recently come to this region. In a recent promotional circular, they share a significant piece of their business model: "Graduate Hotels has a property in every corner of the country. To

---

[168] Quote from Carlo Petrini's *Slow Food: The Case for Taste* in Smith and Pattison, 160.

[169] Smith and Pattison, 160.

[170] Sean Flattery, interview by author, Newberg, Oregon, October 7, 2020.

[171] Sweet, *Rings of Fire*, 45.

capture the essence of a place, every hotel draws upon the region's unique stories, people and traditions."[172]

Calvin Anderson (my son) has worked for Graduate Hotels both locally (Eugene) and regionally (Phoenix). Tough field research assignments allowed me to visit Graduate properties in Seattle, WA and Tuscon, AZ in addition to the stunning Eugene property. The Seattle property is a celebration of University of Washington exploits from *The Boys in the Boat* to custom designed desk lamps of famous alum Bruce Lee. The lobby features a floor to ceiling wall of working "subs" pointing to and pumping out the sounds from the local "grunge rock" music scene that traces its roots to the Emerald City. In Eugene, the lobby doubles as a Nike shrine, featuring framed pictures of decades of pro-athlete promo posters and a case of vintage shoes, including the famed "moon shoes" designed by Nike co-founders Phil Knight and Bill Bowerman and worn by 1972 Olympic marathoner David Russell. And it is only appropriate that the hallway carpets feature local Pendleton Woolen Mills designs and the bathroom walls are covered with custom "Duck" wallpaper.

According to Anderson, the décor is the invitation, that says, "We're interested in what your community has to offer. Come in and tell us your story." He continues, "Training isn't just traditional, but rather helps employees get to know the story of the community. We want each one to be 'community storytellers.'" He quoted a former Graduate CEO who once said, "We want people to feel like they're coming home, even if it's their first time to the city."[173] This is true in the exhibits of most airports, including

---

[172] "Travel With Purpose: Regional Sports Culture," *Collide* (Spring 2019): 139.

[173] Calvin Anderson, Former Graduate Hotels NW Regional Director of Sports Sales, interview by author, Tuscon, AZ, December 16, 2019.

Eugene, which on a recent visit included the mayor's art exhibit, along with permanent displays for the local universities and wineries.

Many churches, including New City in Phoenix, AZ, celebrate local artists in foyer displays and of course in their musicians. However, how unfortunate that in most church buildings, including one I visited recently in Great Falls, MT, you wouldn't have any idea of your location from the décor in the foyer and sanctuary, or in the choice of music. Certainly, local connection and celebration goes beyond the skin-deep of the décor. For Graduate Hotels this includes serving locally sourced food and beverages and engaging in community partnerships that are having significant local impact. This includes the *I-Promise Village* in Cleveland, OH, started by local product and NBA star LeBron James, and by paying off over $150,000 in student debt to date through their "Scholly" program.

When it comes to local product, Oregon's Willamette Valley, already known for its hazelnuts, hops, berries, and Christmas trees, is fast becoming the new Napa. In fact, Oregon largely has Napa to thank for this exploding industry. Though grapes were likely first carried west on the Oregon Trail, it was the pioneers and romantics from California who blazed a new trail to Oregon in search of the perfect Pinot Noir. "They referred to their quest, without embarrassment, as a 'Search for the Holy Grail.'"[174] Their quest, with modest beginnings, ended up being wildly successful as the Willamette Valley offered the perfect terroir for the perfect Pinot.

> Pinot grapes thrive where good fruit grows—cool, moist climate with long growing season (so they can ripen slowly) in soil that drains well. Warm days and cold, snappy nights. Gives it intensity and elegance. Yet the weather can be a bit

---

[174] Tour notes of Jay J. Anderson, 2018-2020, quoting Paul Pintarich, *The Boys Up North: Dick Erath and the Early Oregon Winemakers* (Portland, OR: Graphic Arts Center Publishing Group, 1997).

> inconsistent, with unexpected frosts or heat, which means each Vintage (harvest year) is unique. It is interesting to note that Oregon shares a 45th parallel with Burgundy, France, which "coincidentally" is the wine that most resembles Pinot Noir.[175]

Local vintner Chris Shown, featured in the Preface, is one of the later pioneers who arrived in the south Willamette Valley almost four decades ago. He hails from the wine business, whose family owned 80 acres in the Napa Valley, and now along with his son Matt, who is the chief winemaker, is working his own 66 acres he calls *Brigadoon*. When asked about the concept of terroir, he responded simply, "Terroir is *everything*... everything that goes into the making of the wine. This includes the soil, location, temperature, weather patterns, moisture, wine maker's influence and selection of grape clones."[176] Regarding the uniqueness of Brigadoon's terroir he responded, "We are a 'cool' vineyard sight due to our proximity to the Coast Range mountains. So, our fruit hangs on the vine a bit longer, giving us the flavor (sugar) without the high alcohol. First sunlight is at the crack of dawn in other vineyards but is later for us, so it warms up later here. This means we also harvest later." He concludes, "If we were all making the same wine, then why would we have separate labels?"[177]

The bottom line for local churches is well captured by Smith and Pattison*:* "With a commitment to place, and with gratitude for the immensity of God's gifts there, our churches become catalysts of human flourishing: nurturing local economies and local

---

[175] Tour notes of Jay J. Anderson, 2018-2020.

[176] Chris Shown, phone interview by author, Brigadoon Winery, Junction City, OR, April 13, 2020.

[177] Shown, phone interview by author.

culture, and seeking the common good of our places."[178] It begins with kingdom communities engaging in research, soul searching and giving proper consideration for, "What things—for instance, people, practices, convictions—define your congregation and give it its distinctive taste? How can we celebrate these things…?"[179] Their conclusion is worth introducing in our local gatherings, "Place, like all things in life, is a good gift from God."[180]

Yet, caution and discernment must be employed in every culture. Not all cultural "dirt" is sacred, nor are all expressions of "divinity" created equal. In John's first epistle, he warns us regarding our desires getting carried away to the point of being love of the world.[181] He later rebukes the church of Ephesus, saying "you have left your first love." (Revelation 2:4, NKJV). My strong conviction is that Jesus has called us to incarnate our world, which assumes being at the intersection of dirt and divinity. The church reflects both. But as we properly create and cultivate our culture alongside the other purveyors in our community, divine footprints and fingerprints must become obvious to all of a *kingdom* community in their midst.

Imaging the Local

As kingdom communities seek to embrace and celebrate the local, they must also make special effort to image the local. Two additional metaphors are offered in the

---

[178] Smith and Pattison, 43.

[179] Smith and Pattison, 60.

[180] Smith and Pattison, 73.

[181] See 1 John 2:15-17.

conclusion to this section, but two powerfully illuminating statements regarding place need to be noted here. First, McManus said, "Paris is what a city looks like when artists create it."[182] What are the local creators and cultivators of our individual zip codes (including the faith communities) expressing?

A former local sports journalist and talk show host has now become a notable national voice. His voice, however, extends beyond sports to insightful social commentary. His simple observation, "Teams become their cities"[183] perfectly drives the terroir nail home. The Pittsburgh Steelers display the blue-collar grit of the "Steel City." The Dallas Cowboys display the opulence and size of the Lone Star State (where everything is big), with their palatial stadium and lucrative player contracts. The New England Patriots represent the cerebral sensibilities of their scholarly Boston location. And we would be bereft, as a projected centered in the Pacific Northwest, to leave out the flag waiving "12th Man" fanaticism of the Seattle Seahawks!

The question for kingdom communities is whether the same is true in their localities and gatherings. Newell believes significant cultural influences have been the reality for Christianity throughout all of history's major civilizations. For our day he concludes, "A growing area of academic research is the study of 'place': how we interpret locations, how we interact with our surroundings, and how the resulting sense of place shapes our personal and cultural identity."[184]

---

[182] McManus, 5.

[183] Colin Cowherd, *The Herd,* FS1 TV Broadcast, July 16, 2020.

[184] Edmund Newell, *The Sacramental Sea: A Spiritual Voyage Through Christian History* (London, England: Darton: Longman, and Todd, 2019), 14.

Inculturating the Local

The local kingdom community should influence the local culture even as it is being influenced by it. In order to be faithful to our king, this requires a delicate, and at times seemingly impossible, task. However, there is precedence for faithfully administering this sacred balance. Kreider, in his survey of the early church, presents the mediating practice of *inculturation:*

> As Tertullian and Clement negotiated the relationship between solidarity with the wider culture and critique of it, they were engaging in what missiologists call *inculturation.* Inculturation is rooted in the recognition that Christianity, like every religion, is embedded in culture. As Christian thinkers, missiologists affirm that Christianity can bring liberation to every culture; that is, it can enable the culture's best self to flourish as its people find Christ in their midst, living, teaching, and finding goodness in their culture.[185]

Kreider sees the two principles of "indigenizing" and "pilgrim" as being held in tension by the early church. He asserts, "In the ancient world, when Christians were at their best, they sensed a dynamic interplay between indigenizing and being pilgrim, between affirmation and critique. They lived in existential tension between being at home and being strangers…As a result, the Christians are hybrid people"[186]

Home

Our favorite destination, especially during the holidays, is also our favorite four-letter word: *Home.* Perhaps we could add it to another list of favorites, that being our theology. Volf and Croasmun state, "The purpose of theology is then to help human

---

[185] Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church:The Improbably Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 189.

[186] Kreider, 191.

beings identify God's home as their home and to help us journey toward it."[187] For those who still struggle with the loaded metaphor of kingdom, they helpfully add, "…the 'kingdom of God' and the 'home of God' are metaphors for two sides of the same reality."[188] Perhaps the greatest aspect of terroir is captured in Kreglinger's statement here: "The smell of the wine was so familiar, the taste so fresh and crisp, that it smelled and tasted like home."[189] Palau concludes his Portland story with the perfect question: "That's our story. But what's yours? What makes your hometown, well, *home?"*[190]

Conclusion: Key Metaphor (Re) Signs

Our trusty John Deere *Gator* is returning to the barn with mud on the tires but with the back bed filled with fresh riches compliments of local terroir. We've really only had time for a "taste" of these concepts and ideas relating to kingdom community that are as flavorful, complex and inspiring as the best *Pinot Noir.* The conviction of this researcher has only been buoyed as a result, that Kingdom community needs to be *re-imaged* in Jesus gatherings in every zip code. This will stem, in part, from a freshly articulated ecclesiology, flavored by the local cultural terroir, leading to a life-giving taste of kingdom culture. But the responsibility lies with the vintners, leaders and followers all, to better understand true kingdom community and to properly position and practice accordingly. Many more trips to the vines, fresh cuttings, and married science and art will

---

[187] Volf and Croasmun, 71.

[188] Volf and Croasmun, 181.

[189] Kreglinger, xiii.

[190] Palau, 248.

be required, but what a choice calling and what a choice product will be ours to both enjoy and present our king.

Much has been said regarding the centrality of Jesus in our local expressions of kingdom community, and rightly so. The *King's Standard,* representing His very presence, needs to be flown in all of our gatherings and scatterings. But as the books are temporarily closed on this academic pursuit, a note of celebration and caution needs to be sounded from the sanctuary to the statehouse to the marketplace. Jesus said, "It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7, NIV). By the empowering and superintendence of the Holy Spirit, kingdom community will thrive beyond our wildest imaginations and abilities.[191] But the responsibility also belongs to these same scientific artisans to intentionally listen and faithfully follow as the Spirit leads. Father Dulles takes us *home*,

> To carry out their mission in the Church, Christians must therefore open their ears and hear 'what the Spirit says to the churches' (Apoc. 2:17). It is not enough for them to listen to the Church unless the Church, through its responsible leaders, is listening to the Spirit.[192]

Re-imaging is the expressed order of the day for this project. As McManus expresses, "It's about moving imagination into image, transforming the invisible into the visible."[193] Therefore, two final images are offered for the consideration and implementation of local gatherings.

---

[191] See Ephesians 3:20.

[192] Dulles, 191.

[193] McManus, 67.

Creating Kingdom Icons

Professor Sweet has often indicated his disdain for mission and vision statements for the church. Enter Stephanie Wieber, who in a cohort session introduced us to *Image Statements* for the organizations that we lead.[194] These not only clarify but commend what it is that fuels us as a people. Father Dulles adds, "In religious education a constant effort must be made to find images that faithfully communicate the Christian experience of God. Theology itself depends heavily on images."[195] What local icons can be created, discovered and employed to help provide a taste of the kingdom in an individual zip code?

Zip Codes

A taste of the kingdom in every zip code is a passion project, like a glass of Oregon Pinot Noir, requiring good science and art. The three zip codes that have captured my attention along the way include 97401 (Eugene), 98528 (Belfair) and 98101 (Seattle). I was also introduced by Dr. Fosner to a United Methodist congregation in Wildwood, Florida. Their pastor, Dr. Michael Beck, still conducts typical liturgical activities on Sunday mornings *(proclamation church)*. But they have also launched on-site and off-site *dinner church*es, as well as several *contextual churches* throughout their community, including at a dog park. The Fosner Triad is alive and well in the 34785!

---

[194] Stephanie Wieber (lecture, Portland Seminary, Portland, OR, Sept. 9, 2019).

[195] Dulles, 19.

SECTION 4:

ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

Artifact Purpose

I am developing a book proposal to accompany the Written Statement, focusing on kingdom community as *a taste of the kingdom.* This book will be the second in a trilogy, addressing renewed kingdom thinking and living with an express focus on *re-imaging.* It is envisaged that these books, in addition to printed hard copies, will be part of a suite of resources on a digital platform, available to students of all ages, with the explicit desire of resourcing those serving local churches and the implicit desire of connecting with the university aged.

Modern churches find themselves in liminal cultures, requiring new understandings of the ecclesia *(re-imaging)* and new approaches to communication *(re-signing).* This book will assert, as with the Written Statement, that when accompanied with an embrace of local terroir, each zip code will receive a life-giving taste of the kingdom. To be sure, local Jesus gatherings and the Kingdom of God are not congruent terms, though some of the activities and realities are (hopefully) shared. Thus, the focus of our activities and intentions, however well-conceived, isn't to establish his kingdom on earth. That is well-beyond our calling and abilities as creators and cultivators. It has also already been accomplished, with yet more to be realized. But the gathering of believers *can indeed* experience and offer the world a taste of the kingdom, right here in this zip code and right now at the intersection of the dirt and the divine…in kingdom communities on planet earth!

Artifact Layout and Design

As with each book in the trilogy, *A Taste of the Kingdom* will be presented in a three-part format. Each letter (A-Z) of the first book, *Kingdom Primer,* is a stand-alone lesson intended to help readers with *"learning to think and live according to Jesus"* (the sub-title). To this end, it includes the sections: "Announcing the Kingdom," (A pithy declaration); "Picturing the Kingdom" (An illustrative image or story); "Life in the Kingdom" (Focus on application and experience). Each section has a recurring "icon" as part of the heading, including a trumpet and scroll (Announcing), an artist's paint palate (Picturing), and a compass (Life). The layout is specifically designed for simplicity, applicability and conversations. It is also intentionally playful, with this expressed declaration in the first paragraph of the book:

> This book, crayons and cartoons notwithstanding, really isn't a children's book. Yet, at its heart, that's exactly what it is. It's kind of hard to explain, which is probably why we use so many colors and pictures. As a starting point let's agree it's a book for kids of all ages, especially those who have experienced a few more birthday parties and Christmas mornings.[196]

It is a book that celebrates "child-like" (not childish) as one of the hallmarks of the Kingdom of God. It also looks to the person and words of Jesus, *first, last* and *most.*

Similarly, *A Taste of the Kingdom* will continue in this playful, experiential and conversational manner. But as with *Kingdom Primer,* the principles and applications will be simple yet profound (simplexity), easy to understand but hard to practice, and ultimately are no laughing (or childish) matter. Kingdom community simply *must* be freshly articulated and re-imaged in modern cultures if we are to offer every zip code a

---

[196] Anderson, *Kingdom Primer*, 1.

life-giving taste of the kingdom. The research and conclusions of the Written Statement will find expression and the thesis will find incarnation in this cultural artifact with the same format as *Kingdom Primer,* with a "fresh" twist*:* "A Fresh Understanding" (Pithy re-articulations of ecclesiology); "A Fresh Image" (Creative images, concepts and stories designed to re-image Jesus gatherings in modern cultures); "A Fresh Experience" (Focus on fresh applications and shared experiences).

One of the present and ongoing dangers for kingdom communities of every zip code, as introduced in the Written Statement, is dualism. The result of this is leaders and followers, all, making false "either/or" choices that often don't accurately reflect the Kingdom of God. Thus, each section of *A Taste of the Kingdom* will present "Duads" that celebrate the "both/and" possibilities of the Kingdom of God! An example from Dr. Sweet mentioned earlier is "Global + Local = Glocal" (chapter five), with the obvious implications for kingdom communities.

Artifact Motifs

Kingdom Primer utilizes two main motifs in its design and layout, in direct relation to the title. The concept and metaphor of the Kingdom of God, as presented by Jesus, is particularly inspiring and engaging to me, hence this *magnum opus* trilogy. The introduction of *Kingdom Primer* addresses the reticence of some today to embrace such allusions to "kingdom" because of the "images of colonialism and imperialism this conjures up,"[197] or the struggle to relate to a realm not characterized by democracy. These valid concerns must be given proper voice, and in the spirit of this project, put in their

[197] Anderson, *Kingdom Primer,* 5.

proper context. Terroir can have both positive and negative elements, as can allusions to kingdom. "Yet the Kingdom Jesus refers to is *altogether different"*[198] and his use of this metaphor is ultimately illuminating and fun (imagine that!). Thus, will the journey to the vineyard in *A Taste of the Kingdom* be unapologetically filled with kingdom principles, allusions, and images.

For the record, the metaphor of a "primer" is the second motif of note in the first book. "The dictionary defines a primer as 'an elementary book for teaching children to read…' The first task in the schoolhouse is to learn to read…Learning to read is an intentional task, in the schoolhouse and in the Kingdom."[199] This motif drives the content of the book, from the A-Z (and 1-5) section headings, to the constant encouragement to heed the proper meaning of repentance as "a change of *thinking.*"

The companion motif of *A Taste of the Kingdom* is the culinary and vinicultural concept of *terroir.* In the Written Statement I present the conviction that Jesus gatherings (churches) are influencing local culture as they are being influenced by it. This is wholly appropriate to the proper understanding and practice of *theology, ecclesiology, sociology* and *context.* Terroir is all about the influence of the uniquely surrounding elements of each location and the resulting "story" that is told by the product (food, wine, community). As with the primary kingdom motif, the rich images from the vineyard (and tasting room) will be quite illuminating and fun!

---

[198] Anderson, *Kingdom Primer*, 5-6.

[199] Anderson, *Kingdom Primer*, 6.

SECTION 5:

ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION

Target Audience and Potential Applications

The intention of this book (and trilogy), as introduced in Section 4, is to provide the foundation for a suite of printed and digital resources, made available to students of all ages, specifically:

Those Serving Local Churches

I love the local community of believers and have counted it a privilege to serve several congregations, both paid and unpaid. As a follower and leader, I have seen faith communities at their best, and as a former denominational official, certainly at their worst. Kingdom community on earth is messy (dirty) but ultimately worth the attention and affection (divine). The intent of these books is to first and foremost point to Jesus, and in keeping with my spiritual gift, provide encouragement for faith and connections.

To date, the limited distribution of the first book has itself been encouraging to my own faith. A former church where I was an associate pastor, now nearly 30 years ago, is using it for their fall (2020) book club. Their senior pastor is leading the way with another 15 congregants involved to date. I'll be meeting with them in person mid-way through the season to directly interact with them and can't wait! I have also made the book available as a gift to several church leaders, including my own, in the hopes that it will be a valuable resource. Certainly, *A Taste of the Kingdom* will more directly relate to those currently providing leadership for local congregations but is intended for all.

University Students

I have a particular passion (and I believe calling) for university students. To date I have been involved in encouraging student faith on campus at George Fox University as an adjunct instructor for the initial and required spiritual life/Bible class for all freshman (THEO 101, 102), and currently as a volunteer Life Group leader. My wife and I also intentionally sought out and connected with students from Northwest Christian University (now Bushnell University) and Grand Canyon University when our boys were enrolled there. Several of these students have received a book to date, and more on the way. This is especially exciting given that many of the small group conversations with these students helped to shape *Kingdom Primer.*

My ultimate dream, vocationally, would be to work full-time on a university campus. This would ideally include both the pastoral and instructional, in addition to potential administrative. The suite of resources I'm developing, anchored by the kingdom trilogy, I believe would be an exceptional series of courses! It would also provide resources for small group discussions and is in fact currently being used this way in my Life Group of five students at GFU.

Friends and Family

Social media, as with all forms of media, represents a tremendous opportunity for genuine connection that is fraught with inherent dangers. My own experience has been almost exclusively positive to date, especially as it relates to the release of *Kingdom Primer* in June of 2020. Some of the first people to purchase the book were childhood friends that I haven't seen since we were separated by my family's move in 1982 when I

was 14! I have developed a *Kingdom Primer Facebook Group* specific for the book, and to date I have 125 members and counting. Those currently in the group already represent every one of my locations and every walk of life, from neighbor to student, and in each vocational stop. I have recently begun a Wednesday Blog post on this site that is being seen each week by more than 100 members and represents my most significant "ministry" currently. Of course, nothing is better than having my own family involved, nuclear and extended.

Artisans of all Professions

These books represent my best attempt to develop and release *art* into my world. Until reading the paradigm altering book *The Artisan Soul* by Erwin Raphael McManus, I would have never described myself as an artist. Now I know better, though only within the limited boundaries of a literary canvas. The Written Statement declares the intention that *A Taste of the Kingdom* will not be limited to religious professionals and institutions. I believe the principles of kingdom community can directly relate to those of every professional acumen, application, and artisan. It would indeed be a pinnacle aspiration to have the Starbucks, Nike, and Graduate Hotels of the world that are presented in both the Written Statement and Artifact be influenced and encouraged by this project.

Oregon State Correctional Institution

One of my dearest friends is currently incarcerated for a devastating mistake made nearly two decades ago. It is one of my greatest griefs, and joys, to visit and continue to walk with Rick as he serves a 15-year sentence. But Rick is redeeming this time by serving as a tutor, helping fellow inmates complete their high school educations. He also

has intentionally carried Jesus into the halls, cells and yards of OSCI. Rick received the very first copy of *Kingdom Primer* and has reported that it has been passed from inmate to inmate almost weekly. It will now be a permanent addition to the prison's library. I can't think of a more significant application and distribution of *Kingdom Primer.*

Scope, Content, and Intentions

The introduction of *Kingdom Primer* makes clear its intentions. "This book is a *PRIMER* and makes no claims otherwise…It is not the whole story. Not by a long shot! It is simply an introductory guide to Kingdom thinking."[200] In the same spirit, *A Taste of the Kingdom* is designed to be simply that…a taste of re-articulated and re-imaged principles of kingdom community that are especially compelling and noteworthy. During this latest season, these principles have been especially inspired and informed by Dr. Leonard Sweet, as well as fellow cohort pilgrims in the *Semiotics, Church and Culture,* DMin. SCC17, program of Portland Seminary of George Fox University.

One of these cohort mates of special note is Heath Hollensbe. I would absolutely describe Heath as an artist, and a ten-talent one at that! Heath was instrumental in the final stages of the development, production, and release of *Kingdom Primer.* It simply would not be in print today, nor be the work that I am proud of, without his expertise. Heath himself is developing a "suite of resources" for aspiring authors that includes assistance with development, production, release, and marketing for a monthly fee. I certainly plan on utilizing these services in the days ahead.

---

[200] Anderson, *Kingdom Primer,* 6.

Development and Timeline of the Kingdom Trilogy

As was previously noted, *Kingdom Primer* was released in June of 2020. The program requirements of my current DMin calls for this book proposal and a writing sample that will represent roughly one-half of the total word count of *A Taste of the Kingdom.* In the back of *Kingdom Primer* (page 268) it lists the release date for *A Taste of the Kingdom* as Summer 2021. My personal aspiration is to have a completed draft of this second book by the time of my graduation, May 6, 2021, with publication to follow by the end of June. *Kingdom Primer* also states that the third book of the kingdom trilogy, *Kingdom Compass,* is slated for release in the summer of 2022.

With the intention being that this trilogy will serve as the foundation for a suite of resources, here are some of the additional offerings being considered:

- *Kingdom Blogs and Vlogs* in addition to the current weekly author article postings on the Kingdom Primer Facebook Group.
- *Discussion Guides* for groups for each of the books.
- *Class Syllabus* for each of the books.
- *Sermons, Sermon Series* and *Retreats* for local churches.
- *Age-Appropriate Vignettes* released potentially in small hard-back form.

Publication Standards, Resources and Budget

Kingdom Primer is a self-published work, which is becoming more of the norm for first-time authors. We made the decision to use *KDP (Kindle)*, which allows for on-demand printing runs of any size. With *Kingdom Primer* being a full-color book of approximately 55,000 words, the hard cost for each book is $20.24. KDP adds an

additional royalty charge of $13.50, making for a hefty initial release price online of $35.00. Obviously, this small personal royalty isn't sustainable and not only doesn't compensate for time but to date hasn't come close to covering production costs. However, KDP does allow for *author copies* at the hard cost of $20.24 at amounts up to 999 for each order. This has allowed for initial distributions within the sphere of influence of the author.

Moving forward, being accepted by a publication company will continue to be pursued. I have initiated conversations with the owners of *Deep River Publishing* of Sisters, Oregon (formerly Multnomah) and have put a copy of *Kingdom Primer* in their hands. They have provided valuable assistance to date, but the financial considerations of both parties aren't compatible to date (they offer mostly "pay to play" literary services). I have also sent a copy to my lead professor and mentor, Leonard Sweet, who has recently just launched his own publishing company, *Salish Sea Press.* I will continue to put these books into the hands of "influencers and publishers" (including just recently author and speaker Bob Goff), in hopes that their feedback, guidance and ultimately acceptance will result in the future.

Post-Graduate Considerations

Finally, I feel especially compelled to note that this DMin pursuit has been, for me, a process of "finding my new voice." Dr. Loren Kerns, director of the GFU doctoral programs for Portland Seminary, in advising me initially, indicated that the Master's Degree process is where this normally occurs. However, he encouraged me that this is not inappropriate for a DMin pursuit, especially given the wholesale changes I have experienced over the past several years, personally and vocationally. I am happy to report

that I believe my voice has indeed been (re) found and initially lifted. I look forward to new opportunities for kingdom service in the immediate days ahead, Lord willing. Of course, I also hope that this project will prove to be both relevant and encouraging to those who are coming behind me in their academic degree pursuits and serving alongside me, again Lord willing, in the academic arena.

I earlier indicated that my dream is to serve vocationally on a university campus. After vigorous pursuit to date, these opportunities have been severely limited. In addition to the personal edification and professional "re-tooling" that the DMin program has provided, I also see it as a process of obtaining a "vocational passport." It certainly will not guarantee vocational opportunities, but it *is* guaranteed that most doors won't open without it. I'm thrilled to report that one initial door has already opened as a result of my elevation to the status of *Candidacy.* I have just begun this fall (2020) as an Academic Advisor for *Dinner Church School of Leadership,* which includes 6 students from across the country during this academic year. I am especially encouraged in that I have specially noted *Dinner Church* and Dr. Verlon Fosner throughout the Written Statement, and I am philosophically and passionately aligned with this philosophy of ministry.

SECTION 6:

POSTSCRIPT

Dissertation Execution Summary

As stated in Section 5, this dissertation, and entire DMin pursuit, has primarily been a process of "finding my new voice." Perhaps it would fit the project motif better if rather say finding my *fresh* voice. Perfect. The *terroir* provided by lead professor, Dr. Leonard Sweet, my cohort mates, and the design of the *Semiotics, Church and Culture* program by Portland Seminary of George Fox University, I believe has led to a most rich, balanced and nuanced Pinot Noir, worthy of the Pacific Northwest from which it originated.

There was never any doubt, once I joined the program, that I'd be doing a Track 2 dissertation path. It was always my intention to have a book produced by my studies and research. This certainly made the decision for this program to be my terminal degree quite easy, though not painless. The original intent was to explore a "new wineskin" for local faith communities. The concept of terroir, compliments of Dr. Sweet, surfaced almost immediately, over a cohort dinner on the 33rd floor overlooking *my* Portland. I've been thrilled with the process of discovery, articulation and imaging. I am also quite thrilled by the products that have been developed to date, including this Written Statement and the accompanying cultural artifact. For me it has been more than just a title, or a conceptual development. It has truly been "a taste of the kingdom."

The Path Ahead

One of the greatest surprises, and delights, of this dissertation process was the realization that the cultural artifact would be the "center jewel" of a three-part kingdom trilogy. The Kingdom of God is the most meaningful of Jesus' metaphors to me, and the driving motivation of my life. My first book, *Kingdom Primer: Learning to Think and Live According to Jesus,* released this past year, I believed would be my life's magnum opus. Then along came Len (ahem, Dr. Sweet). But even my dear professor encouraged us all to look beyond our dissertations, Track 2 or not, at our *coming* magnum opus. This most inspiring of messages came over Zoom, of course, from the back deck of his Orcas Island home. We all took it immediately to heart.

The accompanying artifact is all about embracing the *both/and* of the Kingdom of God. So, in that spirit, I'm declaring both *Kingdom Primer* and *A Taste of the Kingdom* to be my life's defining message, with one significant codicil. It will also include *Kingdom Compass,* the third and final installment of the kingdom trilogy, targeted for June 2022. The focus of the third book is "an instrument for daily living." This will accompany "learning to think and live according to Jesus" *(Kingdom Primer)* and "a fresh understanding, imaging and experiencing of kingdom community" *(A Taste of the Kingdom).* There are abundant academic and practical paths to pound down in the days ahead in the hot pursuit of the King and his Kingdom!

I'm thankful that I have a current, and God-willing future, kingdom community in which to base this pursuit. I'm also thankful for the new *choice* traveling companions of my SCC17 cohort. I'll probably arrive at the castle a step or two behind, but I can't wait to raise a glass *together…* and then continue the journey.

APPENDIX A:

ARTIFACT

A TASTE OF THE KINGDOM

A Fresh Take on Kingdom Community

(See image c.1)

JAY J. ANDERSON

ARTIFACT TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION……91

WELCOME (AGAIN) ROYAL SUBJECTS……...92

PART ONE: WHAT MATTERS MOST……..…..104

CHAPTER 1 A THEOLOGY OF THE KINGDOM…….……..105

CHAPTER 2 A THEOLOGY OF COMMUNITY……...126

CHAPTER 3: A THEOLOGY OF PLACE…….…..144

PART TWO: A FLOURISHING LIFE TOGETHER……..……...165

CHAPTER 4 FIRST + LAST……..169

CHAPTER 5 GARDEN + CITY……177

CHAPTER 6 DIRT + DIVINITY……..187

CHAPTER 7 INCLUSIVE + EXCLUSIVE …….196

CHAPTER 8 LOCAL + GLOBAL ……..

CHAPTER 9 LOVE + TRUTH…….

CHAPTER 10 REGION + NEIGHBORHOOD……..

CHAPTER 11 FRIDAY + SUNDAY……

CHAPTER 12 HEALING + HELP……

CHAPTER 13 SIMPLE + COMPLEX..……

CHAPTER 14 INHALE + EXHALE……

CHAPTER 15 DARKNESS + LIGHT…….

CHAPTER 16 CELEBRATION + SUFFERING……

CHAPTER 17 GATHER + SCATTER……

CHAPTER 18 PLACE + RELATIONSHIPS…….

CHAPTER 19 NOW + NOT YET…….

CHAPTER 20 VISIBLE + INVISIBLE……

CHAPTER 21…….

CHAPTER 22……

CHAPTER 23 JESUS + NOTHING……

HAPPY HOUR…….207

Dedication

For Karen, the inspiration behind the man who has inspired generations of students and followers all around the world. I'm blessed, with my Portland Seminary SCC17 cohort mates, to be included in that number. I look forward to being with your Leonard in your Orcas home, and to meeting you in our eternal one.

WELCOME (AGAIN) ROYAL SUBJECTS!

This is our second kingdom excursion together. After a necessary season in the schoolhouse, learning our Kingdom ABC's *(Kingdom Primer)*, it is time to head outside…but not for recess. Class is still in session! Yes, you'll still need your lunch pails and backpacks. You'll also need, in the immortal words of *Woody* in Toy Story, a "traveling buddy." This is most definitely a journey that we'll be taking *together.* Together is the very essence of the Kingdom of God.

So where are we going?

I'm so glad you asked. Our initial destination is the cultural wine country of the Pacific Northwest, for a distinct taste of this rich and inspiring culture. Our ultimate destination, of course, is the Kingdom of God, as introduced and invited by Jesus himself. We'll quickly find that his kingdom is both a dirt and divinity kind of kingdom. Talk about rich and inspiring!

As I might have mentioned once or twice in the first book, I have been truly captivated and motivated by the concept of the Kingdom of God. Yes, it goes without saying that *Downton Abbey* is my all-time favorite TV show, and that *Downtown Disney* is my favorite destination, whether I've just been there or not *(Mainstreet USA* actually, but let's not split hairs). It bears repeating that while some might still (appropriately)

struggle with some of the images and realities that "kingdom" conjures up (colonialism, caste, oppression, excess), "We simply use kingdom terminology and imagery because Jesus did—and because it's fun!"[201] It must also be noted that the "childlike" component of kingdom actually began not with Walt Disney, but with Jesus.

But these valid concerns must be given proper voice, and in the spirit of this project, put in their proper *context.* Terroir can have both positive and negative elements, as can allusions to kingdom. "Yet the Kingdom Jesus refers to is *altogether different"*[202] and his use of this metaphor is ultimately illuminating and fun (imagine that!). Thus, will the journey to the vineyard in *A Taste of the Kingdom* be unapologetically filled with kingdom principles, allusions, and images. So with that said, I'll race you back to the castle!

But along the way, we'll be racing through the rows of the king's vineyard. The image on the front of the book is actually *King Estate,* in the south Willamette Valley of Oregon, about a half hour from my house. The sprawling and sensational acres are just as pretty as the picture and includes more organic agricultural products than just grapes. Oregon has always been famous for its Ag products, from fruits and vegetables to hazelnuts and hops and Christmas Trees! But Oregon is especially famous for its pioneers, from its first explorers trapping the streams to the immigrants riding their prairie schooners on the famed

---

[201] Jay J. Anderson, *Kingdom Primer: Learning to Think and Live According to Jesus* (Seattle, WA: KDP Press, 2020), 5.

[202] Anderson, *Kingdom Primer*, 5-6.

Oregon Trail, seeking ample and fertile land to raise their families and crops. The state capitol even has a pioneer adorning the top of the dome, draped in actual gold (no doubt from California ☺), and our NBA franchise is nicknamed the "Trailblazers."

I am a Pacific Northwest native, both in history and in heart. The Pacific Northwest has a unique culture that sets it apart from other regions of the country. From its roots of rugged individualism and adventure, coming from those early explorers and immigrants, to the organic and earthy connections with the environment, to the ongoing entrepreneurial yet relaxed spirit of the people. The Northwest is indeed as the old Oregon license plate proclaims, a "Pacific Wonderland." Anyone who tastes it will see.

In the mid 1970's, a new band of pioneer came to the Willamette Valley of western Oregon in a renewed search for the Holy Grail, the perfect Pinot Noir. Now, the resulting vineyards have become world-famous, as has the Pinot. Perhaps Oregon's pioneer spirit has been *re-imaged* from a prairie schooner to a Pinot Noir glass! *(see image w.1)* Natives and visitors alike would drink to that. Of course, Willamette Valley growers and vintners will be thrilled to share their journeys, secrets and products with us. However, the Kingdom of God, specifically kingdom *community* in this second book, will be our primary focus.

So, what's with all the footnotes?

Yeah, about those. This second book has been directly birthed out of a research journey, specifically in pursuit of a doctorate degree. Yes, you are now welcome to call me "Dr. Jay!" ☺ That was actually my favorite nickname growing up (Jaybird a close second). But what a wonderful journey it has been, with 11 cohort mates from across the country, an advisor from right here in Oregon (obviously full of wisdom) and a lead professor and prolific author from my original home state of Washington. Perhaps you've heard of Leonard Sweet? If not, I'll send you a reading list, beginning with his Jesus trilogy. You might just hear his name used a time or two in the pages to come. It also included the trip of a lifetime to the "City of Learning," Cambridge, England, which if I start talking about, I'd never stop. Suffice for now to say, "God bless the Queen!"

Suffice it also to say that this book will start out a bit more "bookish" in the first part, due to my becoming more of a smarty. But I'll do my best to walk the line (and jump through the hopscotch squares) between the bookish and the whimsical. Perhaps in a picture we could point to a pack of Smarties (impressive title on the outside and a party on the inside/*image i.2*)! ☺

We certainly must continue to view our world and live our lives in a *child-like* manner if we are to draw the smiles and reap the rewards of our most benevolent King Jesus. **"My Father, Lord of heaven and earth, I am grateful that**

you hid all this from wise and educated people and showed it to little children. Yes, Father, this is what pleased you." (Matthew 11) Our king isn't impressed with our degrees if it doesn't lead to proper *thinking*, which must consistently lead us to repentance (a change of thinking). **"Change your thinking! The Kingdom of Heaven has come near." (Matthew 4)**

So, in Part One we will delve headfirst and headlong into the pool of *theology.* No, you can't skip it (even the footnotes). See it as an opportunity to take a running start at a rope swing and at the apex jump off into the cool, clear and refreshing water! No, it won't be a muddy pond, I promise. I might be a smarty now, but I'm still sweet!

Theology, according to Yale professors (*super* smarties) Volf and Croasmun, "ought to be, but today largely isn't, about *what matters the most*—the true life in the presence of God."[203] The emphasis is mine, and as we'll clearly see, kingdom community is certainly an aspect of the true life that matters most. They continue, "We believe the purpose of theology is to discern, articulate, and commend *visions of flourishing life* in light of God's self-revelation in Jesus

[203] Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun, *For the Life of the World: Theology That Makes a Difference* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2019), 1.

Christ."[204] And just what is a flourishing life? Their answer: "In Jesus' preaching, the answer to the question of flourishing life was '*the kingdom of God*.'"[205] We'll specifically take a fresh look at the flourishing life in Part Two. *What matters most. The flourishing life. The Kingdom of God.* Have you ever referred to theology this way? Yeah, me neither. This is gonna be fun!

Our frolicking in the waters of theology will be limited to three specific pools (or tastes). The first two will be true to the title. Verbatim actually. A theology of the *kingdom* alone could, as has, filled many volumes. We'll be selective, but these foundational understandings will be critical for all that is to come (and not just in the book). Equally significant will be an initial discussion of *community*, by which we mean our theology of faith gatherings (church/ ecclesiology).

Finally, and this is where it gets really interesting, will be a theology of *place.* I recently had the opportunity to serve as a local tour guide in my current home of Eugene and in my former home Portland. Talk about fun and interesting (but not so "rich" if you know what I mean). Before I started leading tours, I didn't have the first clue about the wine industry and the amazing vineyards that were within ten minutes of my front door. Now I'm an expert. ☺

---

[204] Volf and Croasmun, 11.

[205] Volf and Croasmun, 150.

One of our early lessons was the concept of *terroir,* introduced to the world by the French. This became one of the main metaphors of my research and a breakthrough for me in understanding kingdom community. Leonard Sweet calls it "the number one word of the future,"[206] and it has everything to do with place. The impact of the surrounding environment, from the slope to the elevation, from the soil to the wind and from the rainfall to the temperature, all make for a resulting wine that is as unique to its location as it is to its vintners. It tells a *story,* and that story is *good.* Have you ever thought of the church in this way? Yeah, me neither. Don't you just love the French? Yes, God bless them too.

These understandings will lead us to an appropriately aged (get it?) and essential kingdom announcement: ***Kingdom community needs to be re-imaged (pictured) in Jesus gatherings, stemming from a freshly articulated ecclesiology (theology of the gathering) and flavored by the local cultural terroir, leading to a life-giving taste of the kingdom in each zip code.*** (Can you tell that was my thesis? ☺) Notice the preceding statement did not suggest kingdom community needs to be "reimagined." The intention here is to connect the dots, as it were, of existing and emerging understandings of orthodoxy (essential belief) and orthopraxy (essential practice) in local kingdom communities. *Images* have

---

[206] Leonard Sweet (lecture, Portland Seminary, Portland, OR, September 5, 2018).

always been more effective than words, and in our modern cultures it has never been more critical to communicate visually. For sure, all of the senses must be engaged if we are to properly experience and incarnate the Kingdom of God on earth, but sight and taste will get "fresh and clear" attention in these pages.

It is important to note that the research insights I'm sharing were not exclusively discovered in the local church, nor will their applicable value be limited there either. Local businesses, charities and other cultural institutions will not only benefit from this re-*imaging*, but in many cases are already displaying this in unique and inspiring ways. Northwest businesses of note that serve as great examples of the power of local include *Starbucks, Nike* and *The Graduate Hotels.* My son Calvin worked at the Eugene Graduate and was an invaluable resource. He also hooked me up for a few days at the Seattle Graduate as well, which was a tough assignment. All in the name of proper and exhaustive research! ☺

And just how are we going to get there?

Part Two is where the book will take on a familiar shape. Each "letter" of *Kingdom Primer* was divided into three sections: "Announcing the Kingdom" with a pithy statement in purple followed by a brief unpacking; "Picturing the Kingdom" with a fun illustration/story; "Life in the Kingdom" with ideas for

applying and experiencing each principle out loud and in living color. If you enjoyed the format of *Kingdom Primer* then you'll be right at home in these pages, too.

But *A Taste of the Kingdom* will feature a fresh twist (like Sprite). At our first retreat in downtown Portland, Dr. Sweet introduced our wide-eyed cohort to the concept of *liminality*. He said that modern churches find themselves in liminal, or transitional, cultures. They are far different from the traditions we've been steeped in, but yet are still far away from what they will become. This requires new understandings of the ecclesia (super cool Greek word for "the gathering") and new approaches to communication. The picture he used was of a playground swing, where "we must lean back to get proper momentum and perspective yet push forward into the future."[207] Isn't that great?!

This gives the perfect understanding (like's Sprite's lemon/lime) of a *both/and* approach to belief and practice. Far too often, in my strong opinion, we are asked to make "false choices" in our faith and in our following. The academic word for this is *dualism.* Black or white. Blue or red. Right or wrong. In or out. Jew or Gentile. Christian or pagan. Smarty or SweeTart. Certainly, some choices

---

[207] Leonard Sweet (lecture, Portland Seminary, Portland, OR, September 6, 2018).

are that easy. But then there are Reese's Peanut Butter Cups, sweet & sour sauce, and…Sprite! *(image i.3)* Both/and…

Part Two will be a practical theology and celebration of the both/and. Dr. Sweet's other introductory picture (see what a good student I was?) was "bringing two opposite ends together."[208] This is where dualism meets its match and where our understanding of kingdom community gets truly delicious! In cultures as bitterly divided as ours, is it even possible to do this? It is actually our *calling*. Consider the words of the smarty of biblical proportion, Paul:

> **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God." (2 Corinthians 5, NIV)**

Reconciliation is all about bringing two sides together. That used to be what great politicians were known for. *It should be what we as followers of Jesus are known for.* This only makes sense because this is *exactly* what Jesus was known for, and did! He brought a selfish, rebellious and hard-hearted people back into

---

[208] Leonard Sweet (lecture, Portland Seminary, Portland, OR, September 6, 2018).

intimate fellowship with God himself. Talk about the ultimate assignment. We are to go and do likewise.

But here is where the twist comes in. In our understanding, picturing and experiencing of kingdom community, it is amazing how many seemingly opposite understandings and practices can be brought together from the liminal space we are occupying. And it will be breathtakingly beautiful to the Kingdom of God to see what happens when we do!

Thus, I'll be offering twenty sets of "Duads," polar opposites (seemingly) that, when combined (brought together), provide us with *Fresh Takes, Fresh Images* and *Fresh Experiences* of kingdom community. I regularly say to people that I am always "late to the party but awfully fun once I finally get there." I have a fresh example from my research. By now you're probably overwhelmed with my research acumen and conclusions. I've tried to hold back but…you know…

Anyway, my latest research has discovered the origins of purple. Purple has been my favorite color for as long as I can remember: From the deep color on a pansy to my favorite college team to the school color of my boys' high school team. And it's the color of *royalty* of course (which I remind those who don't cheer for my teams). Those who have read *Kingdom Primer* know that it was filled with primary colors, including red and blue. Of course, we also hear a lot about

red and blue during our national (USA) elections. But what do you get when you combine them, red and blue? Wait, you already knew that? Sigh, a researcher just never gets any credit. The result, as you know or could guess by now, is…***purple*****.** Pur-fect! ☺ Purple will not only be our color of choice, but our kingdom community *destination.*

The king has invited us to wander the sacred vines and taste of the *divinely* intoxicating fruit. He has even offered us a seat on his trusty John Deere Gator *(image i.4)* if we want to relax and enjoy the ride and the view. But don't get too comfortable. We'll be rolling up our sleeves and joining the master vintner in the dirty and divine work of creating and cultivating soon enough. But for now, let us neglect our departure no further.

PART ONE

WHAT MATTERS MOST

(Just a Taste of Theology)

(image c.2)

1

A THEOLOGY OF THE KINGDOM

"What you should want most is God's kingdom and doing what he wants you to do…" (Matthew 6:33, ERV)

(image 1.1)

In order for us to properly understand and experience kingdom community, we must first sharpen our pencil and sharpen our focus in relation to our theology of the Kingdom of God, as introduced by Jesus. From his initial utterance **"The time has come! God's kingdom has come near," (Mark 1)** to his final charge to his first followers, Jesus was all about establishing the Kingdom of God on earth. This could rightly be called the *crown jewel* of Jesus's metaphors! ☺ But I believe it's more than that. Much more.

Rob Bell has said, "This kingdom-of-God message (that's what Jesus talked the most about…) simply cannot be kept in a box of any kind."[209] Appropriately, this is also a predominant theme in Christian literature, past and present, so our kingdom competency is well within reach. In fact, Jesus declared that **"indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17, NKJV)** This message and reality, as Bell suggests, can't be hemmed in (or kept inside) and certainly can't be fully captured in a modest word count (are you listening Professor Sweet?). Yet, my current "diggings" have proven rich with insight and

---

[209] Rob Bell, *What is the Bible? How an Ancient Library of Poems, Letters, and Stories Can Transform the Way You Think and Feel About Everything* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2017), 66.

provided invaluable imagery that, were it possible, has brought the kingdom to fresh light. It is my privilege and joy to report on these findings.

The first row in the vineyard, and our first task, is to consider a *description* of the kingdom. We will resist (almost) all efforts to provide a definition. Next, we survey the revealed reality of the kingdom in *time and space*. Third, we'll widen the lens to include our view of creation, noticing how Scripture reveals the kingdom as God's *new creation.* Finally, we'll unfurl scriptural images that adorn the *reign of Christ*. Are you still with me? Here we go!

DESCRIBING THE KINGDOM

The Kingdom of God is much better described than defined, which led Jesus to communicate kingdom realities by using stories and pictures that his audience could immediately relate to:

> But for all his repeated mention of the Kingdom of God, Jesus never once paused to define it. Nor did any hearer ever interrupt him to ask, "Master, what do these words 'Kingdom of God,' which you use so often, mean?" On the contrary, Jesus used the term as if assured it would be understood, and indeed it was.[210]

---

[210] John Bright, *The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept and Its Meaning for the Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1953), 17.

The term certainly was loaded with imperialistic and colonialist baggage, both then and now. This perhaps keeps many from using this most illuminating image in modern cultures. However, Jesus was intentional and consistent in employing its use. It allowed for a readily understood comparison and contrast between the kingdoms of this world and the Kingdom of God. We can certainly follow suit.

There are myriad examples demonstrating the need to describe versus define. My mentor talked about how impossible it is to define a rose, but how thrilling to describe it. Speaking of thrilling, my pastor recently spoke about the difference between describing a kiss versus actually experiencing it! As we seek to describe aspects of the kingdom, then, it is important to do so as those who have ourselves tasted of this kingdom and hunger and thirst for more. Before we get to these descriptions, perhaps we can allow for one helpful definition to tuck in our pack for the journey, compliments of Scot McKnight:*"The kingdom of which Jesus speaks is a people governed by a king"*[211] (emphasis original). I like that.

"Different"

[211] Scot McKnight, *Kingdom Conspiracy*, *Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2014), 74.

One of the best apologists of my generation (and my hero) is Josh McDowell. One of his less scholarly, yet no less profound, books is *The Topsy Turvy Kingdom,* written for kids (of all ages). He captures and illustrates this upside down and backwards reality that Jesus was always delighting (and torturing) his hearers with. Here is a small sample of the words of Jesus:

> **"There the ones who are now least important will be the most important, and those who are now most important will be least important." (Luke 13)**
>
> **"Whoever is the greatest should be the servant of the others." (Matthew 23)**
>
> **"I tell you that this poor woman has put in more than all the others." (Luke 21)**

Jesus demonstrated, from day one, and announced throughout his ministry, that his kingdom was unique. Again, Rob Bell states it well, "It's a kingdom built on compassion and nonviolence and love and solidarity with those who suffer. It's a totally different kind of kingdom…Jesus wants the man to know that the kingdom he's announcing isn't like the kingdoms of the Romans or the Herodians."[212]

---

[212] Bell, 221, 228.

Different Economy

The words of Jesus (above) related to the poor widow's offering, are some of the most grace filled and revealing in all of scripture. Not only did it show his tremendous compassion, but it shows that he *noticed* someone that would have otherwise gone completely unnoticed by the religious crowd in the temple (including the First Followers). It also shows that in the Kingdom of God, there is a far different economy at work. Those of us steeped in capitalism are in for a rude awakening in this regard. I once heard somebody say that Jesus measures the amount you have left as the standard of generosity, not the amount you put in the bucket. Yes! I also just read, "How do slow churches bear witness to the abundant economy of God's kingdom in today's world? The essential practices of this new economy are first gratitude, then generosity and hospitality."[213] Now *that's* different!

Different Fruit

Jesus said, **"You can tell what they are by what they do." (Matthew 7)** Jesus was once again calling out false prophets in the story here. There are

---

[213] Christoper C. Smith and John Pattison, *Slow Church: Cultivating Community in the Patient Way of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 179.

"would be" prophets in every generation and culture, but the proof is not in what they claim, but in their actions. Anyone who claims to be about the Kingdom of God should be manifesting the fruit of that kingdom, beginning (and ending) with love (see also **Galations 5**). Jesus simply doesn't see things like the world sees them, including the religious world. In fact, Jesus compared them to wicked tenants who were supposed to be caring for vineyards on behalf of a landowner. After killing the owner's representatives, including his own son, Jesus warns, **"Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit." (Matthew 21:43, NIV)**

Different Values: The Beautiful Attitudes

Speaking of different, Jesus gives us a most succinct and unexpected list of kingdom values and virtues. This is the world's greatest prologue, given at the beginning of the world's greatest recorded sermon. It leaves little doubt as to his highest intentions for would be kingdom subjects. Renowned New Testament scholar N.T. Wright espouses, "The Beatitudes are the agenda for kingdom

people…They are about the way in which Jesus wants to rule the world."[214] This is how the kingdom is supposed to be. He concludes, "This is what it looks like today, when Jesus is running the world…"[215] The Beatitudes also leave little doubt as to his divine intentions for the Kingdom of God, on earth as it is in heaven. It's important we recognize that the beatitudes of Jesus are foundational to our theology of the kingdom.

"Flourishing Life"

Again, Yale scholars Volf and Croasnum offer a most unexpected answer to the rationale for theology. "We believe the purpose of theology is to discern, articulate, and commend visions of flourishing life in light of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ."[216] They conclude, "In Jesus' preaching, the answer to the question of flourishing life was 'the kingdom of God.'"[217] Further, "We propose that Paul's tripartite definition of the kingdom ('righteousness and peace

---

[214] N.T. Wright, *Simply Jesus: A New Vision of Who He Was, What He Did, and Why He Matters* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011), 218.

[215] Wright, 231.

[216] Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun, *For the Life of the World: Theology That Makes A Difference* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2019), 11.

[217] Volf and Croasmun, 150.

and joy in the Holy Spirit') can fruitfully be read in light of our tripartite heuristic structure of the good life."[218] Did you catch that? Perhaps a picture of this "flourishing triangle" would help. *(image 1.2)*

There is much to unpack here, but their conclusions and connections are *abundantly* clear. Theology is much more than satisfying the intellectual component of faith. Theology is all about living a flourishing life. *Thus, all of theology points to the kingdom, just as all of Scripture points to the king.* Volf and Croasnum further their contentions stating, "What does it mean for life to be led well? It is righteous. What does it mean for life to go well? It is peaceful. And what does it mean for life to feel as it should? It is full of joy."[219] As if this picture wasn't compelling enough, they add to it the most endearing image of all, "…the 'kingdom of God' and the 'home of God' are metaphors for two sides of the same reality."[220] That means that whatever side the coin lands on, we win!

"New Creation"

Bible scholars, specifically purveyors of biblical theology, have noted the similarities of the Genesis creation narrative and the gospel account of John. The

---

[218] Volf and Croasmun, 153.

[219] Volf and Croasmun, 164.

[220] Volf and Croasmun, 181.

incarnation (Jesus coming in the flesh) of the eternal *logos,* himself a participant in the original acts of creation, now once again illuminates the darkness and reveals the glory of God in new acts of creation. The other accounts are more explicit in their use of kingdom language, yet another Yale professor, Paul Minear, directly links God's creative activity to the kingdom, as pictured by John. "The Kingdom of God comes as God's creation of a new heaven and a new earth. It represents the moving of God's Spirit, ordering and overcoming the enveloping chaos."[221] Minear sees the image of *The New Creation* as one of the primary images of the church in the New Testament.

Modern mystic and Franciscan Friar Richard Rohr also makes the connection between the first creation (incarnation) and the second. "Jesus came *out of* an already Christ-soaked world. The second incarnation flowed out of the first, out of God's loving union with physical creation."[222] This was the heavenly plan for earth all along, as the scriptures and specifically the gospel narrators, beautifully record. "It is the focus of both creation and redemption: God's plan of redemption is to bring in a new creation. The entire biblical story, despite its

---

[221] Paul Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1960), 119.

[222] Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe* (New York, NY: Convergent, 2019), 24.

great diversity of forms and foci, is consistent in its emphasis on the reign of God over his people in the environment he creates for them."[223] The concept of the reign of God will be dealt with more thoroughly in a minute.

Wright makes another important association between creation and the kingdom. "The crucial factor in Jesus's kingdom project picks up the crucial factor in God's creation project. God intended to rule the world *through human beings*…the thing that *really* matters, the fact that through Jesus's followers God is establishing his kingdom and the rule of Jesus himself on earth as in heaven"[224] (emphasis original). The royal subjects, God's new creation, are called to significant activity, empowered and authorized by the king himself. This is made possible by Jesus sending the Holy Spirit. It is as if he never left.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his shortened yet significant activity on earth, was one of the great modern church theologians. He contrasted the church from the other types of public gatherings of his day (and ours) including the Society, Association, Sect, Community and even Religious Community. "It is not enough to interpret the church as a community; it is indeed a community, but a

---

[223] Tidball, Derek J., "Church," in *New Dictionary of Biblical* Theology, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 620.

[224] Wright, 212, 215.

community concretely defined as a *community of spirit*"[225] (emphasis mine). The Spirit is what sets the kingdom community apart, leading many to declare the pouring out of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost as the birthday of the church. As Paul declares, **"When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance…" (Ephesians 1, NIV)**

What should also set our kingdom community apart, according to Bonhoeffer, is the greatest of all callings and possessions. "The idea of a community of love and of this connection of ruling and serving appear together here, in this image of the primal state, anticipating their connection and distinction in the ideas of the kingdom of God and the rule of God."[226] Ultimately, God's intention and greatest desire for his new creation is that they be marked by love. Jesus called love the greatest commandment and our expression of love in community as the greatest sign of discipleship.[227] As we await the final consummation, his new creation, the new heavens and new earth,[228] the garden

---

[225] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Communion of Saints: A Dogmatic Inquiry into the Sociology of the Church (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1963), 180.

[226] Bonhoeffer, 41.

[227] See Matthew 22 and John 13.

[228] See Revelation 21.

city, may we, the kingdom community, be beautifully and obviously "marked" by the Spirit and by love.

THE KINGDOM IN TIME AND SPACE

Time

As with eternal life, there is no waiting period to embrace, enter in and begin experiencing the kingdom. Jesus said, **"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand…"(Mark 1, RSV)** The kingdom is *now.* It is not too strong a statement to say that the majority of the teaching of Jesus is an appeal to life on earth. Jesus presents a kingdom whose time has come. It is also *not yet:* "…the Kingdom of God in the New Testament must be understood in a two-fold aspect: it has come and is even now in the world; it is also yet to come. In the tension between the two the Church must live, and must always live, as the 'eschatological community.'"[229] By the way, *eschatological* refers to the end-times. See, you're becoming a smarty too! My pastor, in a recent conversation, perhaps put it best, saying, "We experience heaven on our way to heaven."[230]

---

[229] John Bright, The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept and its Meaning for the Church (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1953), 237.

[230] Tim Johnson, phone interview by author, April 8, 2020.

The church, in a modification of the old cliché, is truly between a Rock (Christ) and a hard place (the world). But what an opportunity, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer said (and lived) during the worst of times in Nazi Germany:

> As the spirit of one man as a member of the church might have a particular task at a particular time, so the objective spirit of the church, fashioned according to the given situation, is different in every age. It receives its stamp from historical circumstances… This is the church's hope, the hope of our present-day church, of the *sanctorum communion,* and it guards this hope as its treasure, its real hope.[231]

Space

The Kingdom of God, as with the church, is also located in space. The church and the kingdom are not one in the same, however, despite the loud protests of some (like Scot McKnight) to the contrary. Jesus explicitly states that this kingdom is not far away when he says, **"For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17, NKJV)** As close as the mention of his name. Yet, there is a location, a spatial orientation that is more than conceptual and spiritual. It is sacred space, but the point is, it is *space.*

The church, though not itself the kingdom, is representative of kingdom realities and at its best, I strongly assert, gives us *a taste of the kingdom.* The church obviously occupies space, not only on the block in a community, but in the

---

[231] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 148, 204 .

culture of that community. According to Schreiter, "Culture is the concrete context in which this happens. It represents a way of life for a given time and place, replete with values, symbols, and meanings, reaching out with hopes and dreams, often struggling for a better world."[232] This is helpful perspective and hopefully the church does actually (helpfully) influence their culture.

Further, as I also passionately assert, the church will allow this surrounding culture to flavor its own. This give and take relationship Schreiter explains well. "Local theology…defined…as the dynamic interaction among gospel, church, and culture. That dynamic interaction was seen to be a dialectical one, moving back and forth among the various aspects of gospel, church, and culture."[233] Wright gives a perfect summary of the church (and the individual's) position in this back and forth and overlapping eschatological reality:

> Where they are, heaven and earth are joined together. Jesus is with them, his life is at work in and through them, and, whether in Jerusalem or out in the wider world, they are the place where the living God, the God who is reclaiming the world for his own, is alive and active and establishing his sovereign rule.[234]

RE-IMAGING GOD'S KINGDOM REIGN

---

[232] Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 21.

[233] Schreiter, 22.

[234] Wright, 215.

A consistent terminology, for those attempting a definition of the kingdom (including McKnight's *people governed by a king*), is *reign*. One doesn't have to be oppressed by the Romans, Persians, or a benevolent dictator to fully appreciate rule and reign. A regal monarch or duly elected President will suffice. But just as the kingdom Jesus announced was unique, so is and will be his reign.

Followers of all eras, including the first, surely struggled to believe the rebuke of Jesus when his band of merry men were jockeying for the best seats in the kingdom. They must have appeared dumbfounded when he declared, **"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant."(Matthew 20, NIV)** But the most shocked expressions were reserved for when Jesus actually behaved as a servant and washed their feet. Perhaps no image of the kingdom possesses more significance than this simple **basin.** *(image 1.3)* Jesus took the image representing lowest and most disgusting of tasks and stamped it with kingdom significance. And doing so he said the greatest among you will do *this.* Pastor Tim Johnson says, "Nothing has changed, Jesus can always be found among those who are serving."[235]

---

[235] Tim Johnson, phone interview by author, April 8, 2020.

Jesus, of course, was far from finished in redeeming kingdom images. No image was more notorious for dominant Roman authority than was the cross. Yet Jesus, on one Good Friday, re-imaged the **cross** *(image 1.4)* from the greatest symbol of terror and torture to the greatest symbol of love. Wright said "…it is because he is the Son of God that Jesus must go to the cross, that he must stay there, that he must drink the cup to the dregs. And he must do so not in order to rescue people from this world for a faraway heaven, but in order that God's kingdom may be established on earth as in heaven."[236]

This point Wright is making needs to be pressed further. "First, it will not do to suppose that Jesus came to teach people 'how to get to heaven.' It was to tell them that God was now taking charge, right here on 'earth'…"[237] This is news to most modern believers, steeped on the *Four Spiritual Laws* and mass evangelism projects. Missionary Leslie Newbigin said, "The church is the bearer to all the nations of a gospel that announces the kingdom, the reign, and the sovereignty of God."[238] This reign is present tense, present place, and present time.

---

[236] Wright, 184.

[237] Wright, 144, 145.

[238] Leslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 124.

Modern followers have also been conditioned to put more emphasis on the crucifixion than the resurrection. Paul certainly didn't. He preached **"Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2, NIV)** to the Jews, but to the Gentiles the cornerstone of the good news was the *resurrection*. Once again Jesus re-imaged a **gravestone** *(image 1.5)* to become perhaps the greatest kingdom image of all. Jesus took the image representing the finality of death and made it the ultimate symbol of life.

Of course, we don't have Easter without Good Friday, and we don't in any way diminish our cherishing of the old-rugged cross. Because of both days, both images, and both *realities,* we have life. "…Jesus is declared to be the bringer of the kingdom through his life (which includes his miracles and his teachings), his death and his resurrection."[239] The bottom line, per Newbiggin, "The resurrection is the revelation to chosen witnesses of the fact that Jesus who died on the cross is indeed king—conqueror of death and sin, Lord and Savior of all."[240]

The parables, the miracles and the passion of the Christ provide us with an overflowing cornucopia of kingdom images. But no list would be complete without the **table.** *(image 1.6)* Most believers immediately picture The Eucharist

---

[239] Tidball, 616.

[240] Newbigin, 127.

(or communion), when considering an invitation to the table of the Lord. The most intimate moments for the first followers and Jesus were at the table, and specifically their last meal together, on the eve of crucifixion. In instituting *The Lord's Supper,* Jesus, after breaking the bread and passing the cup said, **"I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." (Matthew 26, NIV)**

But the occasion Jesus points to will be more hospitable and inclusive than even this unlikely, unschooled and diverse band could imagine. Jesus took the image of deliverance, intimacy and belonging (Passover) and expanded it to *especially* include **"the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame." (Luke 14, NIV)** The untouchables at the margins are always the *first* choice of the king.

The kingdoms of this world have established boundaries and limited resources. The Kingdom of God crosses all man-made boundaries and has an inexhaustible bounty. "Jesus came to undo our notions of scarcity and tip us over into a worldview of absolute abundance –or what he would call the 'Kingdom of God.' The Gospel reveals a divine world of infinity, a worldview of enough and more than enough."[241] This is the table, the reign, that he invites *all* of us to. And there will *always* be enough for seconds.

---

[241] Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe* (New York, NY: Convergent, 2019), 244.

KINGDOM CONCLUSIONS

Understanding and experiencing the Kingdom of God is our greatest pursuit, as announced by Jesus: **"What you should want most is God's Kingdom and doing what he wants you to do." (Matthew 6, MSG)** A significant part of this pursuit is kingdom community, which is, in fact, the very essence of the kingdom (relationships). Bright perfectly captures this: "For the Kingdom is no empty domain, so many square miles of territory with geographical frontiers—*it is people*"[242] (emphasis mine). Bright continues, "This call to radical decision for the Kingdom Christ issued to men. And those who heed it have entered the Kingdom, nay, *are* the Kingdom"[243] (emphasis mine). The kingdom is here and now, and not fully yet. The kingdom is God's new creation and greatest incarnation. The kingdom is God's eternal reign, in progress on earth as it is in heaven. The kingdom is people, *a people governed by a king,* marked by the Spirt and love. Dallas Willard underscores these principles of the kingdom (and more):

> Now God's own "kingdom," or "rule," is the range of his effective will, where what he wants done is done. The person of God himself and the action of his will are the organizing principles of his kingdom, but

---

[242] Bright, 219.

[243] Bright, 220.

> everything that obeys those principles whether by nature or by choice, is *within* his kingdom.[244]

Ultimately, the kingdom is a *person*. Jesus wasn't an agent, forerunner or standard-bearer of the kingdom. "Jesus was the kingdom in person."[245] The crown jewel himself. Not only are fresh images of the kingdom on display in Jesus's words and works, but the very standard of the kingdom was unfurled. The standard of any kingdom always follows the sovereign. Thus, the flag will only fly over the current Buckingham Palace *(image 1.7)* when Queen Elizabeth II is present and accounted for. In the same way, the divine standard that follows the king has now been *permanently* staked in the dirt of planet earth. **"The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdom* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever…Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus." (Revelation 11 and 22, NKJV)**

---

[244] Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1997), 25.

[245] Tidball, 619.

2

A THEOLOGY OF COMMUNITY

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together…" (Hebrews 10:24-25, NIV)

(image 2.1)

A fresh understanding (theology) of *community* also needs to be created and cultivated for our modern Jesus gatherings. Please note that "Jesus gatherings" will be our intentional descriptive of choice (other than kingdom community) as we navigate our way to new understandings and applications relating to the local church. The church matters in every community. The church matters to Jesus. The church should matter deeply to us, leading to fresh understandings, fresh images and fresh experiences. Again, Part 2 will be filled with this very thing. But first we need to put a couple of fancy (and tasty!) words on the table.

ECCLESIOLOGY

Ecclesiology, again, is the branch of theology specifically focused on the church. It is critical to our understanding of true community. There is no shortage of topics that we could survey here. However, we must hasten along if we're going to reach the castle before dark. So we'll once again be very selective. But there are a few key questions that we must take time to answer before we proceed down the trail.

Are the Church and the Kingdom the Same Thing?

Scot McKnight is an author and scholar that has been a gift to the church and the kingdom. I haven't read every one of his books (yet), but I highly recommend all the books I have. He often gives us pithy definitions that really help inform our understanding. Here is his definition of the church: "The church is the kingdom called Israel now expanded to include gentile believers."[246] His strong contention is that the Christian church has not replaced the nation of Israel but rather completed it. Important point well taken. However, his writings hint at the church and the Kingdom of God being one and the same, which is where I part company, but just for the moment.

Here's what I mean. In the previous chapter (and in *Kingdom Primer)*, I stated that the essence of the Kingdom of God is relationships. This is certainly true of the church as well. But this correlation isn't especially helpful in our modern cultures where church most often refers to an institution, activity or place. Perhaps describing the church as *a taste of the kingdom* better captures the essence of our calling and identity, for the moment.

Is the Church an Organization?

[246] Scot McKnight, *Kingdom Conspiracy: Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2014), 90.

The church of Jesus, as with its king, is alive! This is where our tendency to employ business principles to the structure and function of the church poorly communicates this reality. In a field research conversation with Ray Schmidt and Phil Zahn, they shared the vision of *The Fellowship,* a group that silently coordinates events like the National Prayer Breakfast annually. They make every effort to be "a family of brothers and sisters following Jesus together, not an organization, institution or religion."[247] This is an exceptional statement that shouldn't be the exception in our corporate Jesus gatherings. To underscore this point, it is quite interesting to note that,

> the word for 'church' is rarely used in the Gospels, but they contain much significant material for a treatment of the topic of the church, including the notion of the kingdom as embodied in the lives of people on earth, the calling of the twelve disciples to be with Jesus, and the frequent use of communal language such as family, fraternity, little flock and city.[248]

Harper and Metzger, two Pacific Northwest theologians, add to this, "the church is a living, growing organism that responds and reacts to the multitude of cultural environments in which it finds itself…both as products of given cultures and as prophetic voices over against those cultures."[249] Far east scholar Roland

---

[247] Ray Schmidt and Phil Zahn, interview with author, Skype, February 27, 2019.

[248] Tidball, 6.

[249] Brad Harper and Paul Louis Metzger, *Exploring Ecclesiology: An Evangelical and Ecumenical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 12.

Chia adds, "This church knows that its most credible form of witness (and the most 'effective' thing it can do for the world) is the actual creation of a living, breathing, visible community of faith."[250] Is it easy for you to see your current or former Jesus gatherings in this *living* way? Yeah, me neither. But if this is true (and it is) then this takes our understanding of kingdom community back to the vineyard, where we belong.

Along the way, I've heard a couple of descriptions of community that have helped point me in the right direction. I remember overhearing Stan Russell, a ministry hero of mine, introduce a three-part sermon series for his first weeks as pastor at Grace Community Church (Tualatin, OR). It was directly based on the church name, so of course the first week was on *Grace.* But then he broke the word community into its component parts: *Common* and *Unity.* I never forgot that simple semantic twist and it has continued to properly inform my understanding of community. We walk together and hold all things, especially Jesus, in common. We are called to protect the unity of the community at all costs, because Jesus certainly did.

But my favorite description of community is "the intersection of relationships and place." We'll get to a theology of place in the next chapter, and

---

[250] Roland Chia, "Resident Aliens: Some Reflections on Church and Culture." *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 17, no. 3 (July 2000): 97.

I can't wait! But I just have to share a quote from another ministry hero of probably all of ours, Eugene Peterson, that I literally just read before picking up my pen to write this section. Don't you just love perfect timing? He said, "Life always occurs in place. It is never an abstraction, never a generality."[251] Life in (kingdom) community occurs in a place (and not always a building) and always includes relationships. We are called to together. I'll mention several other life-giving intersections in the pages ahead. In another interesting twist, years later I served at Grace Community Church with Pastor Stan, though it had been renamed to *Horizon Community Church.* Horizon, is the place where the sky meets the soil, where heaven meets earth, where dirt meets divinity.

As I write this, my favorite day of the year is just a couple long weeks away. *Thanksgiving.* A fire in the wood stove. Macy's parade (and later my beloved Cowboys) on TV. The smell of turkey filling the house. Pumpkin Pie. Family. There is no better day all year (and no bigger pile of dishes for me to do). I talk in *Kingdom Primer* of "organization" as it relates to family and our Jesus gatherings:

> In order to pull off a meaningful and successful gathering, the family needs to be organized. Someone needs to prepare the main dish, a salad and dessert. Someone needs to plan activities for the kids, light the candles and read from the scriptures (depending on the holiday).

---

[251] Eugene H. Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir* (Colorado Springs, CO: HarperCollins, 2011), 76.

> Someone needs to do the dishes and put away the games. In a family, organization (verb) is needed but not an organization (noun).[252]

The applications for the local church are easily seen but given the structures and cultures we've created, in the west especially, aren't easily practiced. Perhaps it's time for a new recipe. It is especially sobering that Phil Zahn, as a younger voice in *The Fellowship* said, "My generation sucks at community. It's a buzz-word laden with guilt and shame."[253] Community must be much more than a catch-phrase, or the church will lose not only its relevance but its successive generations. Instead, we are invited and can be enthusiastically inviting others, to experience a taste of the kingdom in community.

What Should be at the Core of Community?

If you've already read *Kingdom Primer,* you'll recognize this as a trick question. It's not what, but *who.* Again, this is not mere semantics. This is the life and death of kingdom community. The western institutional church has surely struggled with its central focus in modern cultures. The reason for this is often a faulty default mechanism. "Our biggest default, in religion and otherwise, is to

---

[252] Anderson, *Kingdom Primer*, 83.

[253] Phil Zahn, interview with author, Skype, February 27, 2019.

see the institution as the answer. The problem is not always the institution. The problem is the institutional *thinking."*[254]

This leads to what I have called the "Inverted Bulls-Eye,"[255] *(image 2.2)* where the rings on the ecclesiastical archery target are backwards, most especially the center. Instead of Jesus occupying the center yellow, and moving out to rings of Scripture, Fellowship and Culture respectively, modern churches often substitute Culture as the center, and move outwards through Fellowship and Scripture and give a cursory nod to Jesus on the outer ring. To be sure, this is not done crassly but rather *carelessly*. We must take renewed care to keep the King of the Kingdom truly enthroned in the center of our thinking, activity and affection.

What does this mean for modern kingdom communities? Just this: "*The Kingdom can't be defined by a building, theology or tradition. It is always about Jesus and genuine relationships. We must think and live with a decidedly relational and not institutional lens."*[256] One of the "gifts" of the COVID-19 pandemic is the forceable reminder that the work and life of the church should not be centered around Sunday morning or at a physical address (steeple or no steeple). In a recent

---

[254] Anderson, *Kingdom Primer,* 81.

[255] Anderson, *Kingdom Primer*, 79-80.

[256] Anderson, *Kingdom Primer,* 85.

podcast, Leonard Sweet summed this up perfectly, in saying "The building (verb) of the church is not a building (noun)."[257] The *Field of Dreams* mantra, "If you build it they will come," that fueled the overbuilding of the church of the 70's, 80's and 90's, must be re-imaged immediately. Actually Jesus, in pointing the first followers' attention toward the village Sychar, and away from the well of Jacob, did just that.

Since we're discussing theology, it would only be appropriate to push to the center of the table what Professor Crystal Downing believes to be the "irreducible minimums of orthodox Christianity." This short-list includes "the Trinity, the incarnation and the gift of salvation through Christ's atoning work."[258] The point here is not to initiate arguments but rather recognize what should bring us together. And again, it's not what, but who. Jesus, the Son, who came in the flesh and gave himself up to death as the ultimate example of love, is himself our irreducible minimum of faith, belief and practice. *He* is the bottom line and the very core of kingdom community.

What is our Greatest Community Resource?

---

[257] Leonard Sweet, "The Blessings of Pandemic," Preach the Story, podcast, August 19, 2020.

[258] Crystal Downing, *Changing Signs of Truth: A Christian Introduction to the Semiotics of Communications* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 326.

Say it with me, "It's not what but *who."* Jesus made a jaw-dropping statement, prior to his ascension, that two-thousand years later we still struggle to believe, understand and practice: **"Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you." (John 16:7, ESV)** To state the obvious, the fullness of this promise has yet to be realized in kingdom followers and kingdom communities. Yet the promise remains, as does the presence of Jesus.

Our theologies, our orthodoxies and orthopraxis, must ultimately yield and submit to the presence of God. There is no kingdom without the king, and he has chosen to stay and reign, despite what we might see and believe. Pope Francis, in his first encyclical, *Luman Fidei* (#17), powerfully underscores this point and his extended statement provides a fitting ecclesiastical benediction:

> Our culture has lost its sense of God's tangible presence and activity in our world. We think that God is to be found in the beyond, on another level of reality, far removed from our everyday relationships. But if this were the case, if God could not act in the world, his love would not be truly powerful, truly real, and thus not even true, a love capable of delivering the bliss it promises. It would make no difference at all whether we believe in him or not. Christians, on the contrary, profess their faith in God's tangible and powerful love which really does act in history and determines its final destiny: a love that can be encountered, a love fully revealed in Christ's passion, death and resurrection.[259]

---

[259] Edward T. Oakes, *A Theology of Grace in Six Controversies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 188.

SOCIOLOGY

Our recipe for understanding community must also include a healthy (not heaping ☺) helping of *sociology.* I know. I too struggled to stay awake during my undergrad Sociology 101 class. But this will be time well spent, I promise. It is my strong contention that a *sociological* approach to understanding and reaching our communities needs to be employed by the local church. Most institutions are too slow to embrace changing realities and make adjustments in real time, evidenced especially in education, government and the church.

Local Jesus gatherings returning to a distinct (though not exclusive) *neighborhood* approach is a good place to start (much more in Part 2). Our primary guide in this area is Dr. Verlon Fosner, whose functioning Dinner Churches in 15 neighborhoods (and counting) of Seattle, Washington, offers us an exciting and effective example. He passionately asserts that the Dinner Church philosophy not only has strong biblical theology as a foundation, but strongly established sociological understandings as well. Fosner actually developed this ministry paradigm during his own pursuit of advanced degrees and is now considered the foremost expert, leading and training around the world as the head of the *Dinner Church Collective.* I consider him a friend and he was incredibly generous to me with his time during my research. Again, it was a

hard assignment, accompanying him across the Puget Sound from Seattle, via ferry, to a training event and later drinking fresh coffee in front of his inner-city Seattle fireplace.

Most churches fail to consider not only the sociology of their city but the sociology of their own communities of faith. They rightly believe "Sociologically, the Church is a fact of observation, accessible to persons who do not have faith. Theologically, the Church is a mystery of grace, not knowable independently of faith."[260] But most often they fail to fully consider whether the current models of church are truly accessible to those outside of the faith community. "To be sure, the church cannot be understood solely as a social organization. It is the body of Christ, and the Spirit of God is at work within it."[261] Fosner argues, "Few leaders question the sociological construct of their churches; they simply accept the Reformation model as an enduring assumption."[262] This lack of sociological awareness has surely contributed to the continuing demise and growing irrelevance of many modern churches.

---

[260] Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1991), 115.

[261] Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 160.

[262] Verlon Fosner, "Dinner Church: An Urban Proposal" (DMin diss, Evangel University, Springfield, 2014), 79, WorldCat.

During private interactions and a public training, Verlon introduced me to a pie-chart that is a paradigm buster. Verlon's post-doctoral research helps the local church to target their *entire* community, not just a "slice" of it. According to his findings, a "proclamation" (or attractional) church will only be relevant to a third of the community with Judeo-Christian values or experience. It is sobering to note that this includes virtually all Christian churches in modern cultures! A "contextual" church will reach a second third of the community who are secular minded and socially connected. The final third, who are secular minded but socially isolated, will be reached through a "dinner" church model.[263] *(image 2.3)*

The Collapse of Community

Before we train our sights specifically on place, it is important to understand how significantly the place called community has changed. Virtually everyone agrees that our modern cultures are divided and dysfunctional. The most alarming reality is what a pastoral practitioner in the Midwest, Todd Didline, calls the collapse of community. Church leaders have long lamented this, but Didline makes a significant correlation:

[263] Verlon Fosner, private interview with researcher, Seattle, WA, October 28, 2019.

> The collapse of the American church and the breakdown of the American community are tied together. When you take a critical look at our society you will discover that America in 2018 is one of the loneliest and most fragmented cultures that has ever existed, and the church has been dramatically *infected* by this.[264]

The community problem that churches struggle with is also symptomatic of modern cultures at large. Didline stresses the need to focus on the root causes, not on cosmetic changes. Didline calls these roots Anti-Community Forces that include:

Sprawl. **"**Sprawl has become particularly relevant through the mass production and marketing of cars since the 1950s, which has allowed and encouraged human populations to decentralize." Didline asserts (emphasis his) "*Sprawl has stolen our concept of 'place.'* This restructuring of our lives has made it such that we merely inhabit *space*, with no concept of or regard for *place*." The sobering result is, "The less we care about the place we cultivate, the less we invest in it."[265]

Screens and Technology. Didline further espouses,

---

[264]Todd Didline, "The Death of the Church, Part 1," *Jesus Creed* (blog), *Patheos,* April 11, 2018. http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2018/04/11/the-death-of-the-church-1/..

[265] Todd Didline, "The Death of the Church, Part 2," *Jesus Creed* (blog), *Patheos,* April 18, 2018. www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2018/04/18/the-death-of-the-church-2-the-acf/

> Today, nearly 98% of homes have a TV at their center, and 77% of Americans have a smartphone, just 10 years after their introduction. We have swallowed the promise and pleasure of personal technology whole hog, without first evaluating whether it's good for human flourishing.

Didline is not dismissive or ignorant of technology's value, but rather is shining the spotlight on its eroding qualities relating to community. He continues,

> researchers are discovering the adverse effect the smartphone is having on social engagement…America has not bounced back from its decline in community engagement, in large part due to the combining effects of the smartphone, social media, and the internet. These disruptive technological advances are reinforcing the community disengagement trend.[266]

Hyper-Individualism (Me Culture). Didline's third and final "ACF" is the most insidious, but perhaps the easiest to observe. His pointed assessment is worth considering at length:

> We have moved from a "we" culture to a "me" culture. Since the 1950s, American society has been reorienting markedly toward valuing individualism, and it's reached a point where it has become a prime factor responsible for pulling our Church community apart. We are more likely to understand ourselves in relation to ourselves than in how we affect and are affected by others…Humans are necessarily both individualistic and collectivistic. This argument is not intended to fillet people for thinking about themselves. The problem, however, is that we've reached such an extreme — the "hyper" in hyper-individualism — that it's having significant impacts on our communities, even our faith, and our systems are beginning to reflect and perpetuate that problem. The pH of the water

---

[266] Todd Didline, "The Death of the Church, Part 3," *Jesus Creed* (blog), *Patheos,* April 25, 2018. www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2018/04/25/death-of-the-church-3/.

> around us has become so imbalanced that we don't even realize we're swimming in acid.[267]

Didlines metaphor is apt, adding a corrosive component to community erosion and lack of investment. Given these realities, collapse is no hyperbole.

Didline offers some practical conclusions to the ACFs (Anti-Community Forces) he introduced that would help us to note here. He believes the realities of *Sprawl, Technology* and *Hyper-Individualisitc (Me culture)* "are actually poisoning our communities." He asserts,

> In my humble opinion, the churches that will most successfully and faithfully navigate the 21st century challenges the ACFs present are churches that follow The 3 W's: **W**alkability – The congregation living closer together. **W**isdom – The congregation discerning careful, intentional practices with technology. **W**e – The congregation prioritizing gatherings that cultivate family.[268]

The Ongoing Collapse of Christendom

Unfortunately, society and the church are dealing with a simultaneous collapse. The historical rise and fall of Christendom, post-Constantine, is well

---

[267] Todd Didline, "The Death of the Church, Part 4," *Jesus Creed* (blog), *Patheos,* May 9, 2018. www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2018/05/09/death-of-the-church-4-todd-dildine/.

[268] Didline, "The Death of the Church, Part 1," *Jesus Creed* (blog), *Patheos,* April 11, 2018. http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2018/04/11/the-death-of-the-church-1/..

documented. But the lessons learned by the early church must seemingly be repeated in successive generations. Noted sociologist and Protestant theologian Peter Berger notes that "All three major branches of the Reformation—Lutheran, Anglican, and Calvinist—sought to set up facsimiles of Christendom in their respective territories."[269] He posits "secularization" as the modern version of Christendom's ongoing collapse. "By secularization we mean the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols."[270] He concludes that "secularization has resulted in a widespread collapse of the plausibility of traditional religious definitions of reality."[271]

This certainly has ramifications for the church and society, of which includes waning influence in the public sector and a corresponding relegation to the private. This is certainly a cause for concern, but not for the misguided and deafening cries for a return to the falsely claimed "America as a Christian nation." Christendom's marrying of man's political and religious power and influence has never been the answer and never been an accurate portrayal of the values and realities of the Kingdom of God as introduced by Jesus.

---

[269] Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (New York, NY: Open Road Integrated Media, 1967, 2011), 209.

[270] Berger, 145.

[271] Berger, 145.

Yet, secularization's impact on faith communities is real and is cause for alarm. Verlon Fosner shared these sobering numbers with me:

- 53,000 leave US churches every week
- 96 US churches close every week
- 85% of churches are stalled or in decline
- .5% grow by conversion growth

These numbers, while staggering enough, are of course *Pre-Covid* and its "accelerant." The institutional church of the US is in serious decline and the professionals who serve it (including me) have been undeniably served notice by society. The Kingdom of God, however, continues to **"forcefully advance"**[272] and cannot be confused or linked to this institutional collapse. Kingdom community is imminently possible in the midst of secularization and *especially so* in the midst of persecution, as we've seen from powerful examples throughout history.

[272] See Matthew 11:12.

3

A THEOLOGY OF PLACE

(image 3.1)

Okay, we're almost to the last row in this quick theological survey, so hang with me. This chapter is actually my favorite, so I think you'll enjoy the ride. But there's no telling when we might hit a rut, so please keep your hands in the vehicle and use the safety handles.

As we briefly discussed in chapter one, the Kingdom of God isn't an abstract concept but rather a concrete reality in time and space. Jesus wasn't being a mystic on a mountain with a twinkle in his eye when he invited us to experience his ethereal kingdom to come. Rather, as God in the flesh he was inviting all who heard, and who were to hear, to experience his kingdom *immediately.* In fact, they were staring the kingdom in the face! And yes, there was, and is, an unmistakable twinkle in his eye.

Therefore, kingdom communities can experience a taste of the kingdom right here, right now, in *this place.* We can even say that kingdom communities, themselves, should be offering a taste of *place* as they are offering a taste of the kingdom. That's a big statement with even bigger ramifications for our Jesus gatherings. We'll have to watch our theological P's & Q's carefully. But be prepared for a surprise or two along the way (remember the ruts I warned of). You might even disagree with me a time or two and that's okay, because this is the perfect *place* for such conversations. Still holding onto that safety handle? ☺

The Sacred Value of Place

Let me state the obvious, Eugene Peterson has been a gift to our world, to our place. Peterson writes of the sacred value of place as no one else I've ever read. This is in large part because of a sacred space on Flathead Lake in Montana, a family cabin he helped to construct with his father, that became a sanctuary he came back to every year of his life after. It was likely where he penned the greater portions of *The Message* translation of scripture. Here is his theology of place, in his own words:

> I have often had occasion while walking these hills or kayaking this lake to reflect on how important *place* is in living the Christian faith…I was becoming aware that every detail in the life of salvation that I was becoming familiar with in the scriptures took shape in named places that, with a good map, I can still locate: Ur and Haran, Bethel and Peniel, Sinai and Shiloh, Anathoth and Jerusalem, Nazareth and Bethlehem, Bethany and Emmaus…Soil and stone, latitude and longitude, lakes and mountains, towns and cities keep a life of faith grounded, rooted, in *place*…If I need an adjective to identify the conditions, I think *sacred* would do just fine: *sacred* space…[273]

But if I could blasphemously add to his words (!) I would hasten to say, "Not just any place, but the place where heaven meets earth." I used to work at Horizon Community Church, and we would often wistfully describe our beautiful 38 acres in those terms. That's the meaning of "horizon" after all. The

---

[273] Eugene H. Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011), 11.

intersection of heaven and earth has been noted throughout scripture, most memorably by Jacob after his dream with a rock for a pillow, of a ladder with angels ascending and descending:

> **"When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, 'Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.' He was afraid and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven!" (Genesis 28, NIV)**

I'm betting that Eugene Peterson described his mountain lake paradise in the same way. A *place* where heaven met earth. A *place* where dirt met with divinity. A *place* where Eugene met with Jesus. A *well,* like Jacob's at Bethel, but with the water of eternal life. A "thin place," my pastor calls it, where God's space is just barely out of sight. Peterson later adds, "Life always occurs in place." [274]

The Incarnational Example of Jesus

Dr. Sweet reminds us, "The ultimate act of communication in history, the Incarnation, means that Christ became a part of culture and can't be understood apart from culture."[275] My pastor puts it this way, "Jesus: the one who squeezed

---

[274] Peterson, 76.

[275] Leonard Sweet, *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 14.

into skin to show us what God is like" (Tim Johnson). Eugene Peterson puts it this way, **"The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish" (John 1:14, The Message).** However we put it, the incarnation is one of the chief mysteries and non-negotiables of our faith. Kreider says, "And the means by which God seeks to attract people is incarnation." He concludes, "This is why God chose to send not disembodied words from heaven but an incarnate Son in a mortal body."[276] He didn't send a book, he sent a person!

The people of God have been called to incarnate *our* places as well. Some will be called to depart their indigenous cultures to minister cross-culturally. We call them missionaries. I have long called them heroes. But *all of us* are called to the heroic task of incarnation, to follow the example of Jesus and move into the neighborhood, and to embody his one-of-a kind glory.

The Taste of Place (Terroir)

At the very heart of this *fresh take* on kingdom community is the modern agricultural concept of terroir. Terroir will serve as our primary metaphor for

---

[276] Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Publishing Group, 2016), 372, 531.

understanding the influence and uniqueness of place. Terroir is most often attributed to wine making and was introduced to the world, appropriately, by France. It refers to the surrounding elements (climate, elevation, temperature, soil) and the effect it has on the grapes in the vineyard and thus the resulting wine in the bottle. Professor Amy Trubek expands the concept of terroir beyond wine and into cuisine and culture more broadly in her book *A Taste of Place*. The questions she explores, from a decidedly "foodie" perspective, are based on another really tough research assignment in the home of terroir, the fields of France. She explores how we can mediate between our local desires and our global reality.[277] The answers have parallel ramifications for the local church. My strong contention, as we'll get to later, is that we don't have to choose between the local and the global. We can and should celebrate both. But France's gift to the world is a fresh understanding of the unique and sumptuous value of the local.

As my cohort mates and I began our doctoral journey, we were treated to a weeklong retreat in downtown Portland, Oregon. Yes, I had the home field advantage. While we sat in the meeting room at the trendy boutique Portland Rose Hotel, Leonard Sweet introduced us to what he calls "the number one word

---

[277] Amy B. Trubek, *A Taste of Place: A Cultural Journey Into Terroir* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), introduction.

of the future: terroir."[278] Later, as I had the thrill of being at his dinner table at the Portland City Grill, on the 33rd floor overlooking the Rose City, the "seed" for my research in this direction was planted. This concept is so *cool!* Sorry to keep using these fancy academic words, but it is! ☺

The wines of France are named after the regions they come from. Champagne, Bordeaux and Burgundy can all be located on a map. The concept of terroir is simply that you can taste in the wine where it came from. Gisela Kreglinger, a winemaker from a long line of vintners, devotes an entire volume to discussing the spiritual lessons derived from the origins, production and consumption of wine. Regarding terroir, she states, "Crafting a wine of high quality that reflects the terroir of a specific place is a vocation. The vintner's vocation is to produce, to the best of his/her ability, wines that reflect the bounty of their particular place."[279] Indeed, authors Smith and Pattison provide an exceptional introduction to this paradigm shifting concept:

> …the seventeenth-century French phrase, *le gout de terroir,* which can be translated "the taste of the place." Carlo Petrini, the cofounder of Slow Food, writes often about *terroir* as "the combination of natural factors (soil, water, slope, height above sea level, vegetation, microclimate) and human ones (tradition and practice and cultivation) that gives a unique character to each small agriculture locality and the food grown, raised, made, and cooked there." Thus, a Pinot Noir from Oregon's Willamette Valley takes

---

[278] Leonard Sweet (lecture, Portland Seminary, Portland, OR, Sept. 6, 2018).

[279] Gisela H. Kreglinger, *The Spirituality of Wine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 103.

> on the taste and texture of the grape, the soil, the barrel and the late frost.[280]

When it comes to local products, Oregon's Willamette Valley, already known for its hazelnuts, hops, berries and Christmas trees, is fast becoming the new Napa. In fact, Oregon largely has Napa to thank for this exploding industry. Though grapes were likely first carried west on the Oregon Trail (grapes are not indigenous to Oregon), it was the pioneers and romantics from California who blazed a new trail to Oregon in search of the perfect Pinot Noir. "They referred to their quest, without embarrassment, as a 'Search for the Holy Grail.'"[281] Their quest, with modest beginnings, ended up being wildly successful as the Willamette Valley offered the perfect terroir for the perfect Pinot (say that fast three times).

> Pinot grapes thrive where good fruit grows—cool, moist climate with long growing season (so they can ripen slowly) in soil that drains well. Warm days and cold, snappy nights give it intensity and elegance. Yet the weather can be a bit inconsistent, with unexpected frosts or heat, which means each Vintage (harvest year) are each unique. It is interesting to note that Oregon shares a 45th parallel with Burgundy, France, which "coincidentally" is the wine that most resembles Pinot Noir.[282]

Local vintner Chris Shown, who I met during a couple years as a local tour guide, is one of the later pioneers who arrived in the south Willamette Valley almost four decades ago. He hails from a family owned 80 acres in the Napa

---

[280] Carlo Petrini, *Slow Food: The Case for Taste* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2001), 8, as quoted in Smith and Pattison, 43.

[281] Tour notes of Jay J. Anderson, 2018-2020, quoting from Paul Pintarich, *The Boys Up North: Dick Erath and the Early Oregon Winemakers* (Portland, OR: Graphic Arts Center Publishing Group, 1997).

[282] America's Hub World Tours, tour notes of Jay J. Anderson, 2018-2020.

Valley, and now along with his son Matt, who is the chief winemaker, is working his own 66 acres he calls Brigadoon. When asked about the concept of terroir, he responded simply, "Terroir is *everything*…everything that goes into the making of the wine. This includes the soil, location, temperature, weather patterns, moisture, wine maker's influence and selection of grape clones."[283] Regarding the uniqueness of Brigadoon's terroir he responded, "We are a 'cool' vineyard sight due to our proximity to the Coast Range mountains. So our fruit hangs on the vine a bit longer, giving us the flavor (sugar) without the high alcohol. First sunlight is at the crack of dawn in other vineyards, but is later for us, so it warms up later. This means we also harvest later." He concludes, "If we were all making the same wine, then why would we have separate labels?"[284]I can testify that his *place* and his product at Brigadoon are magical!

The Sanctuary

The implications are readily apparent for churches of *all* stripes, speeds and zip codes. Leonard Sweet has further stated, "There is a field of study called *psychogeography:* the effect of place on human emotion and behavior. We need a

---

[283] Chris Shown, phone interview with author, Brigadoon Winery, Junction City, OR, April 13, 2020.

[284] Shown, April 13, 2020.

new branch of study called *theogeography:* the effect of place on faith, community, and mission."[285] Smith and Pattison, espouse being "rooted in the natural, human and spiritual cultures of a particular place…With a commitment to place, and with gratitude for the immensity of God's gifts there, our churches become catalysts of human flourishing: nurturing local economies and local culture, and seeking the common good of our places."[286] It begins with kingdom communities engaging in research, soul searching and giving proper consideration for, "What things—for instance, people, practices, convictions—define your congregation and give it its distinctive taste? How can we celebrate these things…?"[287] Their conclusion is worth introducing in our local gatherings, "Place, like all things in life, is a good gift from God."[288]

Like a fine wine, there should be a difference between a church in the Willamette Valley of Oregon and the Silicon Valley of California. There should be a difference between a congregation in the Ponderosa Pine desert of the Pacific Northwest and the Saguaro Cactus desert of the Southwest. And like the famous clam chowders, there should be a difference between the kingdom

---

[285] Sweet, *Rings of Fire,* 178.

[286] Smith and Pattison, 43.

[287] Smith and Pattison, 60.

[288] Smith and Pattison, 120.

communities overlooking crashing waves of the Pacific on the west coast and those of the Atlantic on the east coast. I'm going into tour guide mode again, forgive me.

For instance, my wife is from Montana (don't get me started about *God's Big Sky Country!)*, which has a wonderful and unique culture. We were recently in Great Falls for our niece's high school graduation (yay Maddie!). While there, we visited a large brick church with a lovely sanctuary and foyer. But there was nothing about it that told you it was located in Montana, "the last best *place.*" This simply should not be! But happily, many churches, including New City in Phoenix, AZ, celebrate local artists in canvas foyer displays and of course in their musicians. A fellow classmate and Northwest minister, said it this way:

> In fact, one of the most disheartening things about the institutional church today is that so much of it looks exactly the same. Cute and pithy phrases that are intended to stick in your head (but hardly hold any meaning). So many churches singing the same couple songs, using the same backing graphics and not telling the story of their community.[289]

Story is, and must be, an essential component of our kingdom communities. Eugene Peterson, himself a proud Montana native and long-term pastor, developed a strategy for seeing "the church as story" while starting a new church in colonial Maryland. He believed that "churches are not franchises to be

---

[289] Heath Hollensbe, in an online forum of Portland Seminary, fall semester, 2018.

reproduced" but rather "a place of stories."[290] Thus, he led his new congregation through the *story* (not blueprint) of the church in Acts, recognizing that their own individual names and stories would tell a unique corporate story in their community. What a beautiful "strategy!"

Returning to the Willamette Valley wine country of Oregon, we find the perfectly named Newberg congregation *The Church of the Vine.* This local Anglican congregation is led by the thoughtful and energetic Father Sean Flannery. In a recent conversation at our favorite local coffee shop, *The Coffee Cottage,* he said, "Terroir tells a story. You can actually taste the stories of the local community in the wines. The recent catastrophic fires in Oregon and California will be captured in upcoming vintages, for instance."[291] The church as story. Terroir as story. Scripture as story. I think we're on to something here.

The Marketplace

What is true in the vineyard, the kitchen and the sanctuary is also true in some of the Northwest's most famous local and now international businesses. Nike changed the athletic shoe, apparel, and equipment business not just because

---

[290] Peterson, 119, 106.

[291] Sean Flattery, interview with author, Newberg, OR, October 7, 2020.

of its superior products but because of its unique culture. The local terroir of Oregon, its rebellious streak and persevering spirit, and the fabled "Mighty Men of Oregon" (University of Oregon track and field) helped to form their corporate culture and brand identity.[292] Interestingly, Nike not only reflected the terroir of Oregon culture but also *created* culture. Now it's impossible to imagine a world, or a place, without Nike.

Just to the north in Seattle, at a similar place in time, another local business would also create culture and change the world. Starbucks started as a provider of high-quality coffee beans, perfectly roasted and ready for the perfect cup. From humble beginnings, the Starbucks siren is now one of the most recognized logos in the world (along with the Nike swoosh). Howard Schultz, the second CEO, took this initial "taste of Seattle" and combined it with the social culture he witnessed in Italy to form a distinctively Northwest experience. "It's the romance of the coffee experience, the feeling of warmth and community people get in Starbucks stores."[293] Like Nike, Shultz and Starbucks were fanatical about their values and culture, locally influenced and now internationally applied. Their intention was to not only roast the best coffee in the world but to

---

[292] Phil Knight, *Shoe Dog: A Memoir by the Creator of Nike* (New York, NY: Scribner, 2016).

[293] Howard Schultz and Dori Jones Yang, *Pour Your Heart Into It: How Starbucks Built a Company One Cup at a Time* (New York, NY: Hyperion, 1997), prologue.

develop a unique "Starbucks experience" in each one of their stores, serving as a "third place" (after work and home) in each community.[294]

This understanding of place has been understood by many Pacific Northwest businesses such as the aforementioned Starbucks and Nike, and also by a hotel chain that has recently come to this region. In a recent promotional circular, they share a significant piece of their business model: "Graduate Hotels has a property in every corner of the country. To capture the essence of a place, every hotel draws upon the region's unique stories, people and traditions."[295]

Calvin Anderson (my son), has worked for Graduate Hotels both locally (Eugene, OR) and regionally (Phoenix, AZ). Their Seattle property is a celebration of University of Washington exploits from *The Boys in the Boat* to custom designed desk lamps of famous alum Bruce Lee. The lobby features a floor to ceiling wall of working "subs" pointing to and pumping out the sounds from the local "grunge rock" music scene that traces its roots to the Emerald City. In Eugene, the lobby doubles as a Nike shrine, featuring framed pictures of decades of pro-athlete promo posters and a case of vintage shoes, including the famed "moon shoes" designed by Nike co-founders Phil Knight and Bill

---

[294] Howard Schultz, *Onward: How Starbucks Fought for Its Life without Losing Its Soul* (New York, NY: Rodale, 2011).

[295] "Travel With Purpose: Regional Sports Culture," *Collide,* Spring 2019, 139.

Bowerman and worn by 1972 Olympic marathoner David Russell. And it is only appropriate that the hallway carpets feature local Pendleton Woolen Mills designs and the bathroom walls are covered with custom "Duck" wallpaper.

According to Anderson, "the décor is the invitation. We're interested in what your community has to offer. Come in and tell us your story." He continues, "Corporate training isn't just traditional, but rather helps employees get to know the story of the community. We want each one to be 'community storytellers.'" He quoted a former Graduate CEO who once said, "We want people to feel like they're coming home, even if it's their first time to the city."[296] This is true in the exhibits of most airports, including Eugene, which on a recent visit included the mayor's art exhibit, along with permanent displays for the local universities and wineries.

Certainly, local connection and celebration goes beyond the skin-deep of the décor. For Graduate Hotels this includes serving locally sourced food and beverages and also engaging in community partnerships that are having significant local impact. A compelling example is their partnership with *I-Promise Village* in Cleveland, OH, started by local product and NBA star LeBron James. Graduate Hotels have paid off over $150,000 in student debt, to date, through

---

[296] Calvin Anderson, Former Grauduate Hotels NW Regional Director of Sports Sales, interview by author, Tuscon, AZ, December 16, 2019.

their "Scholly" program. And by the way, their corporate motto "We Are All Students," in my opinion is the best thing since "Just Do It!"

Imaging the Local

As kingdom communities seek to embrace and celebrate the local, they must also make special effort to *image* the local. Two powerfully illuminating statements regarding place are helpful for us here. First, pastor and "social architect" Erwin Raphael McManus, in describing one of the greatest cities of the arts, said, "Paris is what a city looks like when artists create it."[297] *(image 3.2)* What are the local creators and cultivators of *our* individual zip codes (including the faith communities) expressing?

The second statement comes compliments of a former local sports journalist and talk show host who has now become a notable national voice in the world of sports. His voice, however, extends beyond sports to insightful social commentary. His simple observation, "Teams become their cities"[298] perfectly drives the terroir nail home. The Pittsburgh Steelers display the blue-

---

[297] Erwin Raphael McManus, *The Artisan Soul: Crafting Your Life into a Work of Art* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2014), 15.

[298] Colin Cowherd, *The Herd,* FS1 TV Broadcast, July 16, 2020.

collar grit of the "Steel City" where they reside. The Dallas Cowboys display the opulence and size of the Lone Star State (where everything is big), with their palatial stadium and lucrative player contracts. The New England Patriots represent the cerebral sensibilities of their scholarly Boston location. And we would be bereft, as a projected centered in the Pacific Northwest, to leave out the flag waiving "12th Man" fanaticism of the Seattle Seahawks!

Again, the question for kingdom communities is whether the same is true in their localities and gatherings. Newell believes significant cultural influences have been the reality for Christianity throughout all of history's major civilizations. For our day he concludes, "A growing area of academic research is the study of 'place': how we interpret locations, how we interact with our surroundings, and how the resulting sense of place shapes our personal and cultural identity."[299] This ongoing research is worthy of our best efforts and brightest researchers.

One of these is a fascinating study conducted on early artistic schools. The data they amassed suggests "that in almost every instance, artists identified with a certain school tend to live in the same region or city during its emergent period." The same is true in our day, they conclude, despite changes in

---

[299] Edmund Newell, *The Sacramental Sea: A Spiritual Voyage Through Christian History* (London, England: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2019), 100-101.

communication and transportation that would suggest otherwise. Specifically, they assert, "A place has meaning, along with its material and social qualities, and those attributions and understandings figure consequentially in how place structures social and cultural life."[300]

One of my favorite images comes again from Professor Trubek. She sees "modern stories of farming, cooking, and eating" as stories "to be considered together, as if they were individual squares of a quilt stitched together."[301] This local patchwork quilt *(image 3.3)* is especially meaningful to me as one of my favorite places is Sisters, Oregon, home of the annual Outdoor Quilt Show. Each quilt tells a compelling, unique and local story in each beautiful square. Many of these quilts also end up at the Oregon State Fair in Salem each year, along with numerous other local products, creations and creatures for the whole state to celebrate and experience.

Inculturating the Local

The local kingdom community should influence the local culture even as it is being influenced by it. In order to be faithful to our king, this requires a

---

[300] Kathleen C. Oberlein and Thomas F. Gieryn, "Place and Culture Making: Geographic Clumping in the Emergence of Artistic Schools," *Poetics* 50 (June 2015): 21.

[301] Trubek, 13.

delicate, and at times seemingly impossible, task. However, there is precedence for faithfully administering this sacred balance. Kreider, in his survey of the early church, presents the mediating practice of *inculturation:*

> As Tertullian and Clement negotiated the relationship between solidarity with the wider culture and critique of it, they were engaging in what missiologists call *inculturation.* Inculturation is rooted in the recognition that Christianity, like every religion, is embedded in culture. As Christian thinkers, missiologists affirm that Christianity can bring liberation to every culture; that is, it can enable the culture's best self to flourish as its people find Christ in their midst, living, teaching, and finding goodness in their culture. However, missiologists also affirm that religions, including Christianity, can be prisoners of culture…[302]

Kreider sees the two principles of "indigenizing" and "pilgrim" as being held in tension by the early church. He asserts, "In the ancient world, when Christians were at their best, they sensed a dynamic interplay between indigenizing and being pilgrim, between affirmation and critique. They lived in existential tension between being at home and being strangers…As a result, the Christians are a hybrid people"[303]

Home

Our favorite destination, especially during the holidays, is also our favorite four-letter word: *Home.* Perhaps we could add it to another list of favorites, that being our theology. Volf and Croasmun state, "The purpose of

---

[302] Kreider, 877-878.

[303] Kreider, 883-884.

theology is then to help human beings identify God's home as their home and to help us journey toward it."[304] For those who still struggle with the loaded metaphor of kingdom, they helpfully add, "…the 'kingdom of God' and the 'home of God' are metaphors for two sides of the same reality."[305] Perhaps the greatest aspect of terroir is captured in Kreglinger's statement here: "The smell of the wine was so familiar, the taste so fresh and crisp, that it smelled and tasted like home."[306]

But in a recent commercial, a guest declared, "If home had a flavor, it would be Chick-fil-A's mac-n-cheese!" Hmm. Mmm! We can argue about which taste best gets us there, but there is no arguing about the universal desire for home. Kevin Palau concludes his book, telling the *Unlikely* tale of Portland churches joining hands for the blessing of the city, with the perfect question: "That's our story. But what's yours? What makes your hometown, well, *home?*"[307]

---

[304] Volf and Croasmun, 71.

[305] Volf and Croasmun, 181.

[306] Kreglinger, xiii.

[307] Palau, 413.

PART TWO

A FLOURISHING LIFE TOGETHER

(Bringing Together the Opposite Ends)

(image c.3)

"Does anybody know how to build a bridge anymore?"

(Harry Smith)

Congratulations are now in order, fellow smarties. You survived three dips in refreshing and deep theological waters. Three cheers! Your certificate of completion is in the mail. Or would you prefer a small tiara? But don't puff up with regal pride, because more "dips" will be necessary along the way (including the one who wrote what you're currently reading). And all of our tiaras, crowns, diplomas, dollars and pounds will eventually end up at the feet of King Jesus anyway.

Part Two will be where things get *doubly* interesting…and FUN! As I mentioned earlier, it will be practical theology (yep, sorry) and a celebration of the *both/and.* Or to put another cool and fancy word on the table, a practical theology of *reconciliation.* Of all the callings Jesus has given us, especially related to kingdom community, this is a *holy* calling. I use that last very spiritual sounding word not in the religious or puritan sense, but in regards to *wholeness.* Scripture says we are to **"be holy because I (God) am holy." (1 Peter 1)** Yes, he is pure. Yes, he is perfect. But, yes, he is *whole.* No, he's probably not that religious. And just as he embodies (incarnates) all that he has called us to, he has called us to minister the same unto others. Until we are all whole. We'll get to more of that in a minute.

Speaking of calling, I remember this moment like it was yesterday. I was driving south across the Glen Jackson Bridge of I-205, over the Columbia River

that divides my home states of Washington and Oregon. As I passed over Governor's Island in the middle of the river, I thought about the work, the skill, the hours and the people that it took to construct this roughly mile long, 8 lane edifice that I was able to cross over in less than two minutes. Bridges are wonders, and often works of art. Brooklyn, Golden Gate and London immediately come to mind. Are you singing the children's song now? Yeah, me too. And speaking of London, how about the Tower Bridge (pictured), which I crossed on an open-air Big Bus. Amazing! Or the most famous of all, the Ponte Vecchio in Florence, Italy. Someday…

But it was in that moment on the rather non-descript (by comparison), Glen Jackson Bridge that I felt the Spirit nudge me and confirm to my heart my calling. To be a *bridge builder.* Now I know that so far in this book I have been seriously mixing metaphors (just wait). Vines. Pools. Bridges. But as I learned at the feet of my professor, our minds are designed for pictures, for metaphors. In fact, our entire system of language is built on metaphors. So bring on the *images.* And we will. But let's let Paul drive this calling home once again:

> **"And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God." (2 Corinthians 5)**

To repeat, reconciliation is all about bringing two sides together. Two seemingly opposite ends, that actually fit perfectly together. And the result

is…well, just wait! It will be breathtakingly beautiful. And ***purple*****.** This is our calling. To be bridge builders. Dot connectors. Peace makers. Ambassadors of a totally different kind of kingdom. ***It should be what we as followers of Jesus are known for.*** So let's get to it. Twenty *rows.* Twenty *pools.* Twenty *bridges.* Twenty *ends to bring together* in this liminal place we occupy in the kingdom. It will bring some needed "addition" to our primary learning and might even seem a bit formulaic. But the power will be in the *combinations*, the additions and not the subtractions. But don't worry letter people, no calculators will be required.

But nonetheless student beware, for these *Fresh Takes, Fresh Images* and *Fresh Experiences* of kingdom community will sometimes be uncomfortable, and you may not agree with them all. That's okay. But we simply *must* continue the conversation, and journey, towards a new understanding of our beliefs (orthodoxy) and practices (orthopraxy) for our modern Jesus gatherings. We simply must have *fresh* and compelling *images.* We simply must offer our own zip code, and every zip code, *a taste of the kingdom.*

4

FIRST + LAST

A FRESH UNDERSTANDING *(image l.1)*

Jesus First + Jesus Last = Jesus Most

Okay, if there is a line that I will wear out between now and when I draw my last breath, it is that one. To me, this is life on planet earth and life in the Kingdom of God in a nutshell. We begin with Jesus (the Alpha) and we end with Jesus (the Omega). He *is* the beginning and the end. And all along the way we look to Jesus *most* (the I Am). This is the *most* beautiful place in the kingdom! The Buena Vista, the greatest view of all.

This in no way diminishes the Godhead. As believers in the Trinity (uh oh, more theology) we believe there are three "persons" that make up ONE God.

There is the *Father*: Everlasting. All-powerful. All-knowing. Eternal. All in all. There is the *Holy Spirit:* The helper. The comforter. The counselor. The fire. The water. And there is the *Son:* Jesus. Savior. Lord. Messiah. King. There are many, including my pastor, who point out that the Greek presentation of the Holy Spirit indicates a feminine tense. Thus, the first and eternal family: Father. Mother. Son. My pastor also paints the picture of the Trinity relating to each other in an eternal *dance.* I so love that image.

This is what the FATHER says about Jesus…

> On the Mountain (Transfiguration): **"This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." (Luke 9)**
>
> In the River (Baptism): **"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." (Mark 1)**
>
> In the Desert (Temptation): **"Worship the Lord your God and serve only him." (Matthew 4)** Note: While it was actually Jesus speaking, these authoritative words from the Father also applied directly to him, a fact Satan recognized.

Is the FATHER jealous of sharing his eternal glory with Jesus?

> According to Peter (a witness on the Mountain): **"He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'" (2 Peter 1)**
>
> According to Paul (a later witness): **"Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and**

under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2)

According to David (second king of united Israel): **"The LORD says to my lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" (Psalm 110)**

This is how the SPIRIT relates to Jesus:

On the Mountain: **"While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them…" (Luke 9)** Yes, I believe this signifies the Spirit was present.

In the River: **"Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove." (Mark 1)**

In the Desert: **"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness…" (Matthew 4)**

This is how the SPIRIT reveals Jesus ("Her" primary role):

In the Womb: **"The Holy Spirit will come on you (Mary), and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God." (Luke 1)**

In the Upper Room and Right After: **"And they were are filled with the Holy Spirit…God has raised this Jesus to life…Exalted, then, to the right hand of God, He has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you both see and hear…Therefore let all Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ!" (Acts 2)**

According to Jesus: **"But when he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on His own; he will speak only what he hears…He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you." (John 16)**

There is no divine power play going on between three Gods. There is ONE God; three persons; unique personalities and roles; shared glory and purpose; united in lifting up Jesus…our King…to the glory of the Father through the ongoing work of the Spirit. The ultimate kingdom community.

Dancing.

A FRESH IMAGE *(image l.2)*

(image 4.1)

Most of the pictures of Jesus in the world are *laughable*. Is it sacrilege to say so? Hardly. More like the images themselves are often sacrilege. Sorry, no offense to the otherwise amazing artists who have attempted this impossible feat. It *is* impossible, and for good reason. We do rather have a problem with getting high centered on idols and icons, after all. So we have to be careful with our images, our *focus.*

Two simple truths are missing from most of the portraits of the King. The first is rather obvious. Jesus was from the middle east. Israel. Palestine. Galilee. And it is rather difficult to find a fair skinned man from there, similar to those you'll see in my ancestral homeland of Sweden. The great irony is that *Jesus* would surely get flagged for extra security at our airports.

So why are most of the pictures, including the shepherd image on the front of my *Children's Bible*, depicting an Anglo-Saxonish looking savior? I think you can do the math. Typically, the flat maps of the world have as the geographical center the locality of the map maker. The proper center of the universe. It's just human nature, I guess. So if Europe is the proper center then it only follows that our focus of worship should appear the same way… "in our own image." Sigh…

The other uncomfortable truth is that Jesus was *not* a looker. Isaiah the prophet made this rather clear: **"He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind… Like one from whom people hide their faces…" (Isaiah 53)** Is that what you see in most of the depictions (pictures, movies) of Jesus? Yeah, me neither. People didn't follow Jesus because he looked like Daniel Craig (the latest James Bond), George Clooney or Matthew McConaughey. Alright? (Alright. Alright!).

Nevertheless, I *love* some of these works! The one you see is my favorite. Is this the way you are most inclined to see Jesus? Probably not. It's not nearly serious enough, sacred enough, or *religious* enough. But if it wasn't Jesus's looks that attracted people then there must have been something else. Yes, I know, it was *supernatural*. But I also believe that Jesus was the life of the party. He was

accused of that, actually. He also attracted kids. The first followers tried to shoo them away. Jesus wasn't amused. Actually, he was! ☺ So it's no stretch to see him as a *laughing prophet.* How about as a *priest without the robes?* A *subversive king?* He was all of those. And *more.*

A FRESH EXPERIENCE *(image l.3)*

So how does ***Jesus Most*** find practical reality in our lives? More specifically, how does it find expression in our kingdom communities? Before I share a couple of ideas, I want to stress what I am *not* saying. There are churches and constructs that propose a "Jesus only" theology. I'm not that familiar with the details but suffice it to say this is not the revelation of scripture nor the intention of Jesus. Each "person" plays a pivotal role and adds depth, texture and meaning to the personality and work of the Godhead. Oh, and none of them dance alone! Even as I write these words, they sound so inadequate. It's only because they are.

The point here is to simply sharpen our focus. As we pray, study and live, *together,* we look to Jesus first, last and most. As the author of Hebrews says, **"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith…" (Hebrews 12)** Here are some practical ways to do just that:

Pray the Name. In *Kingdom Primer* we pointed out the power and authority found in the *name* of Jesus, not in his titles. As Peter declared to a bewildered and bedazzled audience that had just witnessed an undeniable miracle, **"This man is standing here completely well by the *name* of Jesus Christ of Nazareth…*His name* is the only one in all the world that can save anyone." (Acts 4)** So if it's true that this is where true power and authority lie, let's access it confidently, consistently and copiously! Sure, we can and should address all three as we converse together. I start most days by saying, "Welcome, Holy Spirit." Jesus prayed, **"Abba (daddy) Father."** So should we. But the Father, from before the foundation of the world, established that the *name* of Jesus would be set apart, holy, and that as the name of Jesus is invoked and lifted up, wholeness would indeed result. In our personal prayer "closets" and in our corporate prayer "rooms," let's pray the name of Jesus.

Preach the Name. The early church didn't have the collection of 66 books that we refer to as our Holy Bible (scripture). What they did have were the first-hand stories of the person, works and words of Jesus that were passed down from generation to generation and eventually penned by the gospelers. They broke bread and drank the cup together and remembered Jesus, as he instructed. They lifted him up around the table, from house to house, and around all the "tables" and "houses" of their world. They got on boats, donkeys and camels and

carried the name to the ends of the earth! As we tell the stories of scripture, we remind ourselves that *all* scripture is actually the story (singular) of Jesus! All scripture points to *Him.*

Don't Be a Flat-liner. Again, *Kingdom Primer* introduced the concept of "flat-lining" scripture, the inappropriate (and illogical) practice of seeing all verses as having equal value. While we affirm that all scripture has the inherent authority, inspiration and "breath" of God, we also affirm that some parts have *greater* value. Such as those that, in some versions, have the words of Jesus in red (like I've done). Yes, those words are greater than the words of the prophets, leaders and poets of Israel. Jesus himself said so. Thus, my practice is to spend *most* of my devotional time in the gospel accounts of Jesus; in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

What are other ways you can think of to carry, lift up and invoke *the name?* Let's be found with Jesus continually on our lips, continually dripping off of our lives and continually the focus of our rapt attention.

To the glory of the Father and the delight of the Holy Spirit.

5

GARDEN + CITY

A FRESH UNDERSTANDING *(image l.1)*

Garden + City = Kingdom Culture

Ever since the 70's and the famous *Donne & Marie* variety show, I've been singing one of their most famous spot themes, "I'm a little bit country…I'm a little bit rock-n-roll." (Nerd alert disclosure: I actually visited the Osmond Studios outside of Provo, Utah, back in the day and was even backstage in their dressing rooms! No, they weren't there, but I was never the same). Like Marie, I've leaned more country over the years, but I have my moments where the 80's metal of my youth simply must be sung into a hairbrush! Perhaps this is the *real* the inspiration for this book…

But as I was saying, what I love about the Kingdom of God is that it is a *both/and* kind of kingdom. Not only do we *not* have to make certain false choices, but there is an unexpected beauty in totally unexpected combinations. Like garden (country) and city (rock-n-roll). The unexpected beauty is a kingdom culture that is rich, diverse and inspiring! Scripture has these two pictures of the Kingdom of God as bookends:

> **"Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." (Genesis 2)**
>
> **"And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It has a great, high wall with twelve gates…On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and the honor of the nations will be brought into it." (Revelation 21)**

One of the first research books in my course of study is an exceptional introduction to culture by former Harvard campus pastor Andy Crouch. Culture is not only the very breath we inhale as a people but is also the product of our collective exhale. We are influenced by our immediate and prevailing culture as we are influencing it. According to Crouch, "Culture is what we make of the world."[308] Humankind has made much of the world over our brief history on planet earth. We have tamed and named the wild, planted and tended gardens, built and developed grand cities, and along the way have amassed tremendous knowledge and capacities as a civilization. This is all in keeping with our divine calling and identity. Crouch will further help our understanding of calling and identity as creators and cultivators as part of our *Fresh Experience* conversation (below).

But for now, is it possible to bring these two ends, city and garden, together? Scripture shows us this very reality: **"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the *city*. On each side of the river stood the *tree of life*…" (Revelation 22)**

---

[308] Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 23.

The tree of life makes a second appearance, this time as part of the *city* of God, the New Jerusalem, and so grand is its girth that it is on *both* sides of the river. A river runs through it? So it appears. What a compelling picture of *life, growth,* and *vitality.* What an inspiring image of *hope,* especially for those seven churches that "pastor" John was originally writing to, enduring great suffering and persecution in their kingdom communities. He was writing to ours as well. The garden and the city have now become one. It is the ultimate kingdom culture that God has prepared for *us.*

Kind of makes you want to sing into a hairbrush.

A FRESH IMAGE *(image l.2)*

(image 5.1)

Several years ago, two pastors from entirely different cultures of the United States, Hawaii and Arkansas, collaborated to offer helpful images to aid in our understanding of church and culture. Talk about bringing together opposites! They compared the culture of the church to the soul of the human body; culture giving "color and flavor to everything your church is and does;"[309]

[309] Robert Lewis, Wayne Cordeiro, and Warren Bird, *Culture Shift: Transforming Your Church From the Inside Out* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 3.

and culture as "the lens through which you view your life."[310] These are indeed helpful, but their primary metaphor, of special interest to a Pacific Northwesterner, is my absolute favorite. The totem pole.

My mom was raised on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington State, in a small town right on the edge of the Quinault First Peoples Reservation. Her house, built by my grandpa, sits on Lake Quinault (part of the reservation) on the corner where the Quinault River empties out to the west, en route to the Pacific Ocean. The Olympic Mountains are directly visible across the lake, part of Olympic National Park where my dad was a seasonal park ranger in my earliest years. I could keep going down memory lane if you'd like! ☺ The Quinault Tribe, in fact, used to trade with my grandparents, who owned the Amanda Park Mercantile, including hand-made baskets of all sizes that are still some of our most treasured possessions.

At several locations of the reservation, and in most reservations, you would see a totem pole, featuring hand carved creatures, some mythical but most natural, which "announces to residents and strangers alike, 'This is our culture. This is who we are.'"[311] The strength of a bear, the cunning of a cougar, the majesty of an eagle in flight. They are beautiful works of art, and a beautiful

---

[310] Lewis, Cordeiro, and Bird, 12.

[311] Lewis, Cordeiro, and Bird, 42.

representation of culture. What would a totem pole of your local kingdom community look like? What will the heavenly totem pole consist of? Yes, I believe there will be one, right next to that gate, fashioned out of a single pearl. Scripture gives us a few ideas, but right now we must hasten along.

A FRESH EXPERIENCE *(image l.3)*

Through the years, believers have surely struggled with how they relate to culture. According to Andy Crouch, there are six possible responses to culture: 1) Condemning, 2) Critiquing, 3) Copying, 4) Consuming, **5) Cultivating, 6) Creating.**[312] I highlighted the last two, because therein does Andy, (and Jay), believe our focus should be. We *surely* have spent plenty of time in condemning and critiquing, causing Crouch to lament that evangelicalism (in particular) "still produces better art critics than artists."[313] This is a terribly sad assessment. Equally sad is our tendency to copy culture instead of being originals. I believe God has a much higher calling in mind for our kingdom communities.

Certainly, we must be more than careless consumers of all we see, hear and desire. Scripture is clear in this regard:

"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the

---

[312] Andy Crouch, 68-69.

[313] Crouch, 87.

flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever." (1 John 2)

Dangers abound all around us, as does a very real adversary that scripture describes as a **"roaring lion looking for someone to devour." (1 Peter 5)** Peter concludes we had best be **"alert and sober of mind."** Noted. So how do we keep not loving the world and appropriately responding to culture in proper balance? The answer is found in the garden *and* in the city.

Cultivators of Culture. Crouch shares an illuminating, and amusing, picture of our calling as cultivators. He reminds us that "a garden, of course, is not just nature: it is nature *plus culture."* Which leads him to the story of a city-slicker's view of a farm. In wonder, he says to the farmer, "Isn't God's creation beautiful?" The farmer replies, "Well, you should have seen it when God had it all to himself."[314] This perfectly captures it! The hard work of the farmer, in concert with the creator and creation, adds an element of culture that is itself beautiful, productive and *good.* One of the first instructions God gave Adam when he **"placed him in the Garden of Eden"** was to **"cultivate and keep it." (Genesis 2)** How can we, in our kingdom communities, take the raw materials from our creator and cultivate and keep them? What a beautiful, true and good

[314] Crouch, 107-108.

calling is ours to work out together, tilling the soil of hearts and communities for the glory of God, through the ongoing work of the Spirit. Our king will be most pleased.

Creators of Culture. But our calling doesn't end with cultivating. It also includes, as i*mago dei* (in the image of God), joining our creator in the ongoing work of creation. Crouch continues, "This is the original insight of the writer of Genesis when he says that human beings were made in God's image: just like the original Creator, we are creators. God, of course, began with nothing, whereas we begin with something. This leads to his primary definition of culture as *"what we* ***make*** *of the world*"[315] (bold emphasis mine).

And what wonderful things we make as artists, from the Oregon Garden to the aforementioned city created by artists (Paris). But Crouch simplifies it further, when he alludes to "paintings (whether finger paintings or the Sistine Chapel), omelets, chairs, snow angels."[316] We can all be encouraged by this! Erwin McManus, in his most inspiring work *The Artisan Soul,* declares his belief that all of us are called to create art. For those of us who have a hard time believing this, we can be encouraged that in God's eyes, the finger paintings and snow angels are just as significant as Michaelangelo's creations. And God's

---

[315] Crouch, 23.

[316] Crouch, 23.

favorite creations are our healthy, relational, faith-filled communities. Scripture is replete with instructions for creating and cultivating such kingdom communities. Crouch concludes, "…the two postures that are most characteristically biblical…we are to be creators and cultivators. Or to put it more poetically, we are artists and gardeners."[317]

Celebrating Local Culture. I would add one more to Crouch's list. Along with my professor, Dr. Sweet, I am a believer in the "flavor" of local. He once told our cohort that when he visits a city he wants to taste the local cuisine, not go to a chain restaurant. He wants to experience the fruits of the *terroir.* This should be true for much more than the food and drink. The art of each place and the qualities that make a community unique are worth celebrating, and consuming. These can be seen in displays at local airports, in shops downtown and in the festivals that towns share together. It should also be seen in local faith communities. I'll have more on this ahead.

If you're a consumer of *Hallmark Movies,* as my household is, you'll often be presented with the virtues of small-town life (and the evils of the frantic and disconnected big city). But in kingdom terms, the city is just as significant as the village, often even more so. But the good news is, we don't have to choose

---

[317] Crouch, 97.

between one or the other. We *can* be a little bit country *and* a little bit rock-n-roll. We're headed for a city, whose builder and architects is God himself, and we're returning to the garden, where the tree of life awaits us on *both* shores.

And we'll create, cultivate and celebrate…forever.

6

DIRT + DIVINITY

A FRESH UNDERSTANDING *(image l.1)*

DIRT + DIVINITY = INCARNATION

You've no doubt noticed that I've alluded several times to the idea and image of dirt and divinity. I love this picture and believe it gives us one of the best understandings of the Kingdom of God on earth. It has everything to do with our calling as creators and cultivators, as we looked at in the previous chapter. It also has everything to do with the incarnational example of Jesus, as we briefly discussed in chapter three. To repeat (and it's worth repeating):

> the incarnation is one of the chief mysteries and non-negotiables of our faith. Kreider says, "And the means by which God seeks to attract people is incarnation." He concludes, "This is why God chose to send not

> disembodied words from heaven but an incarnate Son in a mortal body."[318] He didn't send a book, he sent a person!

As I write, Christmas is just three weeks away, where we specially *image* the incarnation with our annual pilgrimage to the nativity. Like most households, we have several nativities as part of our holiday decorations, including a small one made of olive wood that was given as a gift by friends who visited the Holy Land. It is a treasure. I also made my own back in the day, complete with small wooden poles and roof tiles that I glued together, along with the full compliment of characters that I painted. My *mom* thinks it's a treasure. ☺

Of course, many aspects of this image aren't scripturally accurate, such as the wise men being at the stable (they came later) and whether there even was a stable. But it's okay, we can keep displaying our treasures as long as we keep it all in perspective, which is difficult with how our cultures celebrate the season. But it remains a significant image, a significant reminder of the reality of the incarnation. Jesus the person, God-himself, chose to "squeeze into human skin," in order to bring *Joy to the World*. His incarnation, fully God and yet fully man, is the ultimate intersection of dirty and divinity.

---

[318] Kreider, 372, 531.

I'm also preparing to share a message with my faith community on the first Sunday of Advent. It is always a privilege. I'll be sharing (via Zoom due to the pandemic) my favorite Christmas message about how to wrap an indescribable gift (see 2 Corinthians 9:5). Full disclosure, I stole the outline and the punchline from my youth pastor, Dale Oquist. It is brilliant, and I've re-preached it several times (kind of like an earlier version of *re-tweeting).* The simple outline is that there is a "box" of prophecy around Jesus, over 60 major prophecies that he fulfilled, so there would be no doubt that he's the promised Messiah. There is the "wrapping" of human nature, the incarnation. And finally, there is the "ribbon" of the resurrection. If the resurrection didn't happen, according to scripture, then there is no point or reality to our faith. And when you unwrap this package what do you find? A Bible in diapers! ☺ The *Word of God* became flesh and blood. Like I said, it's brilliant. Thanks (again) Pastor Dale. And thank you Jesus. But be careful, and always remember that *Jesus* came…

He didn't send a book.

A FRESH IMAGE *(image l.2)*

(image 6.1)

I know what you're thinking, and you're probably right. I used a couple great images above that I could've used in this section. True. But I would argue

they're not *fresh.* Ha! But no, that's not the reason (the Nativity is always fresh anyway, olive wood or not). The real reason is that I need to emphasize a significant concept before we find our way to a Fresh Experience. This is where it might get a "mite" controversial. Remember, you were warned. ☺

If there is one thing that the organized church has struggled with, since it became organized, it is *tradition* and *change*. For far too many, yet today, tradition is *divine* and change is indeed *dirty.* This has sadly led to continual arguments, divisions and wars. But repeat after me, we *don't* have to choose between tradition and change. Back to the image of a playground swing from Dr. Sweet, where we lean back (tradition) and then push forward (change). Yes, I could've used that fresh image, too.

But I simply must share my favorite image of them all from my doctoral studies. It comes from another smarty pants professor, and from the first book Dr. Sweet had us read. Crystal Downing's book *Changing Signs of Truth* is a must read for any would be smarty (or sweetart), by the way. Her signature metaphor is of a coin (quarter) on edge, profoundly illustrating the delicate balance of tradition and change. I'll let her pick it up here:

> This is the position of (re)signing truth: resigned to the headship of Jesus Christ, you maintain trust in the sign to the right, where the words 'In God We Trust' still appear. But your position on the edge also enables you to look to the left, where you can enjoy and celebrate the re-signing of the

> coin. Just as each state of the union determines its own sign on the quarter, so each new era or state of culture determines new signs for the faith.[319]

Speaking of brilliant! To clarify, she uses the word (re) signing to indicate a new understanding to an old image/reality. So as we continue to *resign* ourselves to the authority of Jesus and scripture (In God We Trust/Tradition) we (re) sign the future, represented by the differing state images that now adorn our US quarters.

Further, how we position ourselves as it relates to culture is critical to our ability to influence it. She sees a proper response as one lived on the edge of the coin (the coin standing up on edge). She adds, "Staying on the edge therefore necessitates not only balance but also movement forward. Think of your ant-sized body rolling the quarter through culture like an acrobat rolling a barrel through an arena."[320] The image you see is of Crater Lake on the state quarter of Oregon, and the little "ant" on the edge is *me*, compliments of one of my classmates. Whatever image speaks to you the most just *please* remember, you don't have to choose between tradition and change.

It's both/and.

A FRESH EXPERIENCE *(image l.3)*

Sacred + Secular

---

[319] Downing, 57.

[320] Downing, 61.

Which brings us to another of my core convictions as it relates to kingdom community. The bold heading you see is yet another way, for me, of expressing dirt + divinity. But the use of *sacred* and *secular* in our faith gatherings has led to tremendous misunderstandings and *ungodly* divisions. We saw it clearly in the recent royal wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle. Not only were we reminded of the divide between the royals and the commoners outside of St. George's Chapel at Windsor Castle, but, most unfortunately, we were reminded of the divide between the sacred and the secular once we were inside. I saw this first-hand in my visit to Westminster Abbey, as well. There is seating for the commoners (the Nave) and there is seating for the monks (the Choir) and the altar area where the priests perform the ministry (the Apse). But, sadly, there is often an actual wall dividing the Nave and the Choir, as there is at St. George's and Westminster Abbey. The message couldn't be more clear…or wrong.

This is where I offer an important historical reminder regarding the original *ecclesia*. Theologian T. Desmond Alexander states, "The usual Greek word for church is *ekklesia,* a non-technical word which means 'gathering' or 'assembly.'…It is used of ordinary crowds…but also designates the assembling of Israel before God to hear the reading of the law, confess their sins, express

repentance and renew the covenant…"[321] Surprisingly, it is an appeal to the "secular" aspect of these gatherings that I am making, and not to a temple or cathedral centric culture often hinted at by well-meaning but misguided modern purveyors of religion.

Certainly, there should be "sacred" aspects of our modern gatherings. We are called to be a worshipping community after all. We are invited by Jesus to participate in the Eucharist (communion), where we remember him and the work he completed on our behalf. We are called to be a confessing community, recognizing the authority of the scriptures in our lives and our community. The question is not whether these elements are essential aspects of our corporate gatherings but rather *how* these elements find expression in modern cultures. And *who* is invited to participate.

For instance, there are many who subscribe to a "line by line, verse by verse" public study of scripture, in order to ensure the declaration of the "whole counsel of God." While this is in some ways admirable, this doesn't appear to be the practice of Jesus or the early church. It also doesn't appear to be an effective way of engaging our cultures in significant issues and discussions. I agree we

---

[321] Tidball, 408.

should be exposed to the "whole counsel," I just don't agree that our large gatherings are the best place for it *all*.

Nor was the Eucharist celebrated in the same fashion as with our ornate tables of remembrance in sacred spaces. The early church "remembered" by breaking bread together around *ordinary* tables and "rehearsed" the stories and words of Jesus in their home gatherings. There is surely nothing wrong with celebrating the Eucharist in some of the traditional fashions we're accustomed to, and even in beautiful houses of worship. But we don't *have to* do it this way.

What I am suggesting is a return to a more *secular* understanding and practice of the public gatherings of kingdom communities, where *everyone* is welcome and where *everyone* can participate. They can even sit in the Choir! A recent church billboard in a small community of Oregon perfectly stated, "The church, the original community center." Exactly. In our quest to be wholly faithful to our sacred callings, modern churches have far too often been guilty of neglecting a divine embrace and engagement of their communities. "Advancing" with a decidedly hospitable *community center* philosophy of ministry versus "retreating" to a *sacred space* on a hill is perhaps a place to start. There will be much more on this in the next chapter. Just wait.

But for now, the question is, do we really want to "preach to" and "worship with" the already converted (spiritually/culturally) *only*? Not me! Is

our worship to be limited to the songs and traditions that have been handed down to us? Not on your life! Jamie Auling-Noth, campus pastor of my new alma-mater, George Fox University, says, "Worship is a response to God…and there are *lots* of ways to respond!" A-men, Jamie.

The people (subjects) of God have been called to incarnate our places, *all* of them. A*ll* of us are called to the heroic task of incarnation, in the sanctuary and in the marketplace, to follow the example of Jesus and "move into the neighborhood," and to embody his one-of-a kind glory. It is our highest calling. Part of how we do this in our kingdom communities is by inviting *all* of our community into *all* of our places. *All of them.*

It will be dirty…and divine!

7

INCLUSIVE + EXCLUSIVE

A FRESH UNDERSTANDING *(image l.1)*

INCLUSIVE + EXCLUSIVE = IMAGO DEI

"We believe Jesus is more of an usher than a bouncer." (Tim Johnson)

When I greet people, I'm fond of starting with the oft quoted and trite question, "What do you know for sure?" At the very least it's better than "How ya doin?" But probably not much. I think it is quite significant, however, that I have waited until the start of chapter seven to ask it of you. So?

Since you asked, this would be the perfect time for me to answer. I've put it in bold italicized purple, because it is essential to the conversation below.

One thing I know for sure, if Jesus doesn't meet us ALL with overwhelming mercy and amazing grace then we are ALL doomed.

You're no doubt an agreeable sort or you wouldn't have made it this far into my book. Thank you, by the way. But before you simply nod your head to that statement, take a moment to consider the ramifications of such a conviction for our kingdom communities. For *your* kingdom community.

I have a dear friend that is incarcerated, serving a fifteen- year sentence. Before the covid pandemic hit I visited him monthly and it was *lifegiving.* Rick is the best encourager I know. I miss him dearly. Rick is a sex offender, and the abuse happened over two decades ago now. It involved a child. His adopted daughter. Still with me?

I am also part of a church that is intentionally inclusive. You see the fantastic quote above from my pastor. What does this mean? Part (not all) of what it means is that we had to depart our denomination because my pastor chose to perform a gay marriage. One of these two ladies I have known for several years. She is one of the most vibrant and sacrificial individuals that I know. She has led the charge for years, in Eugene, to support and resource homeless teens that are on our streets in large numbers. She loves these kids passionately. She loves *Jesus* passionately. Do you think this is even possible?

Before you quickly answer, or throw this book across the room, stop to again consider the *amazing grace* and *overwhelming mercy* of our God. If this is *not* true, then it matters not if you're a registered sex offender. It matters not if you think a practicing homosexual is on thin ice. We are *all* on thin ice if it's not true. In fact, I remember years ago hosting a youth leader's conference where my hero, author and evangelist Josh

McDowell, was the keynote speaker. When we were in the back of the room, he pointed to the audience of about 200 leaders and said to me, "I can guarantee you that half of that audience has an issue with internet pornography." This was also nearly two decades ago but I remember it like it was yesterday. No way, Josh.

Way. It's true in virtually any gathering, kingdom or not. So what do *you* see when you look out on your congregation? More tellingly, what do you *believe* about your fellow kingdom subjects? Do you believe it could be possible that they are involved in pornography, adultery, theft, lying, cheating, malice, or even sex abuse? God forbid, right? They would have no business worshipping beside you, right? *Actually, none of us would.*

My convictions used to be very black and white (or red and blue) on these and other issues. "Throw the sex offender out!" My former church did. "God is *not* okay with gays and certainly isn't okay with them marrying." But spending time with Tauna and Rick has changed my life and has changed my thinking about the grace and mercy of God. My thinking is much more purple. Yes, I still struggle with the issue of gay marriage and yes, I'm outraged by sex offences. But if I don't believe that Jesus can forgive, accept and love Rick and Tauna, then it is *me* that is on thin ice. I promise you I feel more that way when I'm with them than the other way around. So are you ready to worship with Tauna in your kingdom community? Are you ready to welcome Rick to sit next to you?

Here's what else I know for sure. ***Rick and Tauna are made in the image of Jesus. They are just as much the imago dei that I am.*** And anything that I'm not sure of, in regards to their beliefs and behaviors, I believe Jesus is fully capable of taking care of

without my help. That doesn't sound very "Christian," at least not the kind we often practice. But I will say it again,

One thing I know for sure, if Jesus doesn't meet us ALL with overwhelming mercy and amazing grace then we are ALL doomed.

A FRESH IMAGE *(image l.2)*

(images 7.1/7.2)

I've never been to the Four Corners of the western United States but it's on my bucket list. There is actually a place, a single dot on the map, where Utah, Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico connect. You see it pictured with a bullseye. And not only is there a single dot but there are miles in every direction where the states come together in smooth, straight lines. Just like they are supposed to. Don't you wish all of life worked like that? So say all those that have a distinctly "modern" mind. I think the Four Corners is Jesus' favorite place to hang out.

But those who live in the "boot" of Missouri would beg to differ. There is a "horn" to my home state of Oregon, and a "panhandle" to several states, but a boot is seriously sweet! Perhaps you've never noticed it before. So why am I giving this geography lesson (nerd alert!)? If you'll find the red circled area, you'll note that in this relatively small area of Missouri, there are four other

states that border it, including Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas and Illinois. And Indiana is within spitting distance. There is nothing smooth about this area, thanks to the rivers and valleys, and the "dot" is rather jagged. Perfect for the postmoderns among us.

Actually, there is a mathematical term for this. It's called "fuzzy sets theory" and it is only for the seriously gifted numbers people among us. I tried to learn more about it, but I couldn't afford the textbooks! ☺ I was actually introduced to this theory from a missionary theologian, so go figure. Here is the profound concept:

> "Fuzzy sets are mathematical sets which have no sharp edges. Instead, there are *degrees of inclusion*."[322] He continues, "Fuzzy sets provide us with not only another way of viewing the world but also a new system of logic. Along with fuzzy-sets theory have emerged fuzzy algebra, fuzzy geometry, and fuzzy logic."[323]

Many would argue that *fuzzy theology* has already been unsuccessfully attempted. Perhaps many of you would argue you're reading it right now.

But what about fuzzy *community?* There is a standing joke among religious professionals that working for the church would be wonderful, if it weren't for all the people. My pastor, who I'm quoting a lot in this section,

---

[322] Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 118.

[323] Hiebert, 119.

recently said "Choosing a church is like deciding what *hot mess* you want to be a part of." Exactly. Our kingdom communities are much more dirt than divinity it seems. Because it is comprised of people means there are problems, hypocrisies and drama. *Lots* of drama. We don't fit together neatly, whether there are four of us or more. We have jagged edges, not smooth lines. But we do belong together, and we *do* fit together. This gives a whole new meaning to the "boot" of fellowship. We're all "fuzzy dots" that the Holy Spirit is connecting together. It takes a *lot* of glue. Kingdom grade super glue…

Love.

A FRESH EXPERIENCE *(image l.3)*

One of the biggest questions to ask our kingdom communities, then, is how it is that we can bring the two ends of inclusion and exclusion together. Is it even possible? It *is.*

Centered Sets. In addition to fuzzy sets, I have also learned, in my recent journey, about centered sets. Local faith leader and international evangelist Kevin Palau wrote a book about the beautiful way the Holy Spirit brought the faith communities of Portland, Oregon, together to bless our city. For those who are aware of the spiritual climate of the Pacific Northwest, it is a most *Unlikely* story. Palau gives a great introduction to *bounded sets:* "In the bounded-set model, we create boundaries, theological borders, and cultural fences to keep clear lines and distinctions between us

and those we don't agree with."[324] Smith and Pattison give us the distinction, "The incarnational church, in contrast, is a 'centered set.' A centered set is defined by its core values. It sees people 'not…as in or out, but as closer or further away from the center (which in this case is Christ)."[325]

Community Facing. One of the greatest practices of my current faith community during the COVID-19 pandemic regards our "position" in relation to our community. Eugene Fifth Avenue Church leadership has challenged our congregation to be decidedly "community facing and community embracing." This is no small point of order. In fact, "At the root of the Greek word for church, *ekklesia,* is the verb meaning 'to call out.'"[326] So it is only appropriate that we position ourselves "facing out."

Tragically, much of the messaging of the institutional church during the COVID-19 crisis has been a litany of demands, an often a blatant disregard and disrespect of civic leadership, and a predictable "turning in." What this often says (shouts) to our local communities is that we don't care about them, or perhaps more accurately that *we care more about ourselves and our religious activities.* And don't get me started on the wearing of masks, which the experts say mostly protects those around us (our neighbors!). So when we demand our rights by refusing a simple act like this, what are we saying (shouting) to the neighbors we are called to love? This is *not* the example Jesus gave us, nor the

---

[324] Palau, 92.

[325] Smith and Pattison, 35.

[326] Smith and Pattison, 33.

commission he left us. Pastor Tim Johnson, in the early days of the shutdown of all public gatherings in Oregon, declared, "We are going to do *more* than is required of us by the letter of the law, because we love our community."[327]

Radical Inclusiveness.

"Jesus lived a life of radical inclusiveness…" (Kevin Palau)

Boxes of exclusion can be clearly seen in every institution, but perhaps nowhere is it more troubling than in local expressions of the church. Here is the crux of the problem. The church,

> is in fact by its nature exclusionary…As a consequence, the church confronts something of a paradoxical mission. *It must preach the most exclusive of messages, yet do so with the most open of hearts, while modeling the most inclusive of communities.*[328] (Emphasis mine)

Jesus knew his message would be divisive, even turning brother against brother and child against parent. Yet the greatest command he gives his followers is to love one another[329] and his greatest desire is that they dwell together in unity.[330] When the jagged edges of "fuzzy community" jab us out of our ecclesiological

---

[327] Tim Johnson, Fifth Avenue Church Staff Meeting, March 3, 2020.

[328] Jonathan Cole, "The Catholicity of the Church: Reconciling the Call for Exclusive Doctrine and Inclusive Community," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 39, no. 2 (April 2005): 178.

[329] See John 13.

[330] See John 17.

comfort zones we will find ourselves much better reflecting the Kingdom of God together.

The Disney resorts are known as *The Happiest Place on Earth.* I dream of the day when our kingdom communities can be known as *The most inclusive place on earth.* Jesus was the most inclusive person who ever walked planet earth, and the religious establishment hated him for it. He hung out with, partied with and even *ate meals* (gasp!) with prostitutes, tax collectors and murderous revolutionaries. Some of them even found their way into Jesus's inner circle. No way, Jesus.

The Margins. *Way.* The story that should most educate our kingdom communities is when Jesus told of a rich man throwing a lavish banquet. He invited the *right set* first: the rich, the powerful, and the influential. But they were too busy with other important matters and sent their regrets. Furious, the rich man sent his servants out with this command,

"Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame…Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full." (Luke 14, NIV)

This isn't how we typically work to fill our houses of worship today. We most often stop with the first set. Jesus looked to the margins. So who are in the

margins of our communities today? Leading the list are the sex offenders (Rick) and the LGBTQ community (Tauna). Jesus was *radically* inclusive, *beginning* with the margins. It's only appropriate that we end with the words of my pastor, regarding his philosophy of inclusiveness…

"I don't want anybody to try to follow Jesus alone." (Tim Johnson)

IT'S HAPPY HOUR (AGAIN)

(image h.1)

Our trusty *John Deere Gator* is returning to the barn with mud on the tires but with the back bed filled with fresh riches compliments of local terroir. We've really only had time for a "taste" of these concepts and ideas relating to kingdom community that are as flavorful, complex and inspiring as the best *Pinot Noir.* My conviction, and hopefully yours, has been richly inspired as a result, that Kingdom community needs to be freshly understood, *imaged* and experienced in Jesus gatherings, not only here in 97448, but in every zip code. A life-giving taste of the kingdom is available to all and is worth any price to deliver.

But the responsibility, the calling, is ours to embrace. The call to be a Kingdom Vintner. A Bridge Builder. A Peace Maker. A Dot Connector. "Dot Connecting" was actually the course of study I just completed with Dr. Sweet at Portland Seminary. Of course, he couldn't call it that (though I bet he'd love to!) because that doesn't sound properly academic enough. So he chose the word *Semiotics*. Much better. Semiotics is simply dot connecting, but it involves a bit more than that. When Jesus was responding to the religious experts and elites who were looking for a sign, he said:

"When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah." (Matthew 16, NIV)

Properly interpreting the signs and images of the times is what semiotics is all about. The Israelite tribe of Issachar was actually known for being **"men who understood the times and knew what Israel should do." (1 Chronicles 12, NIV).** So upon completion of our program, Dr. Sweet simply said, "Welcome to the tribe of Issachar." Perfect.

But now what? I'm so glad you asked. Simply, we as students and followers all, must continue to make every effort to properly understand *kingdom, community* and our *place* in it. We must make every effort to bring the two seemingly opposite ends together, to do the work of a bridge builder. We must continue to search out and utilize the freshest images available to communicate to our modern cultures. Just like Jesus did. But even more, we must seek fresh experiences as we live the abundant life in the kingdom. The life that only King Jesus offers. We'll look at that further in the final installment of this kingdom trilogy, *Kingdom Song & Dance.*

But for now, many more trips through the vines and diggings in the dirt will be required, so let's roll up our sleeves. We are invited to create and to cultivate along with our master vintner. We are invited to offer the same taste of the kingdom to the hungry and thirsty of our culture, *every* culture and every zip code, that we have received. Just as we have tasted.

We are also invited to sprint back to the castle at the end of the day. It's happy hour. It's *always* happy hour in the kingdom. So grab a Pinot glass and a wingback chair by the window. The one right by the King. In the turret filled with friends and family. We can all enjoy the view…*together.* He'd love nothing more.

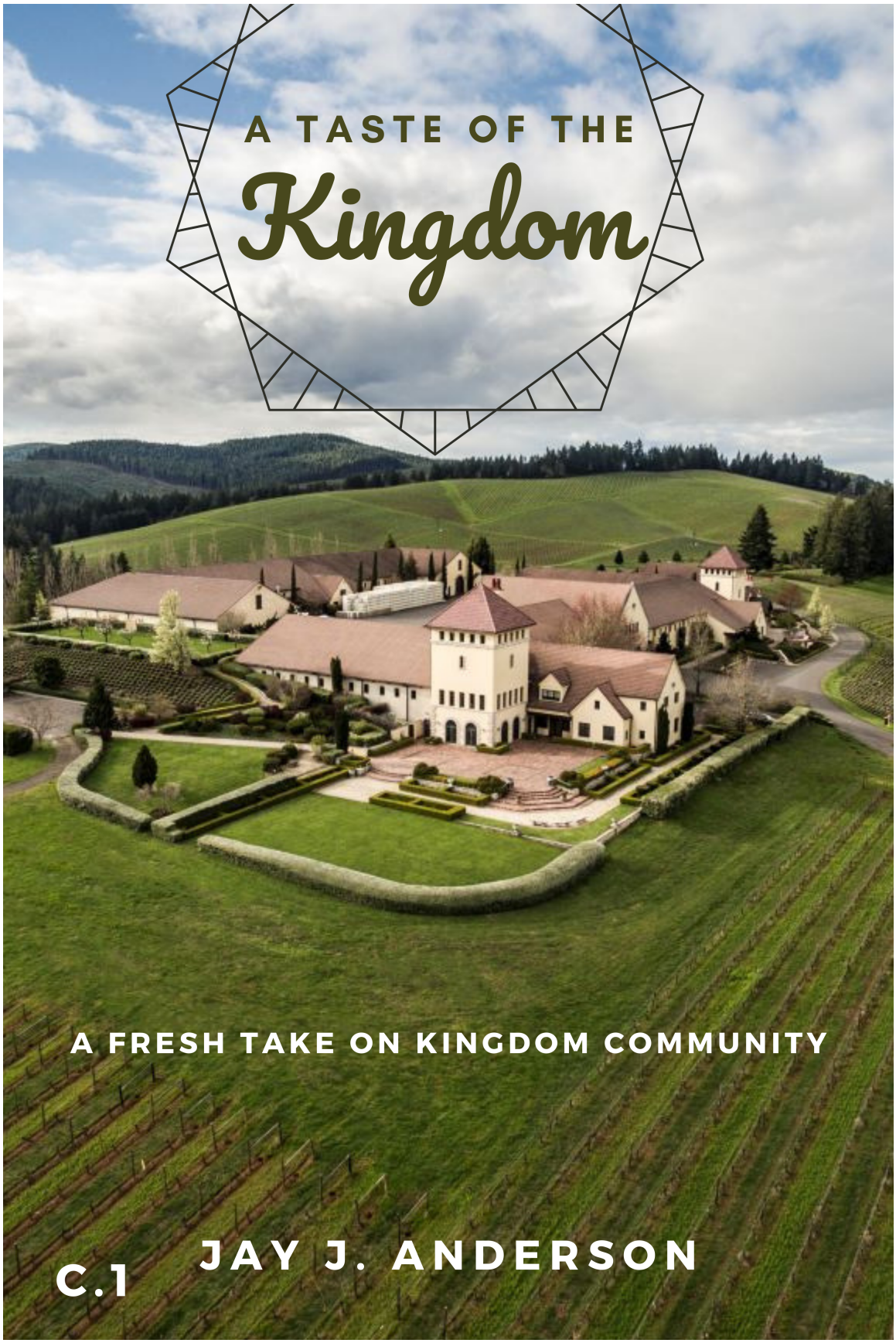
(image h.2)

A TASTE OF THE KINGDOM

ARTIFACT IMAGES

A TASTE OF THE KINGDOM

COVER PAGES


A TASTE OF THE
Kingdom
A FRESH TAKE ON KINGDOM COMMUNITY
C.1
JAY J. ANDERSON

PART ONE

WHAT MATTERS MOST

"JUST A TASTE OF THEOLOGY"

C.2

PART TWO

A FLOURISHING LIFE TOGETHER

(BRINGING TOGETHER THE OPPOSITE ENDS)

Does anybody know how to build a bridge anymore? – Harry Smith

C.3

A TASTE OF THE KINGDOM

RECURRING LOGO IMAGES

L.1

L.2

L.3

A TASTE OF THE KINGDOM

WELCOME BACK (INTRODUCTION)

W.1

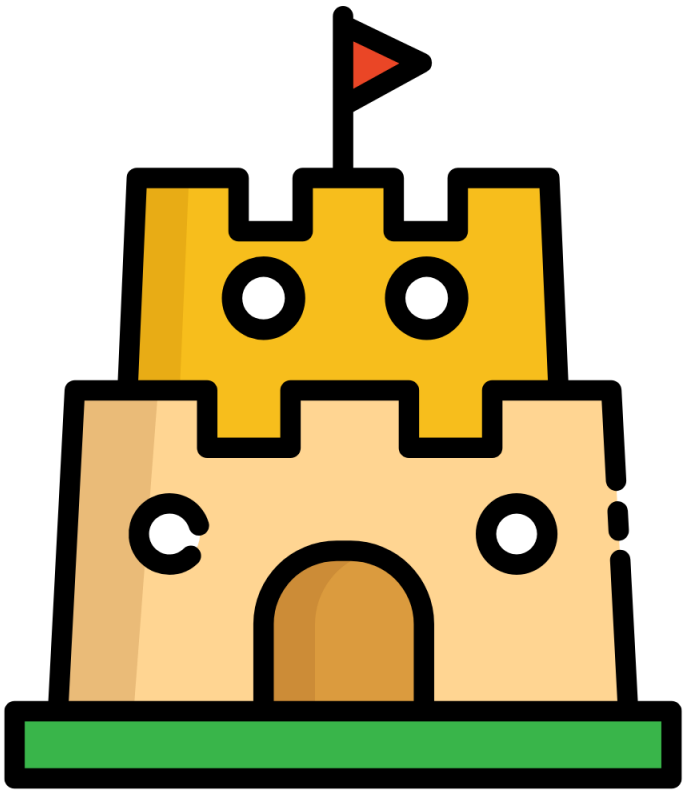
W.2

W.3

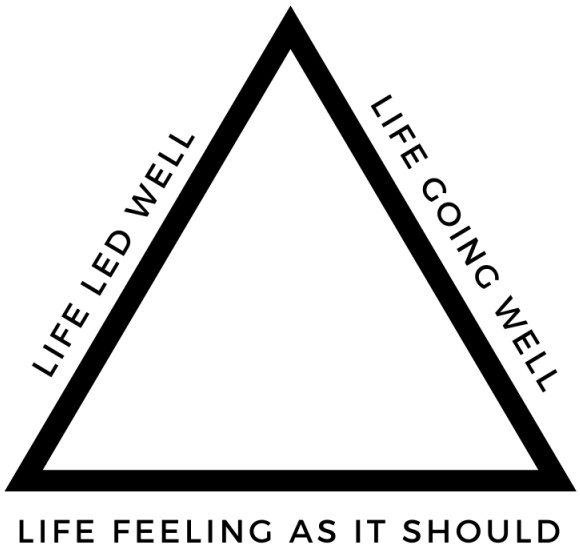
W.4

A TASTE OF THE KINGDOM

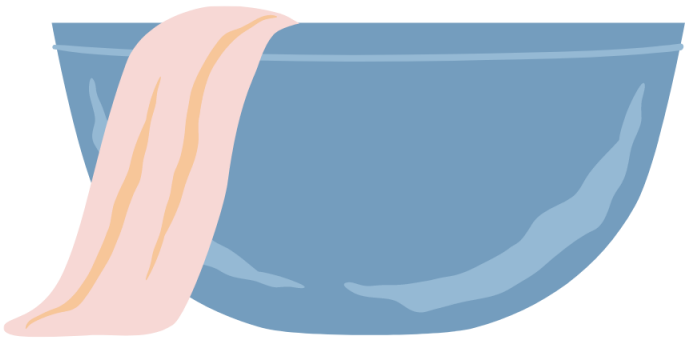
CHAPTER 1



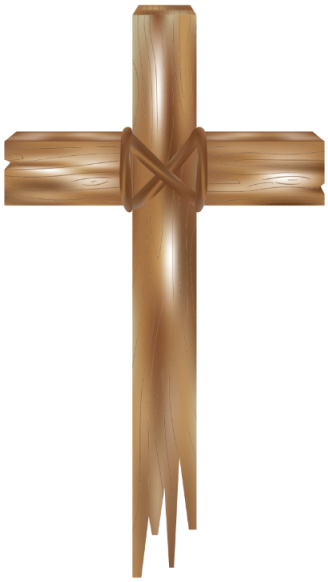
1.1



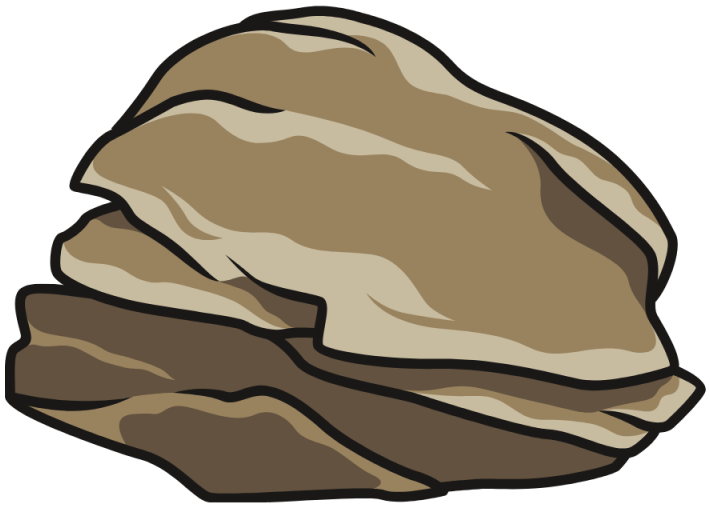
1.2



1.3



1.4



1.5

1.6

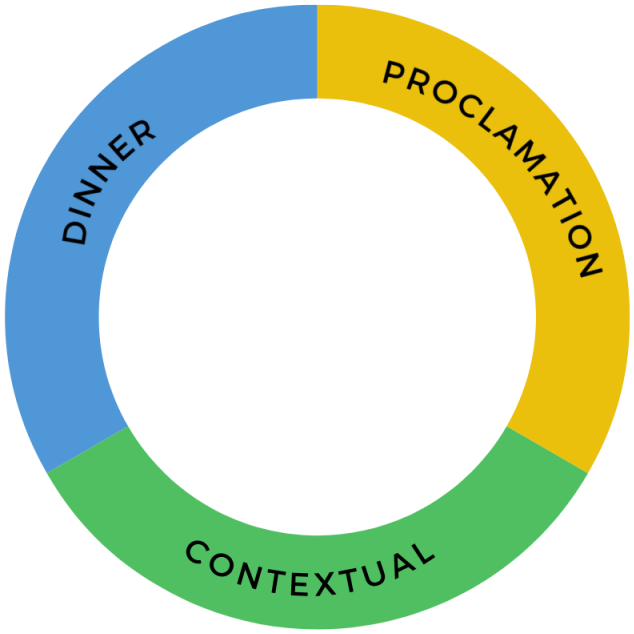
1.7

A TASTE OF THE KINGDOM

CHAPTER 2

2.1

2.2



2.3

A TASTE OF THE KINGDOM

CHAPTER 3

GO
PENTONVILLE ROAD
£320,695
EUSTON ROAD
£677,365
CHANCE
THE ANGEL, ISLINGTON
£761,384
MARYLEBONE STATION
INCOME TAX
PAY 20%
WHITECHAPEL ROAD
£536,656
COMMUNITY CHEST
OLD KENT ROAD
£323,230
£2 - COLLECT £20 SALARY AS YOU PASS
GO
JAIL
VISITING
JUST

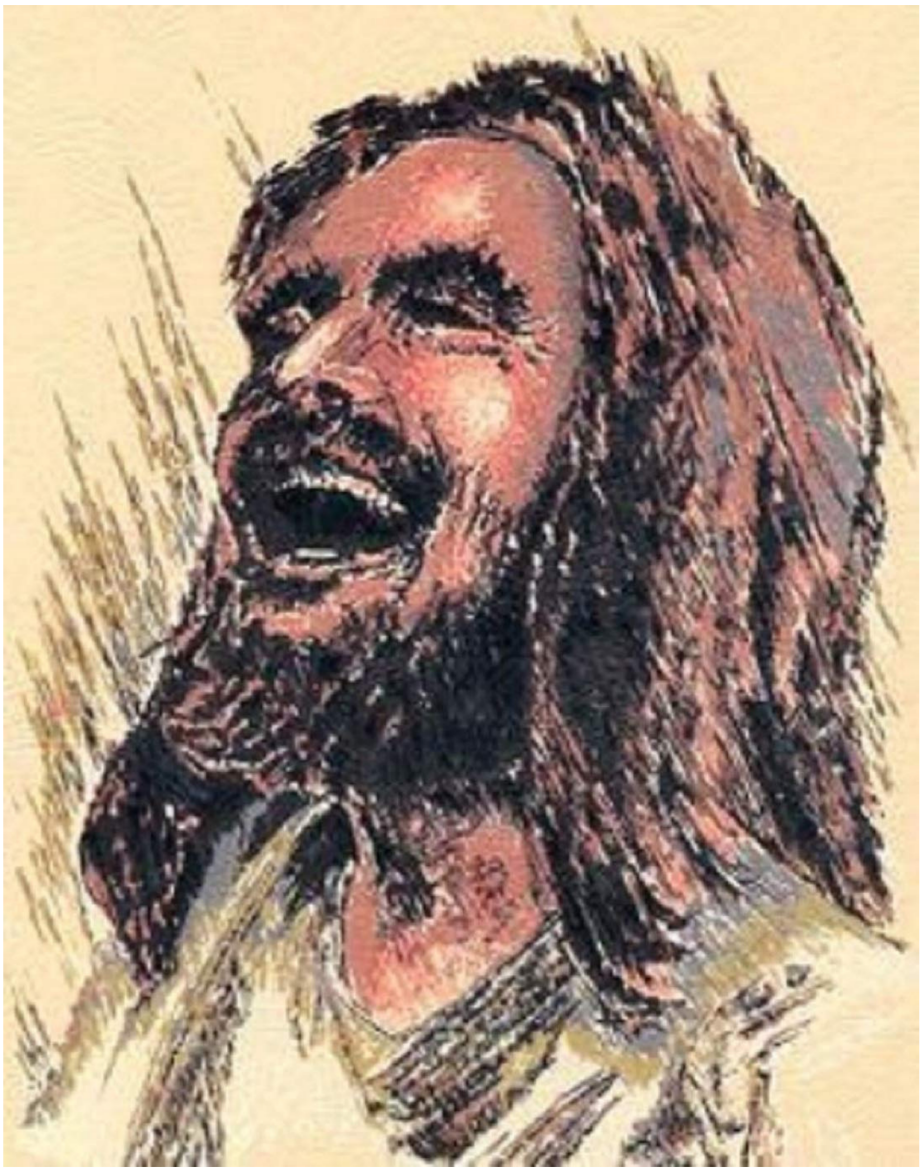
3.1

3.2

3.3

A TASTE OF THE KINGDOM

CHAPTER 4



4.1

A TASTE OF THE KINGDOM

CHAPTER 5

5.1

A TASTE OF THE KINGDOM

CHAPTER 6

6.1

A TASTE OF THE KINGDOM

CHAPTER 7

Salt Lake City
Cheyenne
UTAH
Denver
COLORADO
Colorado
Santa Fe
ARIZONA
Albuquerque
Phoenix
NEW
MEXICO
Tucson
El Paso

7.1

7.2

A TASTE OF THE KINGDOM

HAPPY HOUR (CONCLUSION)

H.1

H.2

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anderson, Calvin, Former Graduate Hotels NW Regional Director of Sports Sales.Interview by Author. Tuscon, AZ, December 16, 2019.

Anderson, Jay J. *Kingdom Primer: Learning to Think and Live According to Jesus.* Seattle, WA: KDP Press, 2020.

Anderson, Jay J. "Emerging Ministry in a Pre-Postmodern Age." Master's thesis, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary of Evangel University, 2008.

Bell, Rob. *What is the Bible? How an Ancient Library of Poems, Letters, and Stories Can Transform the Way You Think and Feel About Everything.* San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2017.

Berger, Peter. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion.* New York, NY: Open Road Integrated Media, 2011.

Bevans, Stephan B. *Models of Contextual Theology.* New York, NY: Orbis, 2002.

Bloesch, Donald G. *The Church: Sacraments, Worship, Ministry, Mission.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Communion of Saints: A Dogmatic Inquiry into the Sociology of the Church.* New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1963.

Bright, John. *The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept and Its Meaning for the Church.* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1953.

Carson, D. A. *Christ and Culture Revisited.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012.

Chia, Roland. "Resident Aliens: Some Reflections on Church and Culture." *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 17, no. 3 (July 2000): 92-98.

Clapp, Rodney. *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996.

Cole, Jonathan. "The Catholicity of the Church: Reconciling the Call for Exclusive Doctrine and Inclusive Community." *Evangelical Review of Theology* 39, no. 2 (April 2005): 170-178.

Cortez, Marc. *Resourcing Theological Anthropology: A Constructive Account of Humanity in the Light of Christ.* Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins, 2017.

Cowherd, Colin. *The Herd*. FS1 TV Broadcast, July 16, 2020.

Cray, Graham. *Mission Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context.* London, England: Church House Publishing,2004.

Crouch, Andy. *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling.* Downers Grove, IL:InterVarsity Press, 2008.

Demossier, Marion. "Beyond Terroir: Territorial Construction, Hegemonic Discourse, and French Wine Culture." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17 (2011): 685-705.

Didline, Todd. "The Death of the Church, Parts 1-4." *Jesus Creed* (blog), *Patheos*, April 11, 18,25, May 9, 2018.
http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2018/04/11/the-death-of-the-church-1/.
www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2018/04/18/the-death-of-the-church-2-the-acf/.
www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2018/04/25/death-of-the-church-3/.
www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2018/05/09/death-of-the-church-4-todd-dildine/.

Downing, Crystal L. *Changing Signs of Truth: A Christian Introduction to the Semiotics of Communication.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012.

Duffy, Eamon. *Royal Books and Holy Bones: Essays in Medieval Christianity.* NewYork, NY: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2018.

Dulles, Avery. *Models of the Church.* New York, NY: Doubleday, 1991.

Field of Dreams. Directed by Phil Alden Robinson. Universal Pictures, 1989.

Flattery, Sean. Interview by Author. Newburg, OR, October 7, 2020.

Fosner, Verlon. Interview by Author. Seattle, WA, October 26, 2019.

Fosner, Verlon. "Dinner Church: An Urban Proposal." DMin diss., Evangel University (Assemblies of God Theological Seminary), Springfield, 2014. WorldCat.

Fosner, Verlon. *Welcome to Dinner, Church.* Franklin, TN: Seedbed Publishing, 2017.

Frank, Georgia. "Taste and See: The Eucharist and the Eyes of Faith in the Fourth Century." *Church History* 70, no. 4 (2001): 619-643.

Full, Tue. Interview on *CBS Sunday Morning*. Spring, 2020.

Gilbert, Melissa. Interview on *CBS Sunday Morning.* July 12, 2020.

Glasser, Arthur F. *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God's Mission in the Bible.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003.

Grenz, Stanley J. *A Primer on Postmodernism.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996.

Gupta, Nijay. Lecture. Portland Seminary, Newberg, OR, December 2, 2019.

Harper, Brad, and Paul Louis Metzger. *Exploring Ecclesiology: An Evangelical and Ecumenical Introduction.* Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009.

Haskell, David George. *The Songs of Trees: Stories from Nature's Great Connectors.* New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2017.

Hiebert, Paul. *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues.* Grand Rapids, MI:Baker Books, 1994.

Hunter, George G. III. *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach theWest…AGAIN*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010.

Johnson, Tim. Sermon. Fifth Avenue Church, OR, July 19, 2020.

Klink III, Edward W., and Darian R. Lockett. *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012.

Knight, Phil. *Shoe Dog: A Memoir by the Creator of Nike.* New York, NY: Scribner,2016.

Kreglinger, Gisela H. *The Spirituality of Wine.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016.

Kreider, Alan. *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016.

Lewis, Robert, Wayne Cordeiro, and Warren Bird. *Culture Shift: Transforming Your Church from the Inside Out.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005.

Maltman, Alex. "The Role of the Vineyard Geology in Wine Typicity." *Journal of Wine Research* 19*,* no. 1 (2008): 1-17.

Mawhorter, Michael E. "Leveraging Church Culture: How Understanding a Church's Culture Enhances Ministry and Community Engagement." DMin diss., Trinity Western University, Langley, BC, 2015. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

McDowell, Josh. *The Topsy Turvy Kingdom.* Cambridge, MA: Tyndale Kids, 1996.

McLaren, Brian D. *A Generous Orthodoxy.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009.

McLaren, Brian D. *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions That Are Transforming the Faith.* New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2010.

McManus, Erwin Raphael. *The Artisan Soul: Crafting Your Life into a Work of Art.* New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2014.

McKnight, Scot. *Kingdom Conspiracy: Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church.* Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2014.

McKnight, Scot. *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011.

Miller, Donald. *Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts in Christian Spirituality.*Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003.

Minear, Paul. *Images of the Church in the New Testament.* Philadelphia, PA:Westminster, 1960.

Newbigin, Leslie. *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986.

Newell, Edmund. *The Sacramental Sea: A Spiritual Voyage Through Christian History.* London, England: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2019.

Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Christ & Culture.* San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1975.

Oakes, S. J., and T. Edward. *A Theology of Grace in Six Controversies.* Grand Rapids,MI: Eerdmans, 2016.

Oberlin, Kathleen C., and Thomas F. Gieryn. "Place and Culture Making: Geographic Clumping in the Emergence of Artistic Schools." *Poetics* 50 (June 2015): 20-43.

Page, Christopher. *The Christian West and its Singers: The First Thousand Years.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010.

Palau, Kevin. *Unlikely: Setting Aside Our Differences to Live Out the Gospel.* New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2015.

Peterson, Eugene H. *The Pastor: A Memoir.* Colorado Springs, CO: HarperCollins, 2011.

Pintarich, Paul. *The Boys Up North: Dick Erath and the Early Oregon Winemakers.* Portland, OR: Graphic Arts Center Publishing Group, 1997.

Polanyi, Michael. *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy.* Chicago,IL: University of Chicago Press, 1962.

Rohr, Richard. *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe.* New York, NY: Convergent, 2019.

Schattauer, Thomas H. "God's Mission and the Christian Assembly: The Search for an Alternative Practice of Worship." *Dialog* 50, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 143-153.

Schmidt, Ray, and Phil Zahn. Interview by Author. Skype, February 27, 2019.

Schultz, Howard, and Joanne Gordon. *Onward: How Starbucks Fought for Its Life without Losing Its Soul.* New York, NY: Rodale Books, 2011.

Schultz, Howard, and Dori Jones Yang. *Pour Your Heart into It: How Starbucks Built a Company One Cup at a Time.* New York, NY: Hyperion, 1997.

Schreiter, Robert J. *Constructing Local Theologies.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985.

Shenk, Wilbert R. "New Wineskins for New Wine: Toward a Post-Christendom Ecclesiology." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 29, no. 2 (April 2005): 73-79.

Shown, Chris. Phone Interview with Author. Brigadoon Winery, Junction City, OR, April13, 2020.

Skinner, Joel. Interview by Author. Eugene, OR, March 14, 2019.

Smith, C. Christopher, and John Pattison. *Slow Church: Cultivating Community in the Patient Way of Jesus.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014.

Smith, James Bryan. *The Magnificent Story: Uncovering a Gospel of Beauty, Goodness, and Truth.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017.

Starkloff, Carl F. "The Church as Covenant, Culture, and Communion." *Theological Studies* 61, no. 3 (September 2000): 409-431.

Sweet, Leonard, and Michael Adam Beck. *Contextual Intelligence: Unlocking the Ancient Secret to Mission on the Front Lines.* Oviedo, FL: HigherLife Development Services, Inc., 2020.

Sweet, Leonard. *From Tablet to Table: Where Community is Found and Identity is Formed.* Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014.

Sweet, Leonard. Lectures. Portland Seminary, Portland, OR and Cambridge, UK, September 5-6, 2018; September 30, 2018; June 2019; September 2019; December 9, 2019; December 12, 2019; April 2020.

Sweet, Leonard. *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who's Already There.* Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010.

Sweet, Leonard. *Rings of Fire: Walking in Faith through a Volcanic Future.* Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2019.

Sweet, Leonard. "The Blessings of the Pandemic." August 19, 2020 in *PreachtheStory*, Podcast.

Sweet, Leonard. *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003.

Sweet, Leonard, and Frank Viola. *Jesus Manifesto: Restoring the Supremacy and Sovereignty of Jesus Christ.* Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010.

Swoboda, A.J. *Subversive Sabbath: The Surprising Power of Rest in a Nonstop World.* Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2018.

Teachout, R.P. "The Use of 'Wine' in the Old Testament." Phd diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, 1979.

Teil, Genevieve. "No Such Thing as Terroir?: Objectivities and the Regimes of Existence of Objects." *Science, Technology, and Human Values* 37, no 5 (2012): 478-505.

Tickle, Phyllis. *Emergent Christianity: What It Is, Where It Is Going, and Why It Matters.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012.

Tidball, Derek J. "Church." In *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology,* edited by T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy, 407-411. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001.

"Travel with Purpose: Regional Sports Culture," *Collide* (Spring 2019): 139-153.

Trubek, Amy B. *The Taste of Place: A Cultural Journey into Terroir.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009.

Tverberg, Lois. *Walking in the Dust of Rabbi Jesus: How the Jewish Words of Jesus Can Change Your Life.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012.

Varriano, John. "Regional Tastes." In *Tastes and Temptations: Food and Art in Renaissance Italy,* 38-65. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009.

Volf, Miroslav, and Matthew Croasmun. *For the Life of the World: Theology That Makes A Difference.* Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2019.

Watson, Troy. "The 'Terroir' of Church." *Canadian Mennonite*, Sep. 28, 2015.http://www.canadianmennonite.org/sites/default/files/past-issues/1919small_153_2015-09-28_1.pdf.

Wieber, Stephanie. Lecture. Portland Seminary, Portland, OR, September 9, 2019.

Wilken, Robert Louis. "The Church as Culture." *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life* 142 (April 2004): 31-36. http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A114561798/AONE?u=newb64238&sid=AONE&xid=2fd110c0.

Willard, Dallas. *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*. San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1997.

Woolschleger, Jason. "Off the Map? Locating the Emerging Church: A Comparative Case Study of Congregations in the Pacific Northwest." *Review of Religious Research* 54, no. 1 (2010): 69-91.

Wright, N.T. *Simply Jesus: A New Vision of Who He Was, What He Did, and Why He Matters.* New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011.

Wu, Jackson. *One Gospel for all Nations: A Practical Approach to Biblical Contextualization.* Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2015.

Zadaria, Fareed. *Ten Lessons for a Post-Pandemic World.* New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2020.