

The Predicament of Place:
Lesslie Newbigin and a Missionary Theology of Place

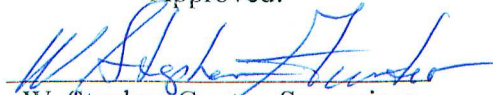
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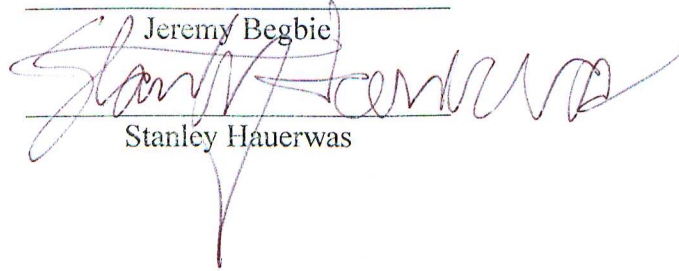
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Stanley Hauerwas

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Theology
in the Duke Divinity School of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

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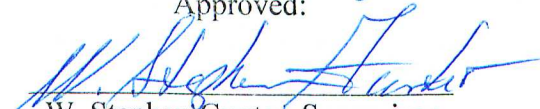
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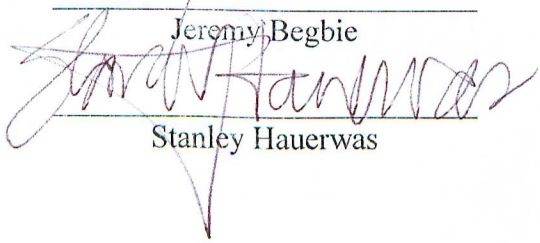
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Abstract

This dissertation examines the role of place in the theology and practice of Christian mission with special reference to the life and thought of missionary bishop Lesslie Newbigin. The study addresses the conspicuous absence of a missionary perspective within the burgeoning literature on religion and place and its corresponding neglect in mission studies. What difference does a commitment to place make for the church's witness in late modernity?

Placing theology in conversation with geography, I argue that a missionary commitment to place strengthens the church's witness by resisting modern distortions of Christian mission and forming a critical element in the church's response to late Western culture. The argument develops in three broad steps: description, construction, and demonstration. The first step describes how traditional bonds between people and place in early Christianity grew weaker over time as impersonal global forces grew stronger. A survey of the ambiguous history of place within Christian mission further confirms the collapse of such commitments, which Newbigin interpreted as an urgent missiological challenge. Next, the second step responds to this collapse by constructing a missionary theology of place that enables the church to recover a commitment to place that is constitutive of her mission rather than in opposition to it. This involves a classical reconstruction of the *missio Dei*, which provides the framework for a trinitarian account of place as sacred creation, sacred journey, and sacred construction. Finally, the third step demonstrates the potential of a missionary commitment to place to strengthen the church's witness in the context of Newbigin's own life and thought. Informed by his

distinguished missionary career in South India, Newbigin established an international research program on the relationship between the gospel and Western culture, which featured a congregational commitment to place.

Dedication

To Diana Porter, faithful mother

Ruth and Samuel, hopeful children

Jodi, loving wife

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This project owes its origins to my childhood in the Ozarks and my adopted home in Overtown, the historic African-American neighborhood of Miami, Florida, where I lived and served as a missionary with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF). These two places define me. Likewise, the encouragement of my mother, Diana, and late father, Jim, to continue my studies, as well as a missionary vocation, shapes me indelibly. Were it not, however, for the longsuffering support of my wife, Jodi, this project would remain unfinished. Thank you. God willing, may we enjoy a long lifetime together for me to repay the debt I owe. That prayer also extends to our children, Ruth and Samuel, who had to endure my absence far too often in the course of this project.

I began my doctoral studies at Boston University under Dana Robert and Bryan Stone, and their influence remains. At Duke, I began this project with Geoffrey Wainwright, Robert Earl Cushman Professor Emeritus of Christian Theology. His approach to Newbigin—with whom he enjoyed a long friendship and about whom he has written the defining theological biography—informs the approach of this study at every turn. As Dr. Wainwright's health declined, my longtime mentor from divinity school, Dr. W. Stephen Gunter, graciously offered to guide this project to completion. To Drs. Gunter, Stanley Hauerwas, and Jeremy Begbie, I also owe a great debt. Their criticism improved this study demonstrably, and their insights are surpassed only by their patience. Whatever errors remain belong solely to me.

Special thanks are due the United Methodist Foundation for Evangelism whose generous support of my Duke Evangelism Fellowship funded my doctoral studies at

Duke as well as the archival research that underwrites this project, especially chapter 6. To that end, librarians at the Cadbury Research Library's Special Collections at the University of Birmingham provided access to the Papers of (James Edward) Lesslie Newbigin and gracious assistance. My visit to Birmingham and the Newbigin archives would not have been as fruitful were it not for the guidance of Frances Young and the hospitality of Adam Hood at the Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education. Ministers Geoff Kimber and Adella Pritchard and longtime lay members of Winson Green United Reformed Church welcomed me in worship and conversation about Lesslie Newbigin's tenure in their congregation. The Rahi family, whom Newbigin recruited to serve alongside him in Winson Green, graciously received me in their home for a wonderful meal and night of stories about "Uncle Lesslie." While I did not include formal qualitative research in this study, those conversations nevertheless informed my interpretation of Newbigin's life and thought in significant ways.

While I worked on this project, I also had other full-time jobs. I am grateful to David Garland and Dennis Tucker, my deans at the George W. Truett Theological Seminary of Baylor University, who supported my research, and to the students of my seminar on "Lesslie Newbigin's Life and Thought," where I tested some of these ideas. Michael Quinlan, my former graduate assistant at Truett Seminary and now colleague serving in Indonesia, deserves special thanks for tedious bibliographic assistance. At CBF, my supervisor, Suzii Paynter, offered consistent encouragement and support to finish this project. And across the street, the First Baptist Church of Decatur offered me

an office where I could escape to write. Finally, I thank the triune God who makes all things possible and whose church this study hopes to edify. *Soli Deo Gloria.*

Decatur, Georgia

D. STEVEN PORTER

Ch. 1 Introduction: the Missionary Promise of Place

The Promise of Place

Place matters. After years of neglect, philosopher Edward S. Casey remarks that “a spatial turn has been taken, with dramatic and far reaching consequences. At the heart of this turn has been the recognition of the formative presence of place in people’s lives and thoughts.”¹ An interest in the concept of place animates a wide range of academic disciplines.² In the field of human geography, where place serves as a basic category, scholars often define ‘place’ by distinguishing it from ‘space.’³ Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan posits, “What begins as differentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value.... The ideas ‘space’ and ‘place’ require each other for definition.”⁴ Building on that experiential aspect of place, fellow geographer Edward Relph adopts a phenomenological approach to place. He argues:

Distinctive and diverse places are manifestations of a deeply felt involvement with those places by the people who live in them, and that for many such a profound attachment to place is as necessary and significant as a close relationship with other people.⁵

¹ Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 2nd ed. (Indiana University Press, 2009), xxi.

² Geographer Tim Cresswell’s invaluable introduction to the literature on place introduces several interdisciplinary discussions. Although his second edition expands that list, he nevertheless excludes religion from his discussion—even when he engages authors whose work takes religion seriously. See Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 81-123, 132-136; Tim Cresswell, *Place: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 115–93, 204–9.

³ For an excellent review essay, see John A. Agnew, “Space and Place,” in *The SAGE Handbook of Geographical Knowledge*, ed. David N. Livingstone and John A. Agnew (Los Angeles; London: SAGE, 2011), 316–30.

⁴ Yi-fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 6; Tuan’s account stands as the classic exploration of this dyad.

⁵ Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976), i.

Given the intrinsic relationship between people and places, Casey and Relph anticipate a renewal of interest in place as Western societies become increasingly transient spaces.

The rising concern for place tracks patterns of modern existence, which strain the natural bonds between people and place that anchor human identity and culture. As historian Diana Butler Bass explains, place “imparts identity and meaning,” because it “involve[s] history, memory, practices, story, and ritual.”⁶ Thus place serves as a repository of traditions and relationships that constitute communities. Recognizing the ties between community, culture and the created world, Casey surmises:

If we were able to return to... “the old ways”—i.e., ways of living in the natural world before the advent of European civilization—we would find that nature and culture interpenetrate as thoroughly as Merleau-Ponty had claimed. In pre-civilized life, knowing nature from up close *is* culture; such intimate acquaintance is the culture that counts.⁷

But such an arrangement between place and culture no longer exists in many places. “The modern world,” writes Butler Bass, “consists mostly of immigrants, massive numbers of people dislocated by war, famine, conflict, religious migration, climate change, economic hardship, or cultural curiosity. People are out of place.”⁸ Such displacement not only strains bonds between place and culture, it often severs them.

Recent interest in place also responds to the deficit created by its modern decline. “The neglect of place,” concludes theologian Craig G. Bartholomew, “has thus had

⁶ Diana Butler Bass, *Grounded: Finding God in the World-A Spiritual Revolution* (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 167.

⁷ Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 2nd ed., xxxiv; emphasis original.

⁸ Bass, *Grounded*, 167.

devastating consequences.”⁹ Bartholomew cites Walter Brueggemann’s assessment of Harvey Cox’s *The Secular City* (1966), which lauded “anonymity and mobility” as the great promise of the modern city. Brueggemann, a biblical scholar, writes:

That promise concerned human persons who could lead detached, unrooted lives of endless choice and no commitment. It was glamorized around the virtues of mobility and anonymity that seemed so full of promise for freedom and self-actualization. But it has failed.... It is now clear that *a sense of place* is a human hunger that urban promise has not met.... It is *rootlessness* and not *meaninglessness* that characterizes the current crisis. There are no meanings apart from roots.¹⁰

In Brueggemann’s view, Cox underestimates the significance of a commitment to place, which Brueggemann gleans from a careful study of the land in the Bible.¹¹ Such analysis begs questions of mission: under the conditions of late modernity, how do we recover a commitment to place? And, following Bartholomew, how do we recover a biblically-grounded vision for placemaking?¹²

A growing and diverse body of Christian literature and scholarship responds to those questions by treating place as a theological category. For example, the agrarian poetry and novels of Wendell Berry, Brueggemann’s work on the land in Scripture, David Brown’s aesthetic theology, Mary McClintock Fulkerson’s congregational ethnography, Eric O. Jacobsen’s theological treatments of the new urbanism, and Philip Bess’ architectural reflections on the sacred, all offer theological reflections on place

⁹ Craig G. Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 4.

¹⁰ Quoted in Bartholomew; emphasis original.

¹¹ See Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).

¹² Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell*, 5, 249–318.

from diverse disciplinary perspectives.¹³ Place now occupies significant conceptual ground in Christian theological discourse; even though such writings appear infrequently in the standard theological curriculum.

The range of approaches to place in that select list of authors indicates that there is no single perspective on place. The same is true of geography. While place serves as a foundational concept, it remains a contested one. Geographer Tim Cresswell remarks:

Despite this general enthusiasm for the study of places there is very little considered understanding of what the word ‘place’ means. This is as true in theory and philosophy as it is among the new students signing up for university geography courses.¹⁴

This conceptual ambiguity helps to explain the diversity of theological appropriations of place. Still, if one were to compile an exhaustive list of Christian perspectives on place in contemporary scholarship, a missionary account of place would be absent.

Notwithstanding the rise in scholarly attention, recent theologies of place routinely omit critical reflection on mission, and theologies of mission likewise omit critical reflection on place. Since cross-cultural missionaries represent the subset of Christians arguably most attentive to place, these omissions invite constructive theological reflection on the difference a commitment to place makes for Christian

¹³ See Wendell Berry, *What Are People For?: Essays* (Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 2010); Wendell Berry, “How to Be A Poet,” *Poetry*, 2001; Brueggemann, *The Land*; David Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Eric O. Jacobsen, *Sidewalks in the Kingdom: New Urbanism and the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2003); Eric O. Jacobsen, *The Space between: A Christian Engagement with the Built Environment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012); Philip Bess, *Till We Have Built Jerusalem: Architecture, Urbanism, and the Sacred*, Religion and Contemporary Culture Series (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2006).

¹⁴ Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction*, 1; Cresswell surveys several working definitions, some of which will receive attention in chapter 4.

witness.¹⁵ The present study bridges those lacunae first by examining the significance of place in the historical development of the church's missionary thought and practice with special reference to the life of missionary bishop Lesslie Newbigin and second by constructing a missiological account of place. I argue that a missionary commitment to place strengthens the church's witness by correcting modern distortions of Christian mission and forming a critical element in the church's response to late Western culture. Thereby, the study aims to strengthen ecclesial practice and contribute to scholarly conversations at the intersection of place and mission.

Before offering a précis, the balance of this chapter will (1) define place, (2) consider the significance of the study, (3) describe its methodology, and, finally, (4) preview the larger argument ahead.

Defining Place

Tuan and Relph's introductory words on space and place invite further definition and illustration. Within human geography, Cresswell reckons "the most straightforward and common definition of place [is] a meaningful location."¹⁶ He cites John Agnew's influential three-part definition of place, which distinguishes between place as a location, a locale, and a sense of place, to encompass the term's dominant usages.¹⁷ As a *location*,

¹⁵ Chapter 6 develops the claim about missionary attentiveness to place within an empirical context of the life of missionary bishop Lesslie Newbigin. Following the work of historian Dana L. Robert, this study defines "missionary" as any person who advances the Christian message across a cultural boundary [Dana L. Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion*, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), x]. Newbigin observes that the threshold between belief and unbelief represents such a boundary in Western culture [Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 1–20].

¹⁶ Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction*, 7.

¹⁷ Agnew, "Space and Place," 326.

place signifies “a site where an activity or object is located,” writes Agnew, “and which relates to other sites or locations because of interaction, movement and diffusion between them.”¹⁸ This aspect of place is understood most readily as coordinates on a map.

Next, Agnew describes a *locale* as a “setting where everyday-life activities take place.”¹⁹ Here Agnew intends something beyond a mere address. “The first sense,” he explains, “is of having an address and the second is about living at that address.”²⁰

Consider the example of a church. A congregation generally has a physical address or location, but a church also is a dynamic seat of human interactions that not only hosts those interactions in space but shapes them. Thus, a church has a location, but it also functions as a locale.

Third, Agnew explains that a *sense of place* communicates that “every place is particular and, thus, singular” and possible of eliciting a strong sense of connection or “belonging” to that place.²¹ For example, a country chapel in Appalachia and Westminster Abbey in London are houses of Christian worship that possess beauty and foster strong personal attachments, but they exude very different senses of place tied closely to their particular histories and the memories they engender. In the case of Westminster Abbey, those associations extend beyond the local community to impart meaning to the nation and culture on a respectively larger scale than the Appalachian chapel. Such attachments drive the burgeoning concern for place in Western culture much more than a given location or locale in itself. Taken together, Agnew’s three

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 318.

²¹ Agnew, 327.

components —location, locale, and a sense of place—offer a sufficiently broad definition of place to navigate contemporary discussions.

To illustrate the power of these attachments to place, cultural critic Will Blythe distinguishes the ethical sensibilities underlying two different approaches to place in American culture. He acknowledges that his roots in a small Southern city inform his reflections:

There are two kinds of Americans, it seems to me, with my father representing the first. Those for whom the word “home” summons up an actual place that is wood-smoke fragrant with memory and desire, a place that one has no choice, but to proudly claim, even if it’s a falling-down dogtrot shack, the place to which the compass always points, the place one visits in nightly dreams, the place to which one aims always to return, no matter how far off course the ship might drift.

And then there are those citizens for whom home is a more provisional notion—the house or apartment in which one sleeps at night, as if American life were an exhausting tour of duty, and home, no matter how splendid, equaled a mere rest stop on the Interstate of Personal Advancement. I am biased against this kind of nomadism, no matter how well upholstered the vehicles. The loss of adhesion to a particular place seems ruinous, and those without the first kind of home wander through our nation like the flesh eaters from *Night of the Living Dead*.²²

Blythe uses hyperbole to convey a serious contrast in commitments to place and the competing visions of human flourishing they entail.

With Agnew in mind, Blythe’s account invites further reflection. First, Blythe personifies two contrasting views of place as two different types of Americans. Next,

²² Will Blythe, *To Hate like This Is to Be Happy Forever: A Thoroughly Obsessive, Intermittently Uplifting and Occasionally Unbiased Account of the Duke-North Carolina Basketball Rivalry* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2006), 4–5; Blythe, former literary editor for *Esquire*, serves as a cultural critic for *Harper’s*. His sports polemic begins with an extended discussion of the ways in which geography shaped his childhood and perspective, hence its relevance to the present discussion.

while both accounts of place situate their subject in a *location*, the friction between the two accounts follows Blythe's assignment of *a sense of place* to his revered father and a mere *locale* to a hypothetical social climber. Third, Blythe ascribes ethical value to each citizen on the basis of their relative attachment to place. His nostalgia-laden depictions of the two Americans comport well with Agnew's three-fold description of place. Finally, Blythe concludes that competing notions of place circumscribe attitudes, aspirations, and even "opposing concepts of American virtue."²³ Thus, different orientations to place produce different sorts of citizens.

What Blythe disparages as nomadism does erode a commitment to place through cultural homogenization, but it also provokes an unanticipated counter reaction.²⁴ Casey explains:

Valorization of local difference arises in the very face of global capitalism and global communication networks: partly as resistance to them but still more so from a renewed appreciation of the felt familiarity of the place one inhabits with one's lived body.²⁵

In Casey's view, Blythe's argument follows an established pattern: the more prevalent cosmopolitan views become, the more detractors they inspire to plant roots in local

²³ Blythe, 5.

²⁴ Blythe's discussion of nomadism also invites an interesting comparison to Islamic tradition. In *The Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldūn discusses how nomadism shaped the character of early Islam. See Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, Abridged edition with a new introduction by Bruce B. Lawrence (Princeton University Press, 2004), 42–48, 65–69.

²⁵ Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 2nd ed. (Indiana University Press, 2009), xxiii.

communities. While other approaches to place challenge Blythe's account or, at least, complicate it, his conclusions still largely obtain.²⁶

The Significance of the Study

This study proposes original contributions to three distinct but intersecting areas of scholarship: (1) the theological interpretation of place, (2) mission theory, and (3) the interpretation of Lesslie Newbigin's life and thought. Despite the interest place elicits in geographical, philosophical and theological quarters, a missionary perspective on place heretofore has suffered neglect. Biblical scholar Richard Bauckham confirms the paucity of such research:

Biblical scholars and theologians have usually found biblical history more significant than biblical geography. Yet there is a great deal of geography in the Bible, much of it literal, but much of it also used with symbolic significance.... Moreover, geography is a massively important feature of people's experience of life. It is a key ingredient in the particularity of human experience. The places where we live affect who we are, and to a large extent it has been geography that has made possible the rich diversity of human cultures and societies that globalization now threatens. The church's own history has been significantly shaped by geography. Of special interest for us now is the fact that the gospel has so often impelled Christians to cross geographical boundaries and to journey to unknown places in obedience to the direction from the particular to the universal that the Bible points.²⁷

Bauckham discovers in mission a useful hermeneutic for interpreting the dynamic interplay between the universal and the particular in Scripture. The lens of mission draws

²⁶ In particular, Doreen Massey's call for "a global sense of place," which Cresswell summarizes as a "product of interconnecting flows—of routes rather than roots," offers an alternative understanding of place and human relationship to it (Cresswell, *Place*, 2004, 53).

²⁷ Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Cumbria, UK: Paternoster, 2003), 55.

attention to the significance of geography for understanding the relationships between Scripture, human identity, and the church.

Bauckham's interest notwithstanding, noticeably absent in most theological discussions of place are the voices of those most attentive to place in church tradition: cross-cultural missionaries. For this subset of Christian disciples, every aspect of living involves a negotiation of differences tied closely to place. From the physical landscape and social structures to matters of language and diet, missionaries consciously remove themselves from their home culture to embody the Christian story in new places, which entail new ways of being. This daily act of *displacement* functions as a spiritual discipline that yields insights into the subject of place that remain unexamined in current scholarly discourse.

For example, John Inge's otherwise excellent *A Christian Theology of Place* illustrates the omission of a missionary perspective on place.²⁸ His monograph offers overviews of place in Western thought and Scripture before exploring the themes of sacrament, pilgrimage, and holy places in Christian tradition. But Inge overlooks missionaries or a missionary perspective altogether. When he insists in his conclusion that Christian witness is "a theme at the heart of this book," he is not referring to the transmission of the gospel across cultural, geopolitical, or natural borders in ways that invite special attentiveness to place(s).²⁹ And Inge is not alone. With few exceptions, recent theologies of place omit critical reflection on Christian mission.³⁰

²⁸ John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place, Explorations in Practical, Pastoral, and Empirical Theology* (Hampshire, UK; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 136; here Inge calls for a combination of neighborliness and justice as "the very best form of evangelization" (136). Inge calls specifically for the creation of small-scale "therapeutic communities"

In the mid-1980s, Lesslie Newbigin drew attention to a similar omission in discussions of the relationship between gospel and culture. Following nearly four decades of missionary service in South India, Newbigin returned to his native England to write and lecture on postcolonial models of Christian mission in an increasingly pluralist Western culture. At the outset of his Warfield Lectures at Princeton Seminary in 1984, Newbigin observed:

The angle from which I am approaching the study is that of a foreign missionary.... There is, of course, nothing new in proposing to discuss the relationship between gospel and culture.... But this work has mainly been

(e.g., L'Arche) whose worship of God enables them to "resist the inhumanities of our day and witness to the gospel," which involves "addressing particular injustices at a given time and place" (136). Certainly neighborliness and justice are crucial elements of the Church's witness, but apart from situating those acts within an intentional sharing of the Christian story, they do not constitute "the very best form" of evangelism, if evangelism at all. They are good actions that require interpretation. Here, Inge seems to work within the assumptions of Christendom. Namely, he claims that faithful actions point unambiguously to Christ without need for interpretation. Such an assumption rises from the long spent inheritance of religious establishment in Inge's Britain. In a religiously plural society, however, virtuous concerns for neighborliness and justice do not belong exclusively to Christians. Indeed, the shadow side of Inge's suggestion inherently demeans other traditions by implying that Christians have a corner on virtue. Lesslie Newbigin frequently pointed out that faithful deeds require interpretation and faithful words require demonstration. Thus, Inge's otherwise excellent monograph ignores cross-cultural mission entirely.³⁰ Notable exceptions to this claim include Richard Bauckham's *Bible and Mission* (Cumbria, UK: Paternoster, 2003), which grew out of several invited lecture series and includes a provocative chapter on "Geography - Sacred and Symbolic." Next, Craig G. Bartholomew's *Where Mortals Dwell* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011) offers a case for Christian placemaking extensively grounded in Scripture and the Western tradition before thinking constructively about a range of topics, including urbanism, gardening, homemaking, the Christian university and others. Third, Eric O. Jacobsen and Andrew Davey in their respective works on Christian engagement with the built environment and the urban future develop missionary perspectives on place, even when they do not describe it as such [see Jacobsen, *The Space Between* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), and *Sidewalks in the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003); Andrew Davey, *Urban Christianity and Global Order: Theological Resources for an Urban Future* (London: SPCK, 2001)]. Also worth mention is Willie Jennings' recent work on Christian imagination. While not exactly a theology of place or a theology of mission, Jennings employs both while developing a political theology focused explicitly on constructions of racial identity [Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010)]. Jennings' serious engagement with a missionary perspective on place is very encouraging; however, in my view, he misinterprets the perspective of leading mission historians Lamin Sanneh and Andrew Walls at key points (especially, pages 159-163). Finally, recent works on placemaking and the arts from Jennifer A. Craft and Len Hjalmarson flirt with the language of mission but never fully engage a missionary perspective or voices [see Jennifer A. Craft, "Making a Place on Earth: Participation in Creation and Redemption through Placemaking and the Arts" (Thesis, University of St Andrews, 2013), <https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/handle/10023/3732>; and Leonard Hjalmarson, *No Home Like Place: A Christian Theology of Place* (Urban Loft Publishers, 2014)].

done, as far as I know, by theologians who had not had the experience of the cultural frontier, of seeking to transmit the gospel from one culture to a radically different one.³¹

Later published as *Foolishness to the Greeks* (1986), Newbigin's lectures sketch the contours of "a genuinely missionary encounter" between the gospel and Western culture, which responds to the absence of the "cultural frontier" perspective he mentions. From that time forward, Newbigin challenged other Christians to cultivate a missionary perspective toward culture.³² Following that line of argument, this study asks: How might contemporary theologies of place benefit from a comparable investigation along missionary lines?

The second contribution this study proposes is to mission theory. Since contemporary theologies of mission customarily omit place, chapter 3 documents place as a missionary problem and offers qualified explanations for its ambiguous role in church history. In turn, that awareness prompts fresh theological construction to fill this gap. The result is a missiological account of place in trinitarian perspective.

The final contribution of this study resides in a focused examination of the difference a commitment to place makes in the life and thought of missionary bishop Lesslie Newbigin, which functions as a test case for the arguments advanced in the initial chapters. The ecumenical leader promotes a congregational commitment to place along

³¹ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 1.

³² *Ibid.*, 1; moreover, Newbigin writes a decade later, "In my experience, most of those who have been awakened to the need for a fresh encounter of the Gospel with western culture are men and women with long experience of missionary service in another culture" [Lesslie Newbigin, "The Gospel and Modern Western Culture" (Unpublished manuscript, 1993), DA 29/12/2, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham]. Newbigin's invitation bore fruit in the church and academy. The theologically-minded, Gospel in Our Culture Network, which holds sessions at annual American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature meetings, and the larger, more diffuse missional church movement are the offspring of his proposal.

christological lines within his trinitarian theology of mission. Informed by long-term cross-cultural service spanning the Global South, the post-Christian West, and post-colonial period of mission, Newbigin offers a rare lens through which observers may view through a single life the evolution of Christian mission theory and strategy from the 19th to 21st centuries. While his most mature reflections on place appear during his retirement appointment as an urban parish pastor in Birmingham, England, the theme of place recurs throughout Newbigin's career.

Newbigin remains a figure of uncommon influence. His writings serve as standard texts at institutions across the theological spectrum and receive frequent treatment at meetings of scholarly societies. Ridley Hall, Cambridge (UK), and Western Theological Seminary (USA) have named centers in honor of Newbigin to continue his research program on the relationship between gospel and culture. In ecclesial contexts, Newbigin's work often serves as training materials for mission organizations and forms the core of conversations on the missional church and denominational initiatives. Although many treatments of Newbigin focus on themes that dominate his later writings—missional ecclesiology, religious pluralism, and epistemology—fewer interpreters, especially those whose constructive interests outweigh historical ones, explore those themes within the larger historical context of his almost forty-year career in South India.

For those willing to examine the longer arc of Newbigin's life, however, a constellation of important secondary themes begins to emerge. Such is Newbigin's missionary and congregational commitment to place, which not only complements but

also serves as a necessary precondition to the enactment of his later and more publicized themes of the congregation as “hermeneutic of the gospel” or “sign, instrument, and foretaste of the kingdom of God.” A congregational commitment to place derives from Newbigin’s missionary experience of living in and learning from many different places over a long “theological life,” as theologian Geoffrey Wainwright describes it.³³

The Methodology of the Study

Two distinct but complementary methods characterize the approach of this study: systematic practical theology and biography as theology. Given the emphasis on mission in the preceding discussion, it would seem that missiology should appear in the list of methods. Its absence, however, reflects the term’s ambiguous status. In his 2013 presidential address to the American Society of Missiology, theologian Craig Van Gelder invited conversation on the future of missiology as a discipline. In turn, the journal *Missiology* devoted a theme issue to the ensuing discussion, including Van Gelder’s original address and responses to it.³⁴ Ross Langmead, one of the contributors, reasons:

Can missiology claim to be an academic discipline, with its own ideas and ways of testing them? Is it mission science, as Schmidlin argued? Philosopher Paul Hirst argued that forms of knowledge, or academic disciplines, are distinguished by distinctive concepts, a network of relationships between them, testable propositions, and techniques for testing these propositions against experience (1974). Leaving aside the problems with these criteria, it is clear that missiology is not a discipline because it is so intertwined with other disciplines (differing here from

³³ Geoffrey Wainwright, *Lesslie Newbigin: A Theological Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 26–28; Wainwright’s attention to the totality of Newbigin’s life, especially his early ecumenical mission work in South India, influences the methodology of this study decisively.

³⁴ Craig Van Gelder, “The Future of the Discipline of Missiology: Framing Current Realities and Future Possibilities,” *Missiology* 42, no. 1 (January 2014): 39–56; another leading journal of missiology published his comments in abbreviated form. See Craig Van Gelder, “The Future of the Discipline of Missiology: A Brief Overview of Current Realities and Future Possibilities,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 38, no. 1 (January 2014): 10.

Rodewald, 2005: 66; and agreeing with Schulz, 2009: 89). Using Hirst's language, missiology is closer to a field of knowledge, unified by its common interest and a community of scholars, drawing readily on a range of disciplines. In the case of missiology it is driven not only by the desire to understand but also by the desire to change the world (praxis). It is thoroughly and willfully interdisciplinary.³⁵

Langmead concludes that missiology functions more closely to a regulative principle that orients theology and other disciplines toward missionary praxis.³⁶

For these reasons, the primary method of this study is best described as systematic practical theology.³⁷ Each term in that description distinguishes the project from other modes of reflection. It is *systematic* in at least three senses. First, it scrutinizes the relationships between various cultural ideologies and Christian doctrines to understand how they function as a web of interlocking beliefs that shape a coherent missiological account of place. Second, it also scrutinizes church practices to tease out theological and philosophical commitments embedded within them. Third, the treatment of Newbigin's life and thought is systematic in nature. Although the presentation of evidence is selective in keeping with a narrow focus on place, the final chapter nevertheless moves chronologically through each period of his life, identifies connections between various place-related themes and compiles them into a coherent, even if inchoate, theology of place.

³⁵ Ross O. Langmead, "What Is Missiology?," *Missiology* 42, no. 1 (January 2014): 76.

³⁶ Langmead, 77.

³⁷ I borrow the phrase systematic practical theology from James W. Fowler's eponymous seminar at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University, in Atlanta, Georgia, spring 1998. While this study could be subsumed under the broad field of mission studies or as a largely historical study that includes constructive theological gestures, systematic practical theology is more accurate. Stanley Hauerwas recently argued that theological reflection also may be "understood as an exercise in practical reason" [Stanley Hauerwas, *The Work of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 4]. Given Lesslie Newbigin's own reflections on phronesis in the works of Aristotle and Alasdair MacIntyre, Hauerwas' discussion of the "performative character" of practical reason conforms to my understanding of this undertaking.

Next, the exercise is *practical* in its sustained focus on ecclesial practices of witness. A central concern lies with the theological construction of witness—its logic, means, and ends—and the way such constructions amplify or distort the gospel. The second sense in which this study is practical is that it reflects current trajectories in contemporary practical theology to engage other disciplines beyond theology in critical conversation. In particular, the field of human geography serves as an essential partner, since that discipline employs ‘place’ as a basic concept.

The study devotes significant space to geographic ideas, but it does not devote the same attention to theoretical arguments from contemporary practical theology, even though that body of literature informs the approach throughout. For example, James N. Poling and Donald E. Miller’s definition of practical theology as “reflection arising out of the living experiences of communities of faith and resulting in faith-informed interpretations that serve to guide the ongoing life and actions of those communities” applies to this study, especially in its treatment of Newbigin.³⁸ Likewise, Stephen Bevans’ typology of contextual theologies, which presents Newbigin as the exemplar of his countercultural model, also proves influential.³⁹ Such sources and mission studies more broadly insist that context is always at play in the interpretative process whether the text under consideration is a writing, a human life or a community. Therefore, this study adopts the premise that all theology is contextual and then examines the places theology

³⁸ James N. Poling and Donald E. Miller, *Foundations for a Practical Theology of Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 11.

³⁹ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Revised ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 117–37.

is situated. The claim that context shapes theology, however, is not to suggest that geography overpowers theology such that all theology is relative to place.

Finally, the study is a work of *theology* in both its descriptive and constructive modes. As the concluding chapter of the study details, Newbigin commends a missionary theology of place to advance Christian witness in late modern Western culture. The Christian theological tradition consists historically in a mutually enriching and correcting discourse across time between people whose lives have been reconciled to the God of Israel and to one another through the cross of Christ. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the common life of this witnessing community embodies for the world the reign of God made possible in the world through Jesus Christ. This project seeks to contribute to that larger conversation and in so doing deepen the church's commitment to the particular places the triune God sends her (John 20:21-23).

In a discussion of Christian practices, theologian Kathryn Tanner summarizes the interdependence of theology and practice that characterizes the church's witness in a way that also expresses the overlapping methodological concerns of the present study. She observes:

Called to the difficult work of being a disciple and witness of Christ in a way appropriate to one's own time and circumstance, one comes, by way of theological investigation into Christian practices, to understand more fully what one is doing and why, and to have a sense for how all that one believes and does as a Christian holds together. Working toward these ends, theological reflection deepens engagement in Christian practices—for example, by developing the religious values and ideas that inform them and uncovering the awareness of spiritual realities that participation in them conveys. Through such deepened engagement, one gains the critical distance from customary forms of action and belief necessary for thoughtful reconsideration and reconstruction of them. . . . In short, sustained and explicit theological reflection helps establish Christian

practices as a whole way of life by sharpening commitments; by guiding performance of Christian practices in the face of the ambiguities, disagreements, and shifting circumstances of everyday life; by contributing to the excellence of such practices by making them more meaningful and meaning-giving; and by imbuing them with a historical, contextual, and theological richness that might otherwise be lost from view at any one place and time, and thereby enhancing their resourcefulness to meet the challenges of that place and time.⁴⁰

Tanner's description of the interplay between theological reflection and church practice resonates with Langmead's view of missionary praxis. Moreover, Tanner's focus on the cultivation of a "whole way of life" anticipates the other method of this study.

The second approach of this study is to demonstrate the coherence and power of the theological account developed in the first five chapters through careful attention to its expression in the life of a leading missionary practitioner and theorist. A growing body of scholarship addressing Lesslie Newbigin's life and thought reveals significant divisions. For many interpreters, the contributions of Newbigin's later years function somewhat independently from his earlier life and contexts. A smaller number of scholars take Newbigin's early contexts seriously, though their work tends toward purely historical approaches rather than constructive ones. While both are valuable, this study adopts the latter approach. Nevertheless it seeks to ground constructive gestures in history and geography. To that end, three qualifications require discussion: (1) distinguishing theological biography from hagiography, (2) setting critical expectations, and (3) weighing the interpretive risks of severing a life from its context(s).

First, biography as theology seeks to understand Newbigin's convictions by attending to his life in the various contexts that shaped it. Wainwright identifies this as a

⁴⁰ Kathryn Tanner, "Theological Reflection and Christian Practices," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass and Miroslav Volf (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 234.

key element in his approach to Newbigin, which “aims to instantiate a way of doing theology that takes sanctified life and thought seriously as an intrinsic witness to the content and truth of the Gospel.”⁴¹ Wainwright still affirms the critical control of context and the Christian theological tradition, but theology in biographical mode emphasizes the importance of a faithful life over disembodied reflection. Theologian James W.

McClendon explains:

By recognizing that Christian beliefs are not so many “propositions” to be catalogued or juggled like truth-functions in a computer, but are living convictions which give shape to actual lives and actual communities, we open ourselves to the possibility that the only relevant critical examination of Christian beliefs may be one that begins by attending to lived lives. Theology must be at least biography.⁴²

This approach should not to be confused with the hagiography prevalent within popular literature from the modern missionary movement, which resembles the lives of saints in the Roman Catholic tradition. Rather, biography as theology maintains critical awareness of context while recognizing what McClendon calls “striking lives.”⁴³ That is, the sort of lives that “by their very attractiveness or beauty, may serve as data for a Christian thinker, enabling her more truly to reflect upon that tension between what is and what ought to be believed and lived by all.”⁴⁴ Newbigin presents such a figure within the missionary imagination of the church in late modernity.

Next, while Newbigin was an accomplished generalist, prolific writer, and spiritual leader, he was not a systematician. That recognition informs the criticism that

⁴¹ Wainwright, *Lesslie Newbigin*, vi.

⁴² James Wm McClendon, *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 22.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

follows without suggesting either that Newbigin could not defend his positions adequately or that his life needs to be shielded from scrutiny. To the contrary, when Newbigin chaired the Committee of Twenty-Five, a group of leading theologians working within the WCC, Karl Barth once commented on his effective leadership, which made for more productive conversations in 1952 than previous years under past chairs.

Barth states:

I would also suggest that it was because this time we had a chairman, in the person of the young Bishop Lesslie Newbigin from South India, who was able to bring us together and keep us together not only because of our common concern and the human links which joined us, but above all because of his spiritual discipline and his bearing and conduct from the beginning.⁴⁵

So while not a specialist himself, Newbigin's leadership on theological commissions impressed more accomplished academic theologians. Likewise, one also must recognize the occasional and contextual character of his writings, which were insightful and trenchant, even if not systematic. Otherwise, one risks subjecting Newbigin to standards of assessment foreign to his person and projects.

Moreover, attending to the person does matter, because Newbigin's life is itself one of the primary texts to be read and interpreted. To extract Newbigin's life from its various contexts risks its misinterpretation. Tanner reminds us that "the difficult work of being a disciple and witness of Christ" resides in the attempt "to meet the challenges of that place and time."⁴⁶ Context matters as much for the interpretation of lives as it does texts. In Newbigin's case, the temptation to focus exclusively on his later works is so

⁴⁵ Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 399.

⁴⁶ Tanner, 234.

great as to justify at the outset of chapter 6 an extended discussion and illustration of the risks involved.

A Note on Sources

Consistent with contemporary practical theology, the present study draws on literature beyond the fields of theology and religious studies, especially human geography. While most of the sources are scholarly in character, the topic of place invites interest from a wide variety of sectors that offer critical insight from fresh vantages points. By contrast, chapter 6 relies on more traditional theological sources to compile and assess Lesslie Newbigin's commitment to place. As a work of practical theological reflection, however, Newbigin's popular writings receive attention alongside his more formal ones. Moreover, since Newbigin held an academic appointment only in retirement, his writings often address conditions *in situ* and therefore exhibit a provisional character. Yet the themes he develops over the course of his long career remain, as Wainwright noted, remarkably consistent.⁴⁷

Mapping the Territory Ahead

The introduction began with a question: what difference does a commitment to place make for the church's witness? This study explores that question in three broad steps: description, construction, and demonstration. Building on the opening discussion of place, the second and third chapters describe the state of place in the late modern church and world. Chapter 2 explores the theological significance of place by asking the

⁴⁷ Geoffrey Wainwright to Lesslie Newbigin, January 13, 1998, DA 29/1/14/11, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham.

basic question: why does place matter to theology? The response marshals a wide range of sources from Scripture, theology, literature, sociology, history, and philosophy to demonstrate that place functions as an essential element in the formation of human identity and ecclesial practice. The chapter also documents three forces that erode a commitment to place in late modernity.

Chapter 3 examines place more narrowly as a missionary problem. It asks how the relationship between the church's missionary practice and place has evolved over time. By adopting David Bosch's periodization of Christian mission, the chapter offers a critical survey of mission paradigms across time. The historical review indicates that constructions of witness in late modernity tend to marginalize a commitment to place while paradoxically planting seeds of resistance to such distortions of the Christian message. The chapter concludes with reflections on the persistent yet ambiguous role of place in Christian mission.

In response to the descriptive work of the first section, the second section of the study offers a constructive theological account of place in missionary perspective. Chapters 4 and 5 develop the conceptual resources necessary for the church to recover a commitment to place that is constitutive of her mission rather than in opposition to it. Thus, chapter 4 develops a framework for the church's commitment to place based on the *missio Dei* that features a trinitarian basis, redemptive focus, and ecclesial locus. Within that larger framework, chapter 5 then develops a trinitarian account of place as *sacred creation*, *sacred journey*, and *sacred construction*. Consistent with Langmead's view of the integrative task of missiology, this approach synthesizes sacred and secular sources

by discerning a missionary dimension within them. In combination, these two chapters form a missionary theology of place capable of strengthening the church's witness.

Given the methodological focus on practice, however, the study invites one further step. The argument culminates in section 3 with a case study to demonstrate the potential of a missionary commitment to place to strengthen the church's witness in the context of a singular missionary life. While the preceding chapters reveal the influence of Lesslie Newbigin, chapter 6 concentrates on the development of his own missionary commitment to place and the way in which he performs that commitment at specific times and places.⁴⁸ After a short illustration of the interpretive problem of separating Newbigin's thought from his life, the chapter adopts the biographical approach to theology that McClendon, Wainwright, and Tanner commend. The case begins with a three-part biographical sketch of Newbigin's life as a student, missionary, and retiree exploring how Newbigin negotiates place in each phase of life. Next, the chapter distills Newbigin's responses to that question into the categories of sacred creation, sacred journey, and sacred construction. This critical compilation of Newbigin's commitment to place tests the adequacy of both the theological account of place developed in chapters 4

⁴⁸ In *The Drama of Doctrine*, Kevin J. Vanhoozer develops an account of the performative character of doctrine that reworks George Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic description of doctrine with which Newbigin expressed strong affinity. Vanhoozer writes, "to locate divine authority in the canon is by no means to relegate the church or church tradition to a position of unimportance. On the contrary, the canonical script calls for ecclesial performance, and for handing on good performance practice from one generation to the next" (151-152). This statement confirms Newbigin's view that the greatest test of right belief was its ecclesial embodiment or, in Vanhoozer's terms, performance. Such an account resonates strongly with the orientation toward praxis within both missiology and contemporary practical theology. Later, Vanhoozer adopts the place-related metaphor of cartography: "Learning how to read, and to follow, the canonical maps through life toward the promised land: this is the picture of theology as a type of knowledge (*scientia*) and wisdom (*sapientia*) that the present approach seeks to develop. The map is a compelling metaphor for a postfoundationalist account of knowledge" (295-296). Vanhoozer opens that section on fiduciary frameworks by citing Newbigin (295). See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

and 5 and Newbigin's own performance of place in the context of its modern devaluation. In sum, the study builds a cumulative case for a missionary commitment to place through description, construction, and demonstration. The net result is to bolster the church's witness to the triune God and highlight a vital yet neglected strand of Newbigin's thought.

Ch. 2 The Theological Significance of Place

Places not only surround us, they shape us. They ground human identity in history, relationships and webs of meaning whose absence would render life less recognizable and intelligible. “Every story,” writes Mississippi author Eudora Welty, “would be another story, and unrecognizable as art, if it took up its characters and plot and happened somewhere else.”¹ Insofar as memories and stories provide the raw materials for constructing human identity, place is a defining marker of that identity.² Besides one’s name, which historically may have included a reference to place—Teresa of Avila or Augustine of Hippo, for example—perhaps the most common question of introduction is one’s place of origin. Anthropologist Marc Augé reports that African children born outside of a village sometimes are named for a feature of the land on which they are born.³ In spite of such common evidence of the power of place to shape identity, the church and the world in late modernity often diminish the significance of local commitments to place.

Before developing a missionary perspective on place in the chapters ahead, we need a better understanding of the role place plays within Christian tradition specifically and in modernity more generally. Why should theology be concerned with place? To answer that question, one must employ a variety of lenses—biblical, theological, ecclesial and hermeneutical—to gain perspective on the ways in which place functions

¹ Eudora Welty, *Place in Fiction* (New York: House of Books, 1957), 11.

² See Charles R. Pinches, *A Gathering of Memories: Family, Nation, and Church in a Forgetful World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006).

³ Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London; New York: Verso, 1995), 53.

dynamically across Christian tradition. Likewise, an assessment of place in modernity identifies three significant forces of displacement—globalization, cosmopolitanism, and human migration—that fuel a contemporary counter-revival of place. The secular character of much of this revival, however, invites a question in the opposite direction: Is anything lost when theological concerns—and, specifically, missionary ones—are absent in contemporary discussions of place? Throughout the discussion, the relationship between the universal and the particular emerges as a source of contention between biblical and modern worldviews. The evidence confirms that a commitment to place not only grounds human identity, but it also inspires the scriptural imagination of the church through embodied witness to the gospel of Jesus to resist the abstraction and excess of modernity’s “placeless” story.

Place, Memory, and Christian Scripture

Modernity’s efforts to diminish the significance of place run counter to the Christian story whose scriptures ground the drama of salvation in geography. “Land,” writes Brueggemann, “is a central, if not *the central theme* of biblical faith. Biblical faith is a pursuit of historical belonging that includes a sense of destiny derived from such belonging.”⁴ Craig G. Bartholomew echoes Brueggemann’s claim, but in his reading of the Creation narratives, Bartholomew substitutes ‘place’ for ‘land’:

In terms of biblical theology, as Genesis 1-3 makes clear, for humans to say “God” is to be implaced, and insofar as *place* evokes—as it clearly does—the nexus God, place, and humankind, it would be quite right to see place as a major contender for the central theme of biblical faith, Scripture moving, as it does, from Eden (an urban-style garden) via the land of

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 3. We will return to the note of ‘destiny’ Brueggemann sounds, which is another way of speaking about Christian eschatology.

Israel and the cultic center of Jerusalem, to the incarnate Jesus, to the city of the new Jerusalem, which is central to the new heavens and earth. Redemption, examined through the prism of place, has the structure of implacement—displacement—(re)implacement.⁵

While Brueggemann and Bartholomew differ on terminology, they share substantial conceptual ground. A brief overview of the settings and plot development of Scripture confirm the biblical significance of place.

First, biblical authors tie faith to particular places across the entire canon of Scripture. “In the beginning,” the Triune God sculpts human beings from the earth’s soil, breathes life into them, and grants them responsibility to cultivate a particular garden paradise named Eden (Genesis 2:7-8). In time, creation rebels against the Creator, and God banishes human beings to wander east of Eden where they work an inhospitable land (3:1-24). Kentucky agrarian Wendell Berry comments:

We have in fact in the biblical tradition, rooted in the Bible but amplified in agrarian, literary, and other cultural traditions stemming from the Bible, the idea of stewardship as conditioned by the idea of usufruct. . . . That service, stewardship, is the responsible care of property belonging to another. And by this the Bible does not mean an absentee landlord, but one living on the property, profoundly and intimately involved in its being and its health, as Elihu says to Job: “if he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath; All flesh shall perish together.” All creatures live by God's spirit, portioned out to them and breathe by his breath.⁶

Citing biblical wisdom literature (Job 34:14b-15a), Berry argues that there is an intrinsic connection between humanity’s (broken) relationship with God and its (broken) relationship with the land. However, the power of place in Christian Scripture does not end with primordial stories of creation and fall.

⁵ Craig G. Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 31; emphasis original.

⁶ Wendell Berry, *What Are People For?: Essays* (Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 2010), 98–99.

Next, God begins the patient work of redemption among his fallen creation. As the narrative of Genesis unfolds, God calls Abram and Sarai to set out from Haran to journey to the land of Canaan, which God promised Abram and his descendants (12:1-9). As they arrive in a promised land that is occupied already, Abram builds an altar to commemorate that place as the anticipated fulfillment of God's word to him (12:7-8). Centuries later, the author of Hebrews recognizes the hermeneutical significance of this story for interpreting the larger narrative arc of Scripture:

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God (Hebrews 11:8-10).⁷

In Hebrews, the place-bound promises of God drive the biblical plotline but also point readers beyond this world toward an eschatological horizon, an ultimate dwelling place with God.⁸

Here one may discern a tension between the particularity of the larger biblical narrative, which follows one small tribe as it ekes out an existence on a small expanse of land, and the universal horizons on display in Hebrews 11 and other passages (e.g., Genesis 12; Isaiah 2:1-5, 66:18-24; Revelation 7:9-12). Historian Stephen Neill detects “a strain of universalism, of a sense of world-wide responsibility, running through the

⁷ Unless otherwise specified, all quotations from the Holy Bible in this study will use the text of the English Standard Version (ESV) [*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2001)].

⁸ Later chapters will return to this eschatological theme, which Brueggemann mentioned previously and Lesslie Newbigin will develop as a central concern in his writings. Here Newbigin reflects not only Scripture but also a major emphasis within ecumenical discourse on mission in the mid-20th century.

whole of the Old Testament.”⁹ For Neill, this perspective reaches its zenith in Isaiah 40-55 as the Israelites held captive in Babylon ponder the power of their God relative to the gods of their captors.¹⁰ Likewise, philosopher Anthony Appiah recognizes a different form of universalism in 'Saint Paul's insistence that “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus”’.¹¹ But Appiah overreaches when he compares Paul’s claim to the “cosmopolitan conviction of the oneness of humanity” in the Stoic *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius.¹² For Paul and other biblical writers, the universal remains tied to the particular but never collapses into it. Without denying the universal nature of the previous biblical claims—whether of a common humanity or a common destiny—their particularity remains inviolable, because they predicate the existence and will of a particular divinity, the God

⁹ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, vol. 6, The Penguin History of the Church (London; New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 16–17.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), xiv, citing Galatians 3:28.

¹² Ibid., xiv; see Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. Christopher Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); the Stoic conception of God understands the interplay of divine immanence and transcendence in a manner more closely reflected in pantheism or, at least, panentheism rather than classical Trinitarian thought. Philosopher Dirk Baltzly explains that Stoics believed “only bodies can act or be acted upon. Thus, only bodies exist.... In accord with this ontology, the Stoics, like the Epicureans, make God a corporeal entity, though not (as with the Epicureans) one made of everyday matter. But while the Epicureans think the gods are too busy being blessed and happy to be bothered with the governance of the universe (Epicurus, Letter to Menoeceus 123–4), the Stoic God is immanent throughout the whole of creation and directs its development down to the smallest detail” [Dirk Baltzly, “Stoicism,” ed. Edward N. Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Palo Alto, CA: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2014), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/stoicism/>]. In contrast, the God of Israel is personal and present to his creation but never conflated with it. The one exception is the paradox that stands at the center of Christian faith: the incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth. The Apostles’ Creed testifies that Jesus “was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day he rose from the dead.” And Scripture locates those claims in specific locales, including Bethlehem, Jerusalem and a hill outside of the city gates named Golgotha. Unlike Stoicism, the Christian story of the God disclosed in Christ Jesus emphasizes the particularity of place rather than an immanent yet impersonal divinity. Moreover, this emphasis on place within the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation also is central to the Christian understanding of salvation, which later chapters address. That said, it is noteworthy that this key emphasis on place and particularity in Christian tradition also carries its own theological challenges, which the next section on Augustine examines.

of Israel. This explains why Paul grounds his appeal for human unity not in anthropology but in Christology (viz., “in Christ Jesus”).¹³

Third, God discloses the universal in Scripture by way of the particular. Another look at the early chapters of Genesis documents a pattern that extends broadly across the canon: the divine creation of all things good (Ch. 1-2) gives way to primordial disobedience (Ch. 2-3) and universal debasement (Ch. 4,6), which in turn trigger divine retribution (Ch. 7-8). As the flood waters recede, God begins creation again with a universal covenant (Ch. 9), but the aspirations of humans to build their own heavenly city undermine it, which again triggers divine wrath against their community through the division of land and language (Ch. 11). Human sin consistently diminishes creation.

Discerning this pattern, theologian Russell R. Reno observes a shift in divine strategy in Genesis:

As chapter 11 draws to a close, the focus of Genesis narrows, ending with Terah’s small clan. But even this seems too broad. In the first verse of chapter 12, Abraham and Sarah alone are called. They are torn from their homeland and separated from their clan. God abandons universal solutions to our bondage to sin. He adopts the way of particularity. The rest of Genesis—the rest of the Bible—will be the story of what follows from the covenant with this obscure man and his barren wife. Abraham and Sarah function as the thin tip of a hypodermic needle. Through them God injects a new possibility. Through this one man and his wife God confers upon all mankind a new future: “I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of earth shall bless themselves.” The narrative collapses from the universal point of view into the particular lives of a mundane, inauspicious couple.

¹³ Only five verses later, Paul fleshes out the identity of Jesus: “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”” (Galatians 4:4-6). The God to whom Paul appeals “in Christ Jesus” is not an immanent yet impersonal combination of reason and matter as Stoicism portrays, but a distinct Trinity of persons in filial relationship.

They are infertile, having come to what seems like a dead-end. But they give birth to new life from which springs the people of Israel.¹⁴

Thus, the plotline of Scripture traces the universal through a particular people named Israel. Even so, insists Lesslie Newbigin, Scripture never loses sight of its universal horizon:

Though the initial call is to Israel, the announcement concerns all nations, for God's reign is the reality for all. The promise is that all nations will be gathered to the messianic feast, and this promise will be fulfilled through his atoning death.¹⁵

In this way, not only the narrative of Scripture but also the Triune God who inspires it discloses the universal through the particular in Jesus of Nazareth.

Finally, place occupies a position so central in Scripture that it becomes a character in the story. Here, comparisons to modern literature abound, whether we consider the Port William Membership of Wendell Berry's imagination, explore the London of Charles Dickens or survive the deprivations of Dostoevsky's Russia.¹⁶ Place, Welty reminds us, makes the story. Such personifications of place, however, are not limited to novels alone. When Kathryn Sockett's novel *The Help* was adapted into a motion picture, she comments that filming in Mississippi "was electrifying, [because] we were in a place we love, a place we're ashamed of, a place we view as almost a character

¹⁴ Russell R. Reno, "Mustard Seeds," *First Things*, 3–4, accessed December 7, 2016, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2016/12/mustard-seeds>.

¹⁵ Lesslie Newbigin, "All in One Place or All of One Sort," *Mid-Stream* 15, no. 4 (October 1976): 330.

¹⁶ I owe this comparison to Gregory Wolfe who offers the following comment on Commenting the role of place in Berry's novels, Gregory Wolfe draws an insightful comparison to Dickens: "The first thing to say about Wendell Berry is that he is one of those writers who has been given the gift of deep roots in a particular place, a connection that is so powerful and primal that it has determined his entire oeuvre. Berry knows and loves Henry County, Kentucky, the way Charles Dickens knew and loved London." Gregory Wolfe, *Beauty Will Save the World: Recovering the Human in an Ideological Age* (Wilmington, Del.: ISI Books Intercollegiate Studies, 2011), 155. I would add Dostoevsky to Wolfe's mix, but, of course, one could cite authors from every corner of the globe.

in the story.”¹⁷ Likewise, in February 1944 when artist Marc Chagall penned a letter to his native Vitebsk, a city from which World War II had exiled him, he laments:

I haven't seen you in a long time, my dear city, I haven't heard from you, haven't talked to your clouds, haven't leaned on your fences. As the gloomiest wanderer, all those years I carried only your breath on my pictures, and thus spoke to you and saw you in my dream.¹⁸

As these examples suggest, places can take on a life of their own and even exhibit, as Relph suggests, the qualities of relationships, which harkens back to Cresswell's definition of place as “a meaningful location.”¹⁹

When this same phenomenon occurs in Scripture, Brueggemann describes it as the creation of a “*storied place*, that is, a place that has meaning because of the history lodged there. There are stories that have authority because they are located in a place.”²⁰ And such authority often conveys the power to (re)shape human identity. Consider how Sinai, Jerusalem, the Temple, Egypt, the Red Sea, Babylon, Golgotha, Rome or other places function in the narrative of Scripture. Beyond their service as the mere settings for stories, they become characters in their own right that conjure memories as powerful as any human character. A specific example may prove helpful.

The city of Jerusalem features prominently in both the Old and New Testaments and may exemplify the most storied place in Scripture. Psalm 122, a song of ascents ascribed to David, evidences the power of memory and the personification of place with regard to Jerusalem:

¹⁷ Michelle Tauber, “Giving a Voice to ‘The Help,’” *People*, August 22, 2011, 104.

¹⁸ Marc Chagall, *Marc Chagall on Art and Culture: Including the First Book on Chagall's Art by A. Efros and Ya. Tugendhold (Moscow, 1918)*, trans. Benjamin Harshav and Barbara Harshav (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 91.

¹⁹ Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976), i; Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 7.

²⁰ Brueggemann, *The Land*, 198; emphasis original.

I was glad when they said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the Lord!”
Our feet have been standing
within your gates, O Jerusalem!

Jerusalem—built as a city
that is bound firmly together,
to which the tribes go up,
the tribes of the Lord,
as was decreed for Israel,
to give thanks to the name of the Lord.
There thrones for judgment were set,
the thrones of the house of David.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!
“May they be secure who love you!
Peace be within your walls
and security within your towers!”
For my brothers and companions' sake
I will say, “Peace be within you!”
For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,
I will seek your good.

For the Psalmist, the city of Jerusalem is not a passive backdrop but an active presence in the unfolding story of God’s relationship with Israel. Theologian Charles Pinches agrees, “Memory relates in curious and intricate ways to place, indeed, to specific places that we have come to know intimately, and to be known intimately by.”²¹ Such memories of place shape personal identity and even devotional practice, as Psalm 122 suggests.

Likewise, places shape entire communities, including their collective memory and rituals. Place Matters, a historical conservation project in New York City, observes that “historically and culturally significant places... are places that hold memories and anchor traditions for individuals and communities.”²² Clearly Jerusalem functions in that manner for the Psalmist and the tribes of Israel in that day. Likewise, for early

²¹ Pinches, *A Gathering of Memories*, 20.

²² “Place Matters,” *Place Matters*, accessed February 20, 2012, <http://www.placematters.net/>.

Christians, reports historian Stephen Neill, the city represents “the centre of the world;” but the city’s influence does not confine itself to the pages of Scripture.²³ Jerusalem’s influence continues unabated to the present for all three Abrahamic traditions who claim it as sacred ground. Theologian Jennifer A. Craft notes that medieval mapmakers consistently place Jerusalem at the center of the known world.²⁴ Whether in ancient Scripture or the present day, history, memory, and relationship intertwine to invest particular places with their own meaning that, in turn, anchors human identity and fuels religious imagination.

Place as Hermeneutic

Places occupy high ground in the stories of Scripture and the processes of human development. But one must ask whether the concern over a loss of place reflects anything more than a quaint nostalgia for beloved places. Consistent with human geography, Brueggemann’s concept of a storied place suggests that place also addresses perception. While place at its most basic level signifies locations where emotional attachments may form, at a deeper level place offers a lens through which we experience and order the world. Theologian Sarah Morice-Brubaker draws a similar conclusion that place functions as both a domain and a perspective.²⁵ Here, Cresswell injects a strong ethical dimension to the discussion:

Place is also a way of seeing, knowing and understanding the world.
When we look at the world as a world of places we see different things.

²³ Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, 6:19.

²⁴ Jennifer A. Craft, “Some Thoughts on Theology and Place,” *Transpositions*, July 31, 2010, <http://www.transpositions.co.uk/2010/07/some-thoughts-on-theology-and-place/>.

²⁵ Sarah Morice Brubaker, “The Place of the Spirit: Toward a Trinitarian Theology of Location” (Ph.D., University of Notre Dame, 2011), 10–22, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/pqdtglobal/docview/922575102/abstract/8FE104CED1EC4E66PQ/1>.

We see attachments and connections between people and place. We see worlds of meaning and experience. Sometimes this way of seeing can seem to be an act of resistance against a rationalization of the world, a way of seeing that has more space than place. To think of an area of the world as a rich and complicated interplay of people and the environment—as a place—is to free us from thinking of it as facts and figures. To think of Baghdad as a place is in a different world to thinking of it as a location on which to drop bombs.²⁶

Place, following Cresswell, serves as a hermeneutic for reading the world but also for humanizing it.

Cresswell's example of Baghdad offers an interesting case. The New Monastic author Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove explores the relationship between perception and place when recounting his own experience with Baghdad during the United States' military invasion of Iraq in 2002. Out the outset of the war, Wilson-Hartgrove and his wife Leah traveled to Baghdad with a Christian Peacemaker Team to suffer with the Iraqi people as an act of Christian witness. Following their arrest in Baghdad, they traveled by convoy across the desert under deportation orders from the Iraqi government. During the trip, one of the cars separated from the convoy and crashed. When Wilson-Hartgrove and others found the blood-stained vehicle, they backtracked to the nearest town.

In the village of Rutba, Wilson-Hartgrove learned that Iraqi passersby had rescued their friends and transported them to Iraqi medical doctors who saved the lives of these American strangers only three days after the American military had decimated their hospital. When Wilson-Hartgrove and his companions asked what they could offer as remuneration, an Iraqi doctor answered, "Nothing. You owe me nothing. Please just tell

²⁶ Cresswell, *Place*, 11.

the world what happened in Rutba.”²⁷ When the Wilson-Hartgroves returned to America, they not only honored that request through media interviews and a publication, but they also formed the eponymous New Monastic community of Rutba House in Durham, North Carolina, as a witness to their experience. The village of Rutba humanized the Iraqi people and provided Wilson-Hartgrove with a new perspective on life and ministry in community.

Following Brueggemann’s argument, Rutba becomes for the Wilson-Hartgroves a “storied place,” which serves not only as a repository of memories but also as a lens for interpreting Scripture and the larger world. Moreover, this newfound appreciation for place serves as a basis for action upon their return home.²⁸ Pinches draws similar connections between place, memory, action, and community:

We can be displaced and still keep faithful memories, but we need special help to do so. Without place we can imagine that we are timeless, one of the most insidious modern lies. That lie corresponds to its twin deception, namely, that we are only minds without bodies. Intimacy with place dispatches both lies.²⁹

In effect, the Wilson-Hartgroves build a living altar in North Carolina to sustain the memory of their theophany in Iraq. And in so doing, they commit themselves not only to a new place but to a new way of seeing and engaging the world.

Returning to Scripture, Brueggemann discerns a similar hermeneutical key in the land, which has the power to change the way readers understand Scripture. He states:

²⁷ Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *To Baghdad and beyond: How I Got Born Again in Babylon* (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2005), 84.

²⁸ Chapter 5 describes such actions as sacred construction, which forms one of three approaches within a sacred geography of place.

²⁹ Pinches, *A Gathering of Memories*, 20.

If land is indeed a prism through which biblical faith can be understood, not only will specific texts take on different nuances and tones, but we shall find that the Bible in its entirety is about another agenda that calls into question our conventional presuppositions and our settled conclusions.³⁰

When approached as a hermeneutic, place can unlock new meanings and new ways of reading. This suggests that place functions in ways roughly analogous to the understanding of history as a rote recitation of facts versus a complex practice of interpretation. Both understandings are valid, distinct and necessary. In Cresswell's view, place "is as much about epistemology as it is ontology."³¹ That is, place may invite nostalgia, but it also invests meaning. Consequently, if place is that significant to biblical interpretation, then what attention should it receive in Christian theological reflection?

The Augustinian Predicament of Place

As early as the fourth century, Saint Augustine of Hippo, a Berber from North Africa,³² puzzled over "a predicament of place."³³ That phrase, for Augustine, names the limits of human language to "to say things that cannot altogether be said" about the triune nature of God and God's relationship to the world.³⁴ In Book V of *De Trinitate*, Augustine demonstrates this problem by citing Psalm 139:8, "If I climb up to heaven, you

³⁰ Brueggemann, *The Land*, 197.

³¹ Cresswell, *Place*, 12.

³² Beyond situating Augustine in his cultural context, the comment on his matrilineal heritage anticipates chapter 3's comparative discussion of place in Islam, which draws on the writings of Ibn Khaldun, a fellow Berber and Muslim *litterateur*.

³³ Saint Augustine, *The Trinity (The Fathers of the Church, Volume 45)*, trans. Stephen McKenna (CUA Press, 2010), 186. In Augustine's usage, the predicament applies to intra-Trinitarian relations, what he later calls "processions" in *De Trinitate*. He also identifies position, habit, and time as predicaments. In Augustine's words: "For by the name Father, the Father by Himself is made known, but the name God includes Himself, as well as the Son and the Holy Spirit, because the Trinity is one God. But the predicament of position, habit, place, and time cannot be predicated of God in the proper sense, but only metaphorically and by means of similitudes."

³⁴ Saint Augustine, *The Trinity*, ed. John E. Rotelle OSA, trans. Edmund Hill OP (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991), 189. Augustine continues, "Our thoughts are quite inadequate to their object, and incapable of grasping him [God] as he is."

[God] are there.”³⁵ In those words where many readers discover a place of comfort, Augustine instead discerns a predicament. Namely, when the Psalmist ascribes God a location, God’s infinite being appears to suffer limitation. Such predications, Augustine reasons, “are not stated properly about God but by way of metaphor and simile.”³⁶ The same figurative solution, however, cannot apply to the body of Christ in the world.

Whether one speaks of the incarnation of the divine Son (John 1:14) or the incarnational community he commissions in the power of the Holy Spirit (John 20:19-23), the doctrine of the Incarnation indicates a material existence within space and time. Mission scholar David J. Bosch draws an explicit connection between these two notions of incarnation when he defines Christian mission as “the good news of God’s love, incarnated in the witness of a community, for the sake of the world.”³⁷ Incarnation binds together identity, mission, and location.

With specific reference to the role of materiality in Augustine’s *De Trinitate*, theologian Ronald J. Teske comments that the predicament of place “does not directly say anything about the being of what is in a place, [though] it does imply that the being in place is extended or has some dimensions.”³⁸ While such language may be true only by way of analogy with reference to the Godhead—Augustine’s conclusion—it nevertheless may suggest something literally true about the relationship of church and place, since “it

³⁵ Ibid., 195.

³⁶ Ibid., 195; for a contemporary defense of the figurative character of theological language, see David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Puralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

³⁷ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series, no. 16 (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1991), 519.

³⁸ Roland J. Teske, *To Know God and the Soul: Essays on the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 102.

does imply that the being in place is extended,” concludes Teske.³⁹ Accordingly, one may ask for what purpose should the church extend into the world, which is another way of raising the question of the church’s mission.

When the Apostle Paul addresses the predicament of place among early Christian communities, he borrows the kenotic imagery of an early Christian hymn. Citing divine self-limitation, Paul instructs the Philippians that Christ Jesus:

who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:6-8).

To fulfill his redemptive mission, Jesus accepts bodily limitations, including location, to identify more fully with humanity.

Paul’s theological response to the predicament of place, however, does not satisfy everyone. When writing to another early Christian community, Paul warns the Corinthians that the divine self-emptying that leads to the cross presents “a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Corinthians 1:23). And in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus admonishes not the crowds but his closest disciples: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (16:24). Jesus both models for his followers and demands from them a costly identification with humanity. However, evidence over the last half-century suggests that close relationships between congregations and the local communities to which the triune God has sent them

³⁹ Ibid.

(John 20:19-23) show signs of steady deterioration. To borrow Augustine's phrase, the church in America faces its own predicament of place.⁴⁰

The Separation of Church and Place

A growing body of scholarship investigates the manifestations of the problem of place and constructive responses to it. But popular discourse exploring a sense of place far outpaces scholarly production on the topic.⁴¹ This suggests that the felt-need associated with the loss of a sense of place resonates deeply with a broad public. In his genealogical work on place, philosopher Edward S. Casey describes this widespread phenomenon as "the existential predicament of place-bereft individuals."⁴² That is, people in late modernity find themselves increasingly alienated from any community or culture that grounds their identity, including the once tightknit connections between

⁴⁰ Before proceeding further, I want to acknowledge the somewhat ambiguous way in which I employ the terms 'congregation', 'church', and 'body of Christ' to refer interchangeably to the universal church and the local congregation. In most cases, my intended meaning will be obvious to the reader. In baptist perspective, one is unable to speak of the universal church apart from its concrete expression in the local congregation--a view Lesslie Newbigin shares--so clarity remains elusive. Theologian Ray S. Anderson argues that a certain ambiguity is a theological necessity at this point. He states, "In a certain sense the church in its incarnational mission is also sacramental. That is to say, the humanity of the incarnational community binds itself to the One to whom the evangelical word of forgiveness has been announced, not removing its presence or turning away its face until the Parousia of the Lord and the resurrection of the body occurs." Therefore, Anderson concludes, "There should be no concern at this point over the fact that the relation between the incarnational community and the church in its more institutional sense is ambiguous. There is both a provisional nature and an ambiguous character to the church that resists precise delineation at the point of its relation to the world. The ambiguity itself evidences the incarnational character of Christ's continued presence in the world and thus is more hopeful as a way of uniting the church in its mission to the world with its identity as the body of Christ." See Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 121.

⁴¹ While this claim is difficult to substantiate empirically, geographer Edward Relph who authored the early, influential phenomenological study *Place and Placelessness* (1976) conducted a Google search engine query of various place-related terms (e.g., place, sense of place, spirit of place, placeness and etc.) and then filtered and organized the results. He concludes, "It is an eclectic, jumbled set of results. It includes place ministries, women's shelters, placemakers and shakers, a placemeter, standardized testing, MindRDR for Google glass, and the end of placeness. Altogether a good reminder that place has a vibrant existence beyond academic discussions" [Edward Relph, "Place on Google: Results of a Search October 2015," *Placeness, Place, Placelessness*, October 13, 2015, <http://www.placeness.com/place-on-google/>].

⁴² Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place : A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 6.

congregations and local communities. In a land G.K. Chesterton once characterized as “a nation with the soul of a church,”⁴³ weekly attendance at church services in the United States have resumed a 40-year pattern of decline after a brief plateau in the 1990s.⁴⁴

Even where participation rates remain strong, the relationship between church and place still shows signs of deterioration. Consider the prevalence of commuter-based congregations where the membership lives predominantly outside of the community in which the church gathers to worship. In one area, this may reflect patterns of urban flight in search of suburban security and financial stability.⁴⁵ In another community, dwindling connections to place instead may reflect decades of church growth strategies adopted to maximize regional access to facilities at the expense of a commitment to the congregation’s immediate neighborhood.⁴⁶ Reflecting on these dynamics, urban ministry scholar Ray Bakke states:

The evangelicalism I grew up with had a theology of persons and programs, but it lacked a conscious theology of place. Protestants generally cut themselves off from “parish” thinking – an ongoing commitment to their place of ministry – so that when a church’s location became “inconvenient” it simply relocated to a new place, often near a freeway (reflecting our society’s shift from a walking to an automobile culture). Along the way, we abandoned real estate that had been prayed

⁴³ G. K. Chesterton, *What I Saw in America* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1922), 12.

⁴⁴ See Stanley Presser and Mark Chaves, “Is Religious Service Attendance Declining?,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 46, no. 3 (September 2007): 417, 422; and Lovett H Weems, “No Shows: The Decline in Worship Attendance,” *The Christian Century* 127, no. 20 (October 5, 2010): 10–11. Aided by more recent data, Weems argues that the period of stabilization that Presser and Chaves document has come to an end. Religious participation rates in the United States have resumed a decline that started in the 1950s.

⁴⁵ The movement for Christian Community Development emerged as a response to the predominance of commuter congregations in urban contexts. See John M. Perkins, ed., *Restoring At-Risk Communities* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1995); Wayne Gordon and John Perkins, *Making Neighborhoods Whole: A Handbook for Christian Community Development* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2013).

⁴⁶ The classic expression of this movement is Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970).

for fervently by Christians before us – and along with it abandoned any commitment to the neighborhoods we left behind.⁴⁷

Commuter congregations, perhaps unconsciously, subordinate the ties that bind church and place to other values, which results in what sociologist William A. Samson describes as “the *placelessness* of the mega-church.”⁴⁸

The example of commuter congregations is especially useful when discussing place, because it highlights the dynamic nature of local communities and the impact of churches. In an interview, Eric O. Jacobsen, who has authored two volumes on the theological significance of the built environment, remarks:

Churches shape the built environment either by becoming a key gathering spot within a particular neighborhood or by becoming a kind of alien presence in a neighborhood where a whole bunch of cars from 'who knows where' show up intermittently throughout the week, but especially on Sunday morning.⁴⁹

When a congregation adopts the latter model of presence, the residential vacuum created by the relocation of a congregation’s core membership often complicates the relationship between church and place further as new residents from different socioeconomic or cultural backgrounds move into the neighborhood. The changing demographic profile of a local community may at once enrich its culture and strain its social fabric. Thus, the

⁴⁷ Raymond J. Bakke, *A Theology as Big as the City* (IVP Academic, 1997), 60; the sort of Christian commitment to place whose absence in Protestant circles Bakke laments here finds varied expressions and new champions in these works: Stanley Hauerwas, *War and the American Difference: Theological Reflections on Violence and National Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 151–66; Giles S. Ecclestone, ed., *The Parish Church?* (London and Oxford: Mowbray, 1988); Sarah Coakley and Samuel Wells, eds., *Praying for England: Priestly Presence in Contemporary Culture* (London; New York: Continuum, 2008), 1–20, 85–106, 147–70.

⁴⁸ Samson contrasts nondescript commuter congregations with the strategies of New Monastic communities to identify closely with local neighborhoods [William A. Samson, “The New Monastics and the Changing Face of American Evangelicalism” (University of Kentucky, 2016), 168, http://uknowledge.uky.edu/sociology_etds/26].

⁴⁹ Joseph Gorra, “Why Suburbia Really Is Affecting Your Spiritual Life: An Interview with Eric O. Jacobsen,” *This Is Our City*, October 5, 2012, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/thisisourcity/7thcity/interview-with-eric-jacobsen.html>.

introduction of language barriers and an accelerated rate of change further weaken ties between church and place.

The growing separation of church and place draws a stark contrast to centuries of Christian presence patterned either on an established parish grid or associational models of congregation tethered closely to a local community. Introducing a collection of essays on the future of the parish system, the Archbishop of York, John Habgood, commented, “The question, ‘Does society still need the parish church?’ is one which church leaders at all levels ask themselves with differing degrees of anguish and puzzlement.”⁵⁰ Even so, the motivations behind such responses remain unclear. Some church leaders may be concerned more with institutional survival than with a congregation’s relationship to a particular place or its public witness in the world and the larger common good.

Here, political scientist Robert Putnam’s ubiquitously cited study, *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community*, confirms Habgood’s implicit judgment on the significance of the relationship between congregations and communities. Putnam’s work chronicles the critical decline in civic engagement in America in the late twentieth century. Writing specifically of the civic impact of religious participation, he explains:

Faith communities in which people worship together are arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America.... As a rough rule of thumb, our evidence shows, nearly half of all associational memberships in America are church related, half of all personal philanthropy is religious in character, and half of all volunteering occurs in a religious context. So how involved we are in religion today matters a lot for America’s social capital.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Giles Ecclestone, *The Parish Church?: Explorations in the Relationship of the Church and the World* (London: Mowbray, 1988), v.

⁵¹ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 66.

Participation in religious congregations, Putnam argues, plays an indispensable role in building the social infrastructure of local communities.

This evidence supports at minimum three conclusions germane to the church's predicament of place. First, a healthy relationship between churches and communities factors decisively in the development and preservation of a civil society, which is a part of the church's witness. Commenting on the charitable impact of local congregations, social critic Malcolm Gladwell reports:

Ram Cnaan, a professor of social work at the University of Pennsylvania, recently estimated the replacement value of the charitable work done by the average American church—that is, the amount of money it would take to equal the time, money, and resources donated to the community by a typical congregation—and found that it came to about a hundred and forty thousand dollars a year. In the city of Philadelphia, for example, that works out to an annual total of two hundred and fifty million dollars' worth of community "good;" on a national scale, the contribution of religious groups to the public welfare is, as Cnaan puts it, "staggering."⁵²

Amid growing socioeconomic inequity in the United States, the ministry of local churches repairs the fabric of local communities.

Next, when religious participation declines in local congregations, it hurts local communities. Putnam and others, including sociologist Mark Chaves, document the decline in religious participation in congregations in America by as much as one-third between the 1960s and 1990s. This cultural shift should cause "anguish and puzzlement," in Habgood's words, not only for religious institutions but also for the communities they inhabit.⁵³ The weakening of formal and "informal social connections"

⁵² Malcolm Gladwell, "The Cellular Church," *The New Yorker*, September 12, 2005, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2005/09/12/the-cellular-church>.

⁵³ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 71–76; Mark Chaves, *Congregations in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 29–35.

of churchgoers contributes to the loss of social capital for congregations and the larger community alike.⁵⁴

Third, by way of extrapolation, forms of religious participation that create distance between a congregation and its immediate community—for example, the aforementioned phenomenon of commuter congregations—also weaken the social capital of the community. The secular benefits of congregational participation stem from the way in which churchgoers weave together the social fabric of the local community. If one extracts that web of relationships from the commons, then its benefits do not accrue since relationships are the substance of social capital. Putnam’s data demonstrates that communities have a vested secular interest in the vitality of local Christian congregations, whether the larger community embraces the Christian story or not. Thus, beyond any narrowly theological or institutional grounds, a close relationship between church and place benefits the common good and their separation harms it. More, however, remains to be said about the connection between a commitment to place and the common good in this era.

Place in Late Modernity

The contemporary estrangement of church and place is neither an exclusively religious nor an exclusively American phenomenon: much of the wider Western culture stands estranged from the places that have produced and sustained it. Multiple forces drive this separation, but the most conspicuous is globalization. When journalist Thomas

⁵⁴ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 66.

L. Friedman describes the inevitable flattening of the world by global market forces,⁵⁵ social geographer Tim Cresswell responds with lament. “It is commonplace in Western societies in the twenty-first century,” writes Cresswell, “to bemoan a loss of a sense of place as the forces of globalization have eroded local cultures and produced homogenized global spaces.”⁵⁶ Where Friedman perceives the promise of a level economic playing field that has potential to benefit the global common good, Cresswell and other detractors fear the destruction of the field altogether.⁵⁷ A brief consideration of globalization will provide a basis for discussing two additional sources of displacement in modernity: cosmopolitanism and human migration.⁵⁸

Globalization

Globalization represents the latest chapter in the Enlightenment narrative of progress whereby developments in European philosophy prompted scientific discovery. Those discoveries, in turn, sparked an Industrial Revolution, which fueled an age of urbanization and imperialism. By the mid twentieth century, European powers, now weakened and war-weary, lost the capacity to contain the nationalist impulses of their respective colonies. A new postcolonial world emerged in which Europe relinquished its military control over former colonies but in many cases sustained its sociopolitical and

⁵⁵ Thomas L. Friedman, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005).

⁵⁶ Cresswell, *Place*, 8; in this passage, Cresswell refers primarily to the loss of local cultures (e.g., independent locally-owned stores and restaurants replaced by big box retailers and global restaurant chains), but in some cases the point applies equally to the destruction of physical topographies and natural habitats (e.g., the environmental impact of strip mining or the destruction of rainforest to grow an industrial base).

⁵⁷ For an example of a post-colonial analysis of the impact of globalization with particular reference to Asia, see George Mathews Chunakara, ed., *Globalization and Its Impact on Human Rights* (Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia, 1998). The volume includes selected presentations from the Christian Conference of Asia Consultation on “Globalization and its impact on Human Rights” held at the Ecumenical Christian Centre, Whitefield, Bangalore, India from Feb. 26 to Mar. 2, 1998.

⁵⁸ Chapter 3 offers further discussion of cosmopolitanism in the context of Christian mission history.

economic influence. Globalization relies on the philosophical, technological, economic, and political infrastructure the Enlightenment built.

However, any assessment of globalization must wrestle also with the complex contributions of Christianity to its development, since the European powers that laid its foundation understood themselves as Christian nations with established churches. The “colonial idea,” Bosch writes, “is intimately linked to the global expansion of Western Christian nations” in the modern period.⁵⁹ Likewise, historian Dana L. Robert argues that the Modern Missionary Movement itself represents an early and significant force of globalization. Take, for example, the explosive growth of student mission movements in the late 19th century. While the premillennial dispensationalism of Dwight L. Moody and Arthur T. Pierson stoked the fires of the Mt. Hermon Revival in Northfield, Massachusetts, in 1886, their teaching at a YMCA summer Bible conference does not alone explain the rapid development of a movement that would commission over 5,000 overseas missionaries within two decades. Nor do the considerable organizing talents of a young John Mott and Robert Speer, who together spearheaded the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions (SVM) with modest support from the YMCA, account adequately for the rapid spread of this movement around the globe.⁶⁰

Instead, Robert explains that the expansion of student movements and Christian missions more broadly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries relied on three key developments from the 1880s: (1) improved communication and transportation technologies, (2) European migration through industrialization and imperialism, and (3)

⁵⁹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 302.

⁶⁰ For a focused study of the Student Volunteer Movement and its influence on global Christianity, see Dana L. Robert, *Occupy until I Come : A.T. Pierson and the Evangelization of the World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003).

well-developed foreign mission infrastructures.⁶¹ Geographer Claire Brickell confirms this judgment while noting that advances in communication and travel continue to transform missionary practice into the present.⁶² Even so, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these developments also profited from the unmistakable optimism of Anglo-American leadership and a certain unity of purpose. Historian William Hutchison observes:

Opposing forces could collaborate because the principal common enterprise, converting the world to Christ, seemed more compelling than any differences; but also because they shared a vision of the essential rightness of Western civilization and the near-inevitability of its triumph.⁶³

Insofar as Christian mission entities like the YMCA and SVM combined religious fervor, advanced technologies, and cultural triumphalism, they not only benefitted from but also contributed to the global architecture the Enlightenment built.⁶⁴

Such a brief treatment of globalization obscures as much as it illuminates. It does not address rival versions or contested interpretations of the Enlightenment or the complex relationships between industrialization, urbanization, and imperialism. Neither does it comment on the complex interaction between postcolonial societies and the

⁶¹ Dana L. Robert, "Extending the Kingdom: The Universal Visions of Student Christian Movements, 1855-1939" (Boston, MA, 2006), 12.

⁶² Brickell states, "Today, the nature of mission and missionary life has changed radically, catalysed by, and in reaction to, the developments in technologies of communication and travel that characterise an ongoing compression of space time" [Claire Brickell, "Geographies of Contemporary Christian Mission(Aries)," *Geography Compass* 6, no. 12 (December 2012): 725].

⁶³ William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 95.

⁶⁴ By the interwar period of the 1920s and 1930s, Western triumphalism was waning, but Christians retained global aspirations. Dana Robert writes, "Missionaries made a distinctive contribution to it [internationalism] by envisioning a Christian internationalism in which indigenization of Christianity in each culture was a central feature" [Dana L. Robert, "The First Globalization: The Internationalization of the Protestant Missionary Movement between the World Wars," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 26, no. 2 (April 1, 2002): 63]. Chapter 3 will revisit the Modern Missionary Movement's complicated relationship with colonialism, which featured resistance to its abuses as well as the aforementioned reliance on its structures.

modern West, nor what Muslim political philosopher Ayn B. Sajoo describes as the “expressions of the civil which make for modernities in the plural.”⁶⁵ Indeed, Appiah argues that any discussion of globalization eventually breaks down due to the indeterminacy of “a term that once referred to a marketing strategy, and then came to designate a macroeconomic thesis, and now can seem to encompass everything, and nothing.”⁶⁶ Instead, the sketch serves to draw attention to the dramatic upheaval of human lives over the past 300 years from the places that previously grounded their existence.⁶⁷ Traditional bonds between people and place grew weaker as impersonal global forces grew stronger—often at the expense of the land itself.

Beyond globalization, cosmopolitanism and human migration also merit discussion as powerful sources of displacement in modernity. Both elements shape the character of the late modern world and relate closely to the processes of globalization, yet remain somewhat distinct from them. And both contribute directly to the erosion of a sense of place. The juxtaposition of these three forces, however, reveals key differences. First, the forces belong in different categories: cosmopolitanism is a philosophy as prone to abstraction as embodiment in communities and practices; human migration is an empirical reality given to demographic measurement; and globalization bridges the empirical and the theoretical by offering a description of trade and finance as well as a prescription for them.

⁶⁵ Ayn B. Sajoo, ed., *Muslim Modernities: Expressions of the Civil Imagination* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2008), 3.

⁶⁶ Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, xiii.

⁶⁷ Of course, one may date modernity much earlier. My point is not to enter arguments over the precise boundaries of the modern period but to observe that the loosening of bonds to place is not easily reduced to a recent development within a contemporary process called globalization. Rather, the weakening of traditional connections to the land and its impact on human identity has a much longer history.

The second difference, according to journalist Jason DeParle, is the level of infrastructure supporting these forces. He writes:

Theorists sometimes call the movement of people the third wave of globalization, after the movement of goods (trade) and the movement of money (finance) that began in the previous century. But trade and finance follow global norms and are governed by global institutions: the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund. There is no parallel group with “migration” in its name. The most personal and perilous form of movement is the most unregulated. States make (and often ignore) their own rules, deciding who can come, how long they stay, and what rights they enjoy.⁶⁸

DeParle’s comment on infrastructure is important but also misleading. While there is no single entity managing human migration in all its varieties, some administrative bodies do exist. Most notably, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) coordinates a large network of NGOs, many of them faith-based, to oversee refugee resettlement operations in conjunction with nation states under a 1951 UN Convention. Global governance agencies such as UNHCR, however, are not the only form of infrastructure. The preceding discussion of globalization identifies informal sources of global infrastructure that predate, if not prefigure, the sorts of institutions that DeParle seeks.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, his point on the largely unregulated and inherently risky nature of human migration obtains.

The differences between these larger forces of displacement in late modernity shape our study in two significant ways. As a philosophy, cosmopolitanism presents a rival narrative to Christianity. Consequently, it receives greater attention than either globalization or migration. Second, the juxtaposition of these forces also invites a

⁶⁸ Jason DeParle, “Global Migration: A World Ever More on the Move,” *The New York Times*, June 26, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/27/weekinreview/27W.html>.

⁶⁹ For example, the Roman Catholic Church offers a global infrastructure with a long history of assisting migrants in new lands.

comparison between place and globalization roughly analogous to the relationship between theology in the church and the academy. Namely, place bridges theory and practice.

Cosmopolitanism

The biblical juxtaposition of the universal and particular creates a generative tension, whereas modernity's quest for a cosmopolitan culture aims to transcend the particular altogether. In its popular form, such cosmopolitanism envisions "citizens of the world" who have shorn provincialism to find themselves equally at home in every place, but especially in the interchangeable commercial districts of emerging global capitals where they enjoy the same amenities, whether in New York or New Delhi.⁷⁰

Such elitism irks cultural critics like Ross Douthat who complains:

The people who consider themselves "cosmopolitan" in today's West, by contrast, are part of a meritocratic order that transforms difference into similarity, by plucking the best and brightest from everywhere and homogenizing them into the peculiar species that we call "global citizens."⁷¹

For Douthat and even others more sympathetic to its aims, cosmopolitanism represents a severing of ties to particular places in service of universal goals. In anthropological terms, cosmopolitanism resembles a flattening of global cultures similar to the flattening of the global economy that Friedman describes.

In theological terms, cosmopolitanism represents a sort of realized eschatology loosely akin to the attempt at Babel to build a tower to the heavens (Genesis 11:1-9).

⁷⁰ Appiah paints a disapproving portrait of such elites: "You imagine a *Comme des Garçons*-clad sophisticate with a platinum frequent-flyer card regarding, with kindly condescension, a ruddy-faced farmer in workman's overalls. And you wince" [Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, xiii].

⁷¹ Ross Douthat, "The Myth of Cosmopolitanism," *The New York Times*, July 2, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/03/opinion/sunday/the-myth-of-cosmopolitanism.html>.

Such an effort involves three distinct elements. First, there is a subordination of the particular to the universal, which in effect devalues the former. Next, the coterie that benefits from that action and possesses the means to leverage it secures its own position to the neglect of the common good. Third, these actions produce a privileged class disconnected from the lives and conditions of their fellow human beings.⁷² These developments, Douthat observes, rely on the same technological advances in communication and travel that Robert and Brickell cite in the development of Christian missions.⁷³ In theory, cosmopolitanism champions the common good by overcoming human difference (i.e., particularity), which it describes as the primary source of enmity preventing universal peace; in practice, cosmopolitanism creates a privileged class of global citizens.

Furthermore, the point of drawing an analogy to Babel is to remind us that cosmopolitanism not only disorders human relations, but also it risks a disordering of human-divine relations. Bartholomew observes:

The problem with Babel would not appear to be brutal mastery [of a Promethean type]; indeed the plain of Shinar would seem to fit with the requirement that “building calls for heeding the parameters of the nature setting.” Rather, the problem is idolatry—Babylon is the city of

⁷² Even the choice of the terms ‘human beings’ holds theological significance in this discussion. Since cosmopolitanism devalues the parochial, it tends to produce neither engaged citizens nor good neighbors, which are prominent categories in theological ethics [e.g., see Pinches, *A Gathering of Memories*, 77–120; Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Stanley Hauerwas, “Happiness, The Life of Virtue and Friendship: Theological Reflections on Aristotelian Themes,” *The Asbury Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (1990): 5–19; and Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2011), 119–38].

⁷³ Douthat states, “Indeed elite tribalism is actively encouraged by the technologies of globalization, the ease of travel and communication. Distance and separation force encounter and immersion, which is why the age of empire made cosmopolitans as well as chauvinists — sometimes out of the same people” (Douthat, “The Myth of Cosmopolitanism”); Robert, “Extending the Kingdom: The Universal Visions of Student Christian Movements, 1855-1939,” 12; Brickell, “Geographies of Contemporary Christian Mission(Aries),” 725.

Marduk—and a quest for control and autonomy rather than a submission to God and his call to spread out around the earth.”⁷⁴

Any eschatology realized under human direction through human efforts is tantamount to idolatry in the scriptural imagination. Therefore, insofar as the modern missionary movement or other voices within Christian tradition undertake a cosmopolitan approach, they must attend to the threat of idolatry.⁷⁵

Indeed, cosmopolitanism’s account of human flourishing and its impediments draws a stark contrast to the vision of Scripture. Biblical scholar Richard Hays’ work on theological ethics provides a useful framework for distinguishing these competing visions, which hold significant implications for the discussion of place. Hays’ synthetic reading of the New Testament presents three focal images that trace “the story of God’s saving action in the world:” community, cross, and new creation.⁷⁶

Beginning with community, Hays argues that the moral vision of Scripture recognizes the community “as the primary addressee of God’s imperatives” rather than the individual.⁷⁷ The bookends of the biblical narrative underscore this point. At the outset in the Garden of Eden, ‘the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be

⁷⁴ Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell*, 43; Bartholomew cites Edward Casey’s distinctions between ancient Promethean (imposition) and Epimethean (cultivation) building practices [see Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 2nd ed. (Indiana University Press, 2009), 173].

⁷⁵ For example, Butler Bass calls for a “sacred cosmopolitanism” that recognizes the “connections we share with God and others here on earth” (270). She follows that orthodox Christian claim with speculation on its commonality across “all faith traditions” (271) and then offers a pluralist account of the eschatological vision of the New Jerusalem that places “doctrine and dogma” in opposition to “love and friendship” (272) [see Diana Butler Bass, *Grounded: Finding God in the World-A Spiritual Revolution* (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 270–72].

⁷⁶ Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 199; Hays notes that the ordering matters, since it corresponds with the biblical history of redemption that begins with the calling of Israel, climaxes with the cross of Christ, and awaits the full consummation of new creation in the Spirit.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 196.

alone” (Genesis 2:18), and, at the end, John of Patmos glimpses “a new heaven and a new earth” anchored by the New Jerusalem in which the nations find healing and gather together to worship the triune God in unity (Revelation 21:1-22:5). Between these scenes of Creation and Consummation, the Old Testament story centers on the calling of Israel and the New Testament, likewise, on the church.

In both cases, participation in a particular sort of community under the reign of God is integral to human flourishing. Also noteworthy in John’s vision is that the nations will retain their particularity in the New Jerusalem: “People will bring into it [the city] the glory and the honor of the nations” (Revelation 21:26). Whereas cosmopolitanism locates enmity in difference and trades in abstractions of community, the Bible embraces difference as a gift to be offered to a transnational community whose identity is united in Christ through the Spirit. Cosmopolitanism, instead, uproots individuals from the concrete sources of their identity in local communities to join an abstract community comprised of what Douthat calls homogenized humanity. Again, in practice, this approach benefits a small group of individuals.

Next, the distance between the biblical vision of flourishing and cosmopolitanism only expands when we consider the cross. Hays describes Jesus’ death on a cross as “the paradigm for faithfulness to God in this world.”⁷⁸ Such “self-giving love” subordinates self for the service of others and invites “those who possess power and privilege to surrender it for the sake of the weak.”⁷⁹ While one suspects some cosmopolitan theorists would support this vision of sacrificial love, there again appears a discontinuity in practice, which Hays helps explain in two ways. First, the self-giving character of the

⁷⁸ Ibid., 197.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

cross presents human flourishing first and foremost as a divine gift to be received rather than an object to acquire through human efforts. Second, however noble cosmopolitan intentions may be, the cross renders divine judgment not on human difference but on human sin, a universal condition that impedes human flourishing (Romans 3:23). Short of an alternative account of human sin and its reconciliation, cosmopolitanism offers universal ideals with no effectual means to realize them.

Finally, the image of new creation brings credibility and purpose to the biblical vision of human flourishing that cosmopolitanism lacks. By retaining rather than relinquishing the particular, biblical faith casts a universal vision without collapsing into abstraction. John's vision of "a new heaven and a new earth" is detailed, even exacting. As the culmination of the biblical canon, this vision stands as the product of a diverse and resilient community's conversation and practice over centuries. This is not to suggest that cosmopolitanism lacks a conceptual history or a community of practice, but I would argue the consistency of that community and the level of its discourse over time suffers in comparison to Christianity. The continuing witness of the church through its performance of that biblical vision of human flourishing imparts added credibility to the Christian vision.

Beyond credibility, however, the lens of new creation also offers purpose, which produces a community of hope. While the cross of Christ signifies the in-breaking of God's reign into the world—yet another instantiation of the redemptive pattern manifest in Genesis—the church recognizes that that reign remains proleptic in character until the final consummation of all things. Hays confirms:

In Christ we know that the powers of the old age are doomed, and the new creation is already appearing. Yet at the same time, all attempts to assert the unqualified presence of the kingdom of God stand under judgment of the eschatological reservation: not before the time, not yet.⁸⁰

Scripture does not downplay the tension between the universal and the particular, it focuses attention upon it. In the same way, Lesslie Newbigin frequently describes the church as the “sign, instrument, and foretaste” of the kingdom of God.⁸¹ That is, the church in the power of the Holy Spirit bears embodied witness to God’s reign through the character of her common life, which is not so much a precondition of human flourishing as it is an advance on it. In this way, writes Paul, the Holy Spirit is “the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption” (Ephesians 1:14 KJV). Christian community offers a partial but tangible hope of things to come. Cosmopolitanism, by contrast, lacks both a substantive account of its *telos* and an empirical demonstration of the universal community it envisions.⁸²

But the concept has a much longer and more substantial history than the standard version reflects. In his influential account cosmopolitanism, Appiah traces its origins from the Cynics and Stoics of the third and fourth centuries BCE, respectively, to Enlightenment figures in the eighteenth century CE, such as Kant and Voltaire.⁸³ Over time, Appiah contends, two essential claims emerge: (1) human beings have obligations

⁸⁰ Ibid., 198.

⁸¹ Lesslie Newbigin, *Sign of the Kingdom*, American ed (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981).

⁸² This criticism may seem overly harsh, but generic appeals for peace or the unity of the human community in the abstract do not prove useful or actionable. Eventually one must define the substance of those terms and demonstrate their viability, since even a universal vision requires a particular form of expression to make it intelligible and demonstrable. At the end of the day, one must answer the question: to what end do we seek peace and unity? Or, what is the purpose of human flourishing? To which the Westminster Shorter Catechism (1646) offers an unflinching reply: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.” Likewise, Augustine prays, “[God] you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you” [Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick, *The World’s Classics* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3].

⁸³ Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, xiv.

to others beyond the natural ties of family and friendship, and (2) human beings can learn valuable lessons from their differences with others.⁸⁴ Although he acknowledges the potential for occasional conflict between those principles, Appiah bases his cosmopolitanism in “universal concern and respect for legitimate difference.”⁸⁵ In other words, Appiah attempts to help readers navigate a world of more than seven billion strangers by appealing to a set of shared values that transcend human difference.⁸⁶

Not surprisingly, other critical theorists view Appiah’s appeal to new universals as a misguided extension of the Enlightenment project. Rejecting the proposals of Appiah and philosopher Martha Nussbaum who makes a similar claim to “common aims, aspirations, and values,” postcolonial theorist Swaralipi Nandi seeks an alternative among what she describes as “more critical cosmopolitanisms.”⁸⁷ She cites approvingly the work of Paul Gilroy and Walter Dignolo who develop rival versions of cosmopolitanism rooted in an ethics of difference.⁸⁸ Instead of transcending difference, both authors embrace it. In his own words, Dignolo posits a model where “diversity as a universal

⁸⁴ Ibid., xv.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Appiah explains, “The language of values is, after all, language. And the key insight of modern philosophical reflection on language is that language is, first and foremost, a public thing, something we share.” He continues, “Our language of values is one of the central ways we coordinate our lives with one another. We appeal to values when we are trying to get things done together” [Ibid., 28].

⁸⁷ Swaralipi Nandi, “Reading the ‘Other’ in World Literature: Toward a Discourse of Unfamiliarity,” in *Critical Pedagogy and Global Literature: Worldly Teaching*, ed. Masood Ashraf Raja, Hillary Stringer, and Zach VandeZande (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 90–91.

⁸⁸ Ironically, Gilroy and Dignolo launch their complaints against the elitist accounts of Appiah and others from endowed chairs at two elite institutions of higher learning, King’s College London and Duke University, respectively. That, of course, is not to dismiss their arguments on an ad hominem basis. Rather, the observation is interesting, because it is the essence of what Douthett pans in his criticism of cosmopolitanism and inversely what Douthett’s critics decry as self-loathing in him [see Daniel W. Drezner, “The Truth of Cosmopolitanism,” *Washington Post*, July 5, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/07/05/the-truth-of-cosmopolitanism/>]. I wonder if the sharp edges of these exchanges have something to do with the inherent difficulty of criticizing a culture in which you are deeply complicit. Second, I also wonder to what extent it reflects a frustration advocates harbor with the gap between the cosmopolitan ideal and its empirical reality on the ground or, more aptly, in the air. If true, then the eschatological tension that Hays identifies offers not only ethical guidance but pastoral care.

project (that is, diversality) shall be the aim instead of longing for a new abstract universal and rehearsing a new universality grounded in the 'true' Greek or Enlightenment legacy."⁸⁹ It remains unclear, however, how Mignolo's substitution of "diversality"—which may be the most universally lauded value in late modern societies—in the place of a more traditional value avoids the universalist logic and legacy of the Enlightenment. The thought structure in both cases remains the same, even if the window dressings have changed. Nandi fails to recognize this problem.

Gilroy, by contrast, makes a far more interesting proposal in his work *Postcolonial Melancholia*. Echoing Appiah's second value of respect for difference, Gilroy acknowledges the "civic and ethical value" of encounters across difference, including the "self-knowledge that can be acquired through the proximity to strangers."⁹⁰ Rather than asserting universal values from above or identifying with cultural elites, however, Gilroy envisions a movement from the margins that "glories in the ordinary virtues and ironies—listening, looking, discretion, friendship—that can be cultivated when mundane encounters with difference become rewarding."⁹¹ While Gilroy suggests more substantive practices than Mignolo's generic assertion of diversality, his proposal remains vulnerable to much of the same criticism. Notwithstanding Gilroy's privileging of the margins, friendship stands as one of the most enduring values in human history. And his celebration of "ordinary virtues," of course, is another way to describe shared values.

⁸⁹ Quoted in Nandi, Nandi, "Reading the 'Other' in World Literature: Toward a Discourse of Unfamiliarity," 91.

⁹⁰ Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 67.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

But here is where Gilroy's cosmopolitanism becomes most interesting. Human beings not only must recognize the benefits of difference, according to Gilroy, they must defend it against the "xenophobia and violence that threaten to engulf, purify, or erase it."⁹² Again, one must set aside the question of how Gilroy's embrace of difference qua difference avoids functioning as an appeal to a universal value; but if one can manage to do so, the power of his approach becomes evident. To defend difference, his cosmopolitanism demands a form of self-discipline that creates distance between people and their native loyalties to place. Gilroy states:

The opportunity for self-knowledge is certainly worthwhile, but, especially in turbulent political climates, it must take second place behind *the principled and methodical cultivation of a degree of estrangement from one's own culture and history*. That too might qualify as essential to a cosmopolitan commitment. This distancing can sound like a privilege and has sometimes been associated with the history of elites, but I am not convinced that it is inevitably tainted by those associations. Something like it is now a routine feature of the postmodern and postcolonial processes that condition metropolitan life: diaspora dispersal, mass immigration, military travel, tourism, and the revolution of global communications, to name just a few.⁹³

Gilroy's cosmopolitanism, no less than the versions of Appiah and Mignolo, requires human beings to alienate themselves from the places that have shaped and sustained their identities. Presumably, people would do this to make themselves at home in the homogenized spaces of a globalized world. Only in Gilroy's version—and to a lesser extent in Mignolo's—there is an attempt to hold the particular and universal together, to access a common humanity through its particularity. In this way, Gilroy steps unconsciously toward the biblical vision but never reaches it.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.; emphasis mine.

Despite this move, the practical risks of such a proposal remain great—from personal questions of identity and assimilation to public concerns about the loss of culture and local character. Augé already fears that the intrusion of “non-spaces” in late modern cultures, which he defines as spaces that are not “relational, or historical, or concerned with identity” (e.g., airports, TV, motels, smart phones, merchandise chains and etc.), will crowd out deeper, long-standing connections to place that inform and anchor human identity.⁹⁴ In the surfeit of information and space Augé calls “supermodernity,” he concludes, “People are always, and never, at home.”⁹⁵ Thus, cosmopolitan proposals, even as interesting as Gilroy’s, beg practical questions: What are the long-term consequences of such displacement? And, why would anyone willingly submit to it? What secures future cosmopolitan projects against the elitism of past ones? But the far more important and basic questions are these: What vision of human flourishing does Gilroy’s cosmopolitanism underwrite? Where does he locate the problem humanity faces? Does his cosmopolitanism have the capacity to resolve it? What empirical evidence can he marshal to anchor hope?

To be fair, Gilroy discerns correctly that this estrangement from place already is the daily reality for countless people living in the shadows of globalization. They are not so much drawn to the vision of cosmopolitanism as driven by circumstance toward it. Appiah agrees, “The well-traveled polyglot is as likely to be among the worst off as among the best off—as likely to be found in a shantytown as at the Sorbonne.”⁹⁶ His comment affirms Nandi’s observation of the possibility of multiple cosmopolitanisms and

⁹⁴ Augé, *Non-Places*, 77, backcover.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁹⁶ Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, xviii.

also pushes discussion toward the third modern force we identified earlier: human migration. Before turning there, however, Gilroy's invitation requires more theological scrutiny through the lens of place.

Christian tradition offers a mixed response to the invitation to distance oneself willingly from the places that nourished a person's identity. As Hays insists, the story of Scripture is the story of a community formed to worship the triune God. However, the stories of Abraham and Sarah and many others comprising that "great cloud of witnesses" enshrined in Hebrews 11 attest that God's call nevertheless often involves sojourns in distant lands on both voluntary and involuntary terms. Certainly cross-cultural missionaries undertake willingly what Gilroy describes as a "principled and methodical cultivation of a degree of estrangement from one's own culture and history."⁹⁷ And voices calling for the suppression of natural loyalties are relatively common throughout Christian tradition.⁹⁸ But such convictions always take shape under what Hays would call a cruciform ethic of service patterned on the self-giving love of Jesus with the support of a community.⁹⁹ And that combination is uncommon. Douthat attests:

Genuine cosmopolitanism is a rare thing. It requires comfort with real difference, with forms of life that are truly exotic relative to one's own. It takes its cue from a Roman playwright's line that "nothing human is alien to me," and goes outward ready to be transformed by what it finds.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, 67.

⁹⁸ Chapter 3 will feature a diverse range of voices, such as Hugh of Saint Victor who expresses a medieval Christian form of cosmopolitanism as well as Philipp Nicolai who circumscribes a very narrow commitment to place four centuries later. Here we also do well to remember the Apostle Paul's radical appeals for unity in Christ across multiple markers of identity (e.g., Romans 10:12; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11).

⁹⁹ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*; from Catholic monastic orders to Moravian choirs, and Baptist voluntary societies to Methodist class meetings, most missionary efforts have relied on community networks of support from the Apostle Paul forward. .

¹⁰⁰ Douthat, "The Myth of Cosmopolitanism."

What is most compelling about Douthat's appraisal—and where it overlaps most closely with the biblical vision—is its posture of humble receptivity, since human flourishing is a gift to be received more than a strategy to pursue.

Notwithstanding the diversity of approaches to place in Christian tradition, Augustine discerns an exceptional connection between place and mission in the Incarnation.¹⁰¹ God's self-disclosure in Jesus of Nazareth demonstrates a clear commitment to place. Paul captures this through the kenotic imagery of an early Christian hymn, which witnesses that Jesus "though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped" (Philippians 2:5-8), while John's Gospel engages Hellenistic philosophical categories to affirm, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). This divine movement toward place runs counter to the cosmopolitan movement away from it.

Beyond the fundamental affirmations of place and material culture in the Incarnation, the ministry of Jesus also confirms a commitment to place. When Jesus calls his disciples in Matthew's Gospel, he instructs them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (10:5-6). A few chapters later, amid the controversial healing of a Canaanite woman's daughter, Jesus reminds his disciples, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (15:24). While Paul receives a divine commission and apostolic endorsement to bear witness across the entire Near Eastern world,¹⁰² archeologist Merilyn Hargis estimates that Jesus limited his own ministry to a region the size of modern-day New

¹⁰¹ See pages 14-16.

¹⁰² See Paul's divine call (Acts 9:15-16), early success in the Gentile mission (14:27), and apostolic endorsement at the Jerusalem Council (15:1-35).

Jersey and never ventured much further than 100 miles on any trip.¹⁰³ Neill confirms his limited geography and adds that the form and content of Jesus' teaching also conform closely to his Semitic world.¹⁰⁴ Rather than transcending the places that nourished his human existence, Jesus embraces them.

This evidence suggests that at the center of Christian faith stands a paradox between the universal and the particular: the cosmic Christ appeared as a somewhat provincial Savior. The portrayals of Pontius Pilate's interrogation of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels corroborate this view. Pilate, the prefect of Rome charged to protect the interests of Emperor Tiberius, does not view Jesus as a threat to Rome. Instead, the Synoptic accounts portray Pilate questioning Jesus with intrigue rather than fear, "Are you the king of the Jews?" (Matthew 27:11, Mark 15:2, Luke 23:3). At this point, attentive readers of the Gospels recognize a larger canonical and historical significance to the Jesus story, but contemporaries, like Pilate, view Jesus largely through the prism of internecine religious disputes of a small Near Eastern nation.

When the same readers detect a transition in titles attributed to Jesus from the Hebrew 'Messiah' to the Greek 'Lord' in Acts and the Pauline correspondence, they recognize not merely a cultural shift but a theological claim.¹⁰⁵ New Testament scholar Oscar Cullman describes this as an intentional extension of Jesus' authority from the Jewish community to the nations.¹⁰⁶ Such a move carries political overtones: Jesus, not Caesar, is Lord. While the Synoptic Gospels do not confront Pilate with this claim, it

¹⁰³ Meryl Hargis, "On the Road," *Christian History*, 1998, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-59/on-road.html>.

¹⁰⁴ Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, 6:15.

¹⁰⁵ This shift in terminology is most visible in Acts of the Apostles and the writings of Paul.

¹⁰⁶ Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, trans. Shirley C. Guthrie and Charels A. M. Hall (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), 202.

represents another instantiation of the universal by way of the particular. The cosmopolitan rejection of that claim, in both form and substance, not only represents a force of displacement pressing upon late modern cultures but also a direct challenge to a Christian theology of place.

Human Migration

Finally, a third force exerting pressure upon the late modern world is human migration. Unlike globalization and cosmopolitanism, human migration is less prone to abstraction, since it describes demographic realities of people on the move. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs reports that 244 million international migrants live in countries other than their country of origin in 2015, which represents an increase of 71 million (44%) since 2000. While two-thirds of those migrants live in Europe (76 million) or Asia (75 million), North America ranks third with 54 million. But of any single host country, the United States welcomes the largest number of migrants at 47 million, roughly 20% of the total global migrant population.¹⁰⁷

Despite a statistically significant surge in human migration across the globe, migrants account for only 3% of the human population. Given these figures, geographer Harm J. De Blij offers an important reminder:

The overwhelming majority (the myth of mass migration notwithstanding) will die very near the cabin in which they were born. In their lifetimes, this vast majority will have worn the garb, spoken the language, professed the faith, shared the health conditions, absorbed the education, acquired the attitudes, and inherited the legacy that constitutes the power of place:

¹⁰⁷ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, "Trends in International Migration, 2015," Population Facts (Geneva: UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, December 2015), <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/populationfacts/docs/MigrationPopFacts20154.pdf>.

the accumulated geography whose formative imprint still dominates the planet.¹⁰⁸

De Blij is correct, most people stay close to home. His comment, however, downplays the significance of the advanced infrastructure on which today's migrants depend.

Migrants may represent a small percentage of the total global population, but they exert much greater pressure on global systems than their predecessors, whether ecological, economic, or educational.

Beyond the scale of migration today, past waves differ from the present trends in several ways. DeParle cites five differences. First, aforementioned advances in travel allow migrants to roam much further from home than in the past. Next, in spite of larger distances, migrants return more than \$300 billion per year in remittances to family and friends in their countries of origin. Third, migration is undergoing a feminization process as women now account for roughly half of all migrants. Fourth, advances in communication allow migrants to sustain much closer contact with home. Finally, there is a rising expectation that government should control migration.¹⁰⁹ When coupled with the massive rise in numbers, those dynamics present Western societies with major challenges. How do such nations assimilate millions of newcomers across cultural and linguistic barriers without losing the host's own national character and identity? Modernity cannot escape the complex relationship of the universal and the particular.

But the nature of human migration in this period is even more challenging than that description suggests due in many cases to its precipitating factors. Here it is essential to distinguish between different categories of human migration. The immigrant drawn by

¹⁰⁸ Harm J. De Blij, *The Power of Place: Geography, Destiny, and Globalization's Rough Landscape* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3.

¹⁰⁹ DeParle, "Global Migration."

opportunity may be a Mexican farmworker crossing the Rio Grande, whether documented or not, to follow growing seasons in the United States or an Indian software engineer from the Silicon Plateau of Bangalore relocating to the Silicon Valley outside of San Francisco to accept a position at Google. Both are migrants, but only one a cosmopolitan. And yet, in both cases, they share a desire for economic advancement and a willingness to leave their homes voluntarily to pursue opportunity.

Of the 244 million international migrants in the world, as many as 65.3 million were forcibly displaced according to estimates from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).¹¹⁰ Such involuntary forms of human migration represent a very different experience of migration characterized by trauma, comprehensive need, and an acute sense of homelessness.¹¹¹ Elie Wiesel reflects on the challenge forced migration presents to the contemporary world:

In truth, our century is marked by displacements on the scale of continents. Armenians, Kurds, Muslims, Hindus, Bosnians, Rwandans: political and economic refugees, victims of religious persecution, ethnic cleansing, and racial oppression. Never before have so many beings fled so many homes.¹¹²

Wiesel grasps not only the scale of the refugee crisis but also its sorrow by addressing the emotional losses connected to displacement.

¹¹⁰ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “UNHCR Global Trends 2015,” UNHCR Global Trends (Geneva: UNHCR, 2015), 2, <http://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/576408cd7/unhcr-global-trends-2015.html>.

¹¹¹ While there is overlap in experience between all migrant groups, forcibly displaced persons present a distinct context for theological reflection and mission engagement along the specified lines of trauma, comprehensive need and homelessness. See D. Steven Porter, “Reimagining Christian Witness among Refugees in North America,” in *Religion, Migration, Identity Study Group* (International Association of Mission Studies, Toronto, Canada, 2012).

¹¹² Elie Wiesel, “Longing for Home,” in *The Longing for Home*, ed. Leroy S. Rouner (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 19.

The UNHCR figure breaks down into 21.3 million refugees, 40.8 million internally displaced persons, and 3.2 million asylum-seekers. In 2015, 34,000 people per day fled their homes, which affects not only the migrants themselves in ways Wiesel notes, but also the communities and nations that receive them. For example, due to its close proximity to regional wars, Lebanon presently hosts 183 refugees for every 1,000 of its own citizens.¹¹³ The vast majority of these 65.3 million persons of concern remain within their country of origin or on its border. As soon as risk subsides, displaced persons return home.

However, in cases where forcibly displaced persons resettle as refugees under article 1A(2) of the *1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*, they tend to stay longer, if not permanently. The UNCHR observed that the number of returnees—people who returned home—decreased worldwide by 400,000 between 2004 and 2005.¹¹⁴ In North America during that same period, none of the 716,800 persons of concern returned to their country of origin.¹¹⁵ A decade later in 2015, the United States still leads the world in refugee resettlement.¹¹⁶ Thus, for large numbers of migrants, their displacement from the sources of their identity is increasingly a permanent condition.

The confluence of globalization, cosmopolitanism, and human migration in late modernity paints a bleak portrait of place in the contemporary world. Art critic Lucy Lippard concludes that we stand at “a threshold between a history of alienated

¹¹³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “UNHCR Global Trends 2015,” 2.

¹¹⁴ United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees, “Refugees by the Numbers, 2006 Edition,” *Refugees by the Numbers* (Geneva: UNHCR Media Relations and Public Information Service, 2006).

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “UNHCR Global Trends 2015,” 3.

displacement from and longing for home.”¹¹⁷ Likewise, when Edward Casey addresses the same problem in *The Fate of Place* (1997), he describes the human response to placelessness:

That predicament is one of place-panic: depression or terror even at the idea, and still more in the experience, of an empty place. As some people find the prospect of an unknown place—even a temporary stopping place on an ordinary journey—quite unsettling, many others experience a wholly unfamiliar place to be desolate or uncanny. In both cases, the prospect of a strict void, of an utter no-place, is felt to be intolerable. So intolerable, so undermining of personal or collective identity is this prospect, that practices of place-fixing and place-filling are set in motion right away. In the one case, these practices amount to public rituals reenacting cosmogenesis; in the other, they occur as private rituals of an obsessive cast—efforts to paper over the abyss by any means available. The aim, however, is much the same in both cases: it is to achieve the assurance offered by plenitude of place. The void of no-place is avoided at almost any cost.¹¹⁸

When facing the threat of placelessness, human beings undertake the work of placemaking. Chapter 5 describes such efforts as sacred construction. The contemporary revival of interest in place, Casey concludes, is an existential response to the increasingly common experience of displacement in late modernity.

The Revival of Place

The erosion of a commitment to place and the unprecedented scale of human displacement in late modernity have prompted a rescue mission to replant human lives and communities more firmly in local soils. The effort to wrest the particular from the universal—to resist Friedman’s depiction of an inevitably flattened world or the abstractions of cosmopolitanism—enlists both secular and sacred sources to reconfigure

¹¹⁷ Lucy R. Lippard, *The Lure of the Local : Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: New Press, 1997), 20.

¹¹⁸ Casey, *The Fate of Place*, 6.

identity in a rapidly changing world. As mentioned earlier, the causes and implications of the loss of place stir debate across a wide range of disciplines and vocations. Each approach in its own way recognizes the constitutive character of place in the formation of human identity and community and, consequently, the dangers of a growing sense of displacement. This leads to tangible attempts, if not an imperative, to revive a commitment to place and active placemaking in the world.

Evidence of this revival of place proves as diverse as the groups undertaking them. Consider the arts where, despite her concerns, Lippard sees also opportunity for activism:

The potential of an activist art practice that raises consciousness about land, history, culture, and place and is a catalyst for social change cannot be underestimated, even though this promise has yet to be filled. Artists can make the connections visible. They can guide us through sensuous kinesthetic responses to topography, lead us from archaeology and land based social history into alternative relationships to place.¹¹⁹

In the Christian world, similar appeals for artistic engagement with an eye toward cultural transformation inform the writings of Andy Crouch and his editorial projects at *Christianity Today*, such as *This Is Our City*, which aims “to document the ways Christians are contributing to the flourishing of their cities;”¹²⁰ the platform speakers at the annual Q Conference, which bills itself as “a place for church and industry leaders to thoughtfully navigate today’s culture;”¹²¹ and the development of centers for theology and the arts at institutions as diverse as Fuller Theological Seminary, the University of St. Andrews, Duke University, and Calvin College.

¹¹⁹ Lippard, *The Lure of the Local*, 19.

¹²⁰ Andy Crouch, *Culture Making : Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008); “This Is Our City,” *This Is Our City*, accessed January 3, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/thisisourcity/>.

¹²¹ “Q 2017,” *Qideas.Org*, accessed January 3, 2017, <http://conference.qideas.org/>.

The call to engagement, however, is not limited to the arts. Anthropologist Laura

B. DeLind envisions a renewed civic agriculture where:

A sense of place and embodied work in a place are essential elements of civic agriculture and civic engagement. It is in literally feeling the “res publica” and in our individual and sweaty sacrifices to it that we begin to inhabit places in any deep and collective way.¹²²

DeLind recognizes that resistance to the powerful forces eroding a commitment to place in modernity will require collective toil and sacrifice, which she describes as a politics of place. This leads her to the local, consensus-driven political philosophy of Daniel Kemmis who states, “Public life can only be reclaimed by understanding, and then practicing, its connection to real, identifiable places.”¹²³ Reminiscent of Wendell Berry’s agrarianism, DeLind and Kemmis argue that the renewal of our common life comes through a recommitment to common practices among neighbors rather than abstract appeals to a universal humanity.

The emphasis on locality and shared practices resonates beyond the small movement for civic agriculture. DeLind cites the example of the Chiapas, an indigenous culture that refuses to surrender their commons to modernity. “They are,” DeLind writes, “in essence, rejecting the culture of material separation, market accumulation, and physical and spiritual displacement.”¹²⁴ Why, however, would they oppose modernity’s widely accepted standards of progress? According to DeLind, the Chiapas prefer their story of human flourishing to the version modernity offers.

¹²² Laura B. DeLind, “Place, Work, and Civic Agriculture: Common Fields for Cultivation,” *Agriculture and Human Values* 19, no. 3 (2002): 222.

¹²³ Daniel Kemmis, *Community and the Politics of Place* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 6.

¹²⁴ DeLind, “Place, Work, and Civic Agriculture,” 220.

The sustained growth of the local food movement in the United States represents another attempt to offer an alternative narrative of human flourishing. Similar to the Chiapas' embrace of a more local economy, the local food movement cultivates common practices that reconnect human beings to each other and to the places that sustain them. Some of the most public expressions of this movement are the rise of farm-to-table restaurants and farmer's markets on church lawns. These practical attempts to recover a sense of place resist modern agricultural methods and enjoy theological support from a growing body of literature on the ethics of food production and consumption.¹²⁵

The revival of place, however, is not without contradictions. A specific example from the local food movement illustrates hidden tensions. In 1924, George Frances Willis founded Avondale Estates, Georgia, a small planned community within the Atlanta metropolitan area, and named it after Shakespeare's Stratford-upon-Avon. The city became the proud birthplace of the Waffle House restaurant chain in 1955.¹²⁶ While the original diner now serves as a museum, a contemporary Waffle House restaurant is located nearby. The Atlanta-based company operates 2100 restaurants across America and famously never closes. The diner in Avondale Estates serves customers the same menu of inexpensive commercially-produced foods as any other Waffle House location.

In 2016, another breakfast restaurant opened on the same street in one of downtown Avondale Estates' distinctive Tudor-styled buildings, which were "designed to reinforce the English image" of the community and joined the National Register of

¹²⁵ For example, see Norman Wirzba, *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Jennifer R. Ayres, *Good Food: Grounded Practical Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013); Kyle T. Kramer, *A Time to Plant* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria Press, 2001), 103–20; Fred Bahnson, *Soil and Sacrament: A Spiritual Memoir of Food and Faith* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013).

¹²⁶ "Fast Facts on Avondale Estates," *City of Avondale Estates, Georgia*, accessed January 28, 2017, <http://avondaleestates.org/2202/Fast-Facts>.

Historic Places in 1986.¹²⁷ Rising Son is an independent restaurant that features seasonally-influenced dishes with locally-sourced ingredients, according to food writer Bob Townsend who covered the restaurant's opening.¹²⁸ The restaurant's concern to highlight local food finds expression on the menu, which informs guests of the local farms that produce various ingredients. Rising Son prepares every dish from original ingredients at a substantially higher price point than the Waffle House nearby. The owners also market the restaurant as a champion of community-supported agriculture to attract a cosmopolitan clientele unimpressed with or unaware of the Waffle House's respectively deeper roots in the local community.

The example is useful, because it illustrates the complexities and inconsistencies surrounding a commitment to place. Both restaurants may lay claim to locality, however, the local paper covered only one establishment with two separate reviews. In the same year the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* covered Rising Son, its coverage of Waffle House was limited to other metropolitan Atlanta locations, featuring multiple shootings, a failed health inspection, and the denial of permits to build a new location in another community's historic district.¹²⁹ Moreover, consistent with the elite profile of

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Bob Townsend, "First Look: Rising Son in Avondale Estates Offers a Taste of Blue-Collar Cooking," *Atlanta Restaurant Scene*, April 19, 2016, <http://atlantarestaurants.blog.ajc.com/2016/04/18/first-look-rising-son-in-avondale-estates-offers-a-taste-of-blue-collar-cooking/>.

¹²⁹ Steve Burns, "Waffle House Sued by Family Members of Fatal Shooting Victim," *AJC.Com*, April 21, 2016, <http://www.ajc.com/news/local/waffle-house-sued-family-members-fatal-shooting-victim/OKcVYckl0pIFpxYUWnz0FP/>; Lauren Foreman and Ellen Eldridge, "Atlanta Rapper Yung Mazi Shot at Buckhead Waffle House," *AJC.Com*, December 27, 2016, <http://www.ajc.com/news/waffle-house-executive-describes-video-atlanta-rapper-who-was-shot-buckhead/L66yKtciBJvKR17PW15QMI/>; Ana Santos, "DeKalb Waffle House Nearly Fails Health Inspection," *AJC.Com*, March 29, 2016, <http://www.ajc.com/news/local/report-dekalb-waffle-house-nearly-fails-health-inspection/mNltxJy7w1Th7XWS0Ac2MP/>; David Ibata, "At Issue: Should Waffle House Be Allowed in Historic Woodstock?," *AJC.Com*, July 16, 2016, <http://www.ajc.com/news/local/issue-should-waffle-house-allowed-historic-woodstock/kGB44CGwkf7aTLVYKIDTJP/>.

cosmopolitanism, the pricing of Rising Son's locally-sourced menu excludes some members of the local community from its patronage.

Such efforts to recover a sense of place and the tensions they manifest are not limited to the artistic community or the local food movement, but the discussion of arts and agriculture is sufficient to register the strong backlash against the loss of a sense of place in modern Western life. And this observation revisits the other question posed at the outset of this chapter: Is anything lost when theological concerns—and, specifically, missiological ones—are absent in contemporary discussions of place?

In response, a missionary perspective on place affirms on theological grounds the communitarian resistance to displacement evidenced in the former examples from the arts and agriculture, but it also recognizes the possibility that certain forms of displacement may constitute a spiritual discipline. This discipline, however, cuts in the opposite direction of the spirituality of Tuan, which seeks to escape the self by turning inward to move from place to placelessness. In contrast, a missionary approach redirects a focus from one's own place (and one's own self) to attend to the image of God reflected in other peoples and places. As such, the missionary life pursues a voluntary displacement from defining, yet nevertheless secondary, place-based sources of identity to discover a more basic source of identity in the triune God. Since our creaturely relationship with God involves an intrinsic relationship with and dependence upon the rest of God's creation (Genesis 1-3), the missionary approach rejects any quest for placelessness—whether the Buddhist or cosmopolitan variety—to set our relationship with place in the larger context of our relationship with the God who created all places. Therefore, even a

general theological perspective on place falls short of the particular contributions the development of a missionary perspective promises. And this claim begs the question explored in the next chapter: namely, how has the church understood place within her missionary practice over time?

In sum, why should Christianity be concerned with place? Because a commitment to place offers alternative ways of reading Christian Scripture and the world around us that strengthen the church's resilience against the rival narratives of modernity. Such readings equip the church to live more faithfully into a biblical vision of human flourishing between creation and consummation.

Ch. 3 Place as a Missionary Problem

As we noted in the previous chapter, the church in Western culture faces a predicament of place, but this begs the question, “How did this situation arise?” The relationship between the church’s commitment to place and her missionary practice provides an important starting point for responding to that question. While chapter 2 documented tensions between church and place from a wide angle, the present chapter will focus more narrowly on place as a specifically missionary problem. A critical assessment of place within five different historical paradigms of Christian mission reveals a diverse construal of commitments to place over time. More pointedly, the analysis exposes conflicting approaches to Christian witness that sometimes marginalize a commitment to place, while planting concomitant seeds of resistance to such distortions within the same paradigm. Such a diversity of perspectives on place and its function within and between paradigms presents an ambiguous picture of place in the history of Christian mission.

Assessing the History of Place in Christian Mission

Since mission theory has not always attended to place in the way that mission practice has done by necessity, assessment over time presents its own predicament. Namely, there is no uniform missionary perspective on place. Notwithstanding this difficulty, a historical understanding of the role of place in Christian mission proves essential to any constructive effort to recover a commitment to place in the contemporary church. To expedite a survey that otherwise could occupy multiple volumes—see, for

example, historian Kenneth Scott Latourette's magisterial *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (1937) in seven volumes¹— this chapter will draw on David J. Bosch's seminal study, *Transforming Mission* (1991), to provide a concise review of approaches to mission in previous periods of Christian history. The argument then moves from review to critical reflection on the role of place in each time period.² For readers unfamiliar with Bosch's work, this move requires some justification, beginning with some brief background on the author and text, before addressing its substance.

The influence of David J. Bosch's *Transforming Mission* within the field of mission studies in the 20th century is unparalleled. This broad reception reflects the way in which Bosch transcended strict boundaries in both his person and his scholarship.³ An Afrikaner who served as a Dutch Reformed missionary, Bosch publicly opposed apartheid and learned to speak fluent Xhosa—as well as Afrikaans, German and English. His scholarship displayed an encyclopedic character that moved across disciplinary boundaries with ease. Trained in New Testament under Oscar Cullman at Basel, Karl Barth's presence also influenced Bosch; and his fellow student, John Howard Yoder, introduced him to the Anabaptist tradition. At the height of apartheid, Bosch declined invitations to teach at prestigious American institutions to bear Christian witness among

¹ Beyond the pioneering global scope of Latourette's study, the work also draws a contrast with contemporaries by concentrating specifically on the history of the expansion of Christianity [Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, 7 vols. (New York, London: Harper & Brothers, 1937)].

² David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series, no. 16 (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1991); see also its reissue, which attests to the work's continuing influence within mission studies [David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th Anniversary edition (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2011)].

³ Biographical details in this paragraph draw broadly on the following sources: Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 2011; James A Scherer, "Bosch, David J, 1929-1992," *Missiology* 20, no. 4 (October 1992): 453–55; Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 273–77.

his own people. In this way, Bosch demonstrated his own missionary commitment to place, even though his scholarship does not address it in formal terms.

In spite of dense prose and documentation, no other text has shaped contemporary mission studies as significantly as *Transforming Mission*. Historian Andrew Walls described *Transforming Mission* as Bosch's "own *Summa Missiologica*."⁴ From a theological viewpoint, Alan Neely described it as "the most comprehensive and thorough study of the Christian mission done in this generation, if not this century."⁵ Likewise, Fr. Louis Luzbetak offered a similar assessment from the field of anthropology: "Unquestionably [*Transforming Mission*] stands out as the most comprehensive and enlightened work on mission models studied across Christian traditions and mission history."⁶ Translated into twelve languages, Martin Reppenhagen and Darrell L. Guder wrote an additional conclusion to the 20th anniversary edition, entitled "The Continuing Transformation of Mission: David J. Bosch's Living Legacy: 1991-2011," where they observe that *Transforming Mission* "has transformed the teaching of mission in many ways" with inclusion on theological curricula at institutions spanning diverse theologies and geographies.⁷ Finally, the publication of two companion texts by separate authors inspired by Bosch—one a compilation of primary historical texts referenced in

⁴ Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002), 277; missionary bishop Lesslie Newbigin offers the same judgment on the dust jacket of *Transforming Mission* [Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991].

⁵ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, dust jacket.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 2011, 533.

Transforming Mission and the other a reader's guide to it—confirmed the significance of Bosch's work.⁸

With regard to method, *Transforming Mission* explored mission history through a combination of biblical studies and historical theology. In particular, Bosch identified six historical periods or paradigms of Christian mission, which he adopted from theologian Hans Küng's work on paradigm shifts in theology. Kung himself had adapted paradigm theory from Thomas S. Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962).⁹ Bosch summarized Kuhn's approach:

In a nutshell, Kuhn's suggestion is that science does not really grow cumulatively (as if more and more knowledge and research bring us ever closer to final solutions of problems), but rather by way of "revolutions." A few individuals begin to perceive reality in ways quantitatively different from their predecessors and contemporaries, who are practicing "normal science." The small group of pioneers sense that the existing scientific model is riddled with anomalies and is unable to solve emerging problems. They begin to search for a new model or theoretical structure, or (Kuhn's favorite term) a new "paradigm," one that is, as it were, waiting in the wings, ready to replace the old (Kuhn 1970:82f).¹⁰

Likewise, Christians adopted radically different paradigms of mission in response to the changing needs of different periods of history.

However, Bosch qualified the use of paradigm theory within Christian theology of mission in important respects from its use in the natural sciences. First, old theological paradigms often survive alongside newer ones and sometimes experience a revival in later periods (e.g., Bosch cites the "rediscovery" of Paul's letter to the Romans by

⁸ Norman E. Thomas, ed., *Classic Texts in Mission and World Christianity*, American Society of Missiology Series, no. 20 (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995); Stan Nussbaum, *A Reader's Guide To Transforming Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series 37 (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2005).

⁹ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

¹⁰ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, 184.

Augustine, Luther and Barth in different periods).¹¹ Next, new paradigms often retain elements of the old paradigms they replace.¹² Finally, people sometimes hold simultaneous commitments to multiple paradigms in the history of the church.¹³ Even with those qualifications in view, the application of Kuhn's theory to Christian mission proves useful for interpreting the conspicuous shifts in mission models across time.

Turning to substance, Bosch argued, "It is neither possible nor proper to attempt a revised definition of mission without taking a thorough look at the vicissitudes of mission and the missionary idea during the past twenty centuries of Christian church history."¹⁴ That thesis informed his opening exegetical study of Matthew, Luke-Acts and the letters of Paul, in which Bosch identified multiple missionary perspectives among early Christian witnesses. Next, Bosch appropriated K ung's periodization of Christian history to consider "the distinctive understanding of Christian mission" in the following epochs:

1. The apocalyptic paradigm of primitive Christianity.
2. The Hellenistic paradigm of the patristic period.
3. The medieval Roman Catholic paradigm.
4. The Protestant (Reformation) paradigm.
5. The modern Enlightenment paradigm.
6. The emerging ecumenical paradigm.¹⁵

Before applying Bosch's framework to review the role of place in mission history, three further comments on context are necessary.

First, in his treatment of historical theology as in his biblical studies, Bosch recognized the way in which context shaped the Christian message and mission indelibly.

¹¹ Ibid., 186.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 8.

¹⁵ Ibid., 181-82.

Each generation “wrestled with the question of what the Christian faith and, by implication, the Christian mission meant for them.”¹⁶ That this process produced different understandings of the tradition did not bother Bosch but rather underscored a core Christian conviction. Against arguments for a single objective interpretation of Christian tradition, Bosch claimed:

It is an illusion to believe that we can penetrate to a pure gospel unaffected by any cultural and other human accretions. Even in the earliest tradition the sayings of Jesus were already sayings about Jesus (c.f., Schottroff and Stegemann 1986:2).... Nobody receives the gospel passively; each one as a matter of course reinterprets it.... [T]his circumstance is not something we should lament; it is an inherent feature of the Christian faith, since it concerns the Word made flesh.¹⁷

Christian faith, Bosch reasoned, required interpretation from the outset, given its origin in the incarnation of God in Christ in a particular time and place.

Bosch was not alone in this assessment. In a similar theological turn, Walls echoed Bosch’s incarnational claim:

The divine Son did not become humanity in general, but a specific man in a specific place and culture; he is, as it were, made flesh again in other places and cultures as he is received there by faith.... Christian faith, then, rests on a massive divine act of translation, and proceeds by successive lesser acts of translation into the complexes of experiences and relationships that form our social identities in different parts of the world auditorium.¹⁸

Informed by his study of global Christian history, Walls agreed that translation is a necessary feature of the interpretation of Christian faith.

¹⁶ Ibid., 182.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 47.

This linguistic dependence of Christian faith on translation pointed to a larger empirical reality that grounded these theological judgments. Historian Lamin Sanneh confirmed:

Since Jesus did not write or dictate the Gospels, his followers had little choice but to adopt a translated form of his message. The missionary environment of the early church made translation and the accompanying interpretation natural and necessary.¹⁹

Indeed, Sanneh concluded, “Christianity seems unique in being the only world religion that is transmitted without the language or originating culture of its founder.”²⁰ Thus, from its inception, Christian faith wed itself to local cultures, languages, and the places that produced them via acts of translation. In that sense, the entire periodization that follows reflected an implicit theology of place.

Second, such a concern for context, and the tacit commitments to place it entailed, assumed different forms in different times and places. The language of translation that animated the writings of Sanneh and Walls, for instance, gave way to the language of ‘home’ in philosopher Leroy Rouner’s work on the displacement of refugees or, more specifically, the ‘Christian home’ in Dana Robert’s study of Anglo-American mission theory in the 19th-20th centuries.²¹ In previous chapters, we considered the emphasis on the land in Brueggemann’s work, the doctrines of Creation and Incarnation, and references to the local congregation and parish. Later in this study, Walls’ discussion of the pilgrim and indigenizing principles within Christianity also receive attention. While

¹⁹ Lamin O. Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity?: The Gospel beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 97.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 98.

²¹ Leroy S. Rouner, ed., *The Longing for Home* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996); Dana L. Robert, ed., *Converting Colonialism: Visions and Realities in Mission History, 1706-1914*, *Studies in the History of Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 134–65.

that short list does not exhaust the factors under consideration, each of these concepts in its own way contributes to an understanding of the importance of place in Christian faith. Although they are not identical and often make only implicit reference to place, they nevertheless share common conceptual ground.

Finally, Bosch recognizes that the contemporary world faces another paradigm shift. Not unlike the sixteenth century, when the modern world was born, the transition between late modernity and the world to come remains incomplete. Thus, Bosch concludes his periodization of Christian history with a discussion of postmodernism and “the elements of an Emerging Ecumenical paradigm,” which identifies fourteen major features.²² Instead of a coherent model, Bosch gathers the threads of a quilt still being sewn and then looks for patterns. Since several of the elements of the emerging ecumenical paradigm have antecedents in earlier periods and our present chapter’s purposes are historical in nature, the argument that follows will conclude with Bosch’s Enlightenment paradigm and delay engagement with the most promising features of the emerging paradigm until later chapters.²³ With that awareness, let us turn to the Early Church.²⁴

²² Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, 368–510.

²³ For example, perhaps the most significant feature Bosch identifies in his Emerging Ecumenical paradigm is the *missio Dei*, which receives separate treatment in chapter 4 below. In similar fashion, evangelism, contextualization, inculturation, common witness and eschatology (“action in hope”), each factor prominently in chapter 6’s study of Newbigin’s writings. Therefore, the present omission of those elements from this chapter serves to later underscore their significance.

²⁴ With its origins in Scripture, the first paradigm serves frequently as a standard against which later paradigms are compared. Consequently, the missionary paradigm of the Early Church receives more substantial discussion than other eras in this chapter, with the exception of the modern period, in keeping with the present study’s critical and constructive interests in contemporary church practice. The intervening periods receive a concise review of their missionary paradigm, along with a few illustrations of a commitment to place within it.

The Early Church Missionary Paradigm

Based on his distillation of the Gospels and Paul's writings, Bosch identified five features of the missionary paradigm of the early church. First, Christian mission centered on the person of Jesus.²⁵ The crucified and risen Messiah conducted a public ministry of signs, wonders, and challenging teachings that heralded the in-breaking reign of God, which he claimed to fulfill (Luke 4:16-30). Second, mission in the early church was revolutionary in nature.²⁶ Amid the political demands of the Roman Empire, Bosch attested, "Christians confessed Jesus as Lord of all lords—the most revolutionary political demonstration imaginable."²⁷ Paul stated this plainly in his letter to the Romans: "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him" (10:12). Together, these two claims subverted the empire of the day but in ways enigmatic to many contemporary observers who hoped for a new political establishment.

Third, Christian mission transformed relationships that in turn transgressed all manner of boundaries.²⁸ Alongside the example of Jesus, whose company earned him the reputation of a drunkard, glutton, and friend of extortionists and sinners (Matthew 11:19, Luke 7:34), Paul extended the theo-political claim of Romans 10 beyond the Hebrew-Hellenist divide to address other boundaries, saying, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians

²⁵ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, 47.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

3:27-28; Colossians 3:11). The believer's identity in Christ transformed the basis for social relations within the community, which opened new possibilities beyond it. Thus, the *ekklesia* functioned as what philosopher Charles Taylor might call a new social imaginary within the Near Eastern world.²⁹ Moreover, Tertullian reported that by 200 CE consistent social transgressions earned the early Christian community the moniker of the "third race" after "the Romans and Greeks (the first race) and the Jews (the second)."³⁰

The fourth feature of the early church in mission was the incipient character of God's reign. While inaugurated in Jesus, God's reign is not yet fulfilled. That claim about the kingdom of God also describes the church's ministry. In Newbigin's words, the church stands as a "sign, instrument and foretaste" of the kingdom but still awaits its final consummation.³¹

Finally, weakness marked the missionary paradigm of the early church, which had witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus and received his invitation to "take up their cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). Bosch cited Hans von Campenhausen's claim that "Martyrdom and mission belong together. Martyrdom is especially at home on the

²⁹ Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, Public Planet Books (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1215/9780822385806>; Taylor identifies three characteristics of "modern social imaginaries" that apply also to the early church in its context: the economy, the public sphere, and self-governance. The *oikonomia tou theou* or household of God in the New Testament (Ephesians 2:19, 1 Timothy 3:15, 1 Peter 4:7, Titus 1:7) embodies an alternative economics, especially but not limited to the common purse in Acts 2 and the generous care for widows and orphans, and likewise the creation of a new social sphere free of traditional cultural, social, religious, and gender barriers. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the *ekklesia* under the lordship of Christ made these innovations possible in the early church.

³⁰ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, 48.

³¹ Lesslie Newbigin, *Sign of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981).

mission field.”³² The witness (in Greek, *martyria*) of the early church under Nero (54-68 CE) validated that claim.³³

Assessing Place in the Early Church

What role then does a commitment to place play in the era of the early church? The question requires some additional background on the nature and context of Christian community at the time. For Bosch, early Christianity was “a living organism” that cannot be reduced to static accounts of development pitting Jewish believers against Gentiles.³⁴ First, while culturally distinct, a common set of beliefs and practices united the two communities. “Both groups,” reported Bosch, “confessed Jesus as the risen Messiah and practiced baptism as condition for incorporation into the new community; both agreed that they shared an identity that was new and distinctive and normative (cf Meyer 1986:169).”³⁵ One also might add table fellowship to that list of common practices. While Jewish dietary law strained table fellowship at times, Paul enjoined the practice and developed a liturgy for that purpose (1 Corinthians 11:23-29). Next, the pluralistic nature of Judaism at the time allowed early Christian communities to continue to utilize synagogues and the temple for worship and also welcomed “proselytes or God-fearers,” like Cornelius (Acts 10), into the community.³⁶ Finally, Bosch reminded his audience of the varied perspectives within each community, but especially the Jewish believers, among whom he identified a centrist group with left and right flanks that later caused

³² Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, 50.

³³ Mark Galli, “Persecution in the Early Church: A Gallery of the Persecuting Emperors,” *Christian History*, accessed January 30, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-27/persecution-in-early-church-gallery-of-persecuting-emperors.html>.

³⁴ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, 44.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 41–41, 45.

troubles for Paul.³⁷ The early Christian community was culturally diverse, yet also shared significant commonality.

Most significant for mission in the early church was a common conviction about the inclusion of Gentiles in the new community. Bosch explained:

The inclusion of the Gentiles in God's saving act was integral to the faith convictions of both *hebraioi* and *hellenistai*. Whereas the former expected their inclusion to be brought about by the eschatological pilgrimage of the nations to Jerusalem, promised in the Old Testament, the latter believed that the Gentiles would be brought in through an historical missionary outreach of the church (Meyer 1986:67, 82, 206).³⁸

While the means of that inclusion were disputed, the end was shared and embodied first in Antioch.³⁹ A diverse urban congregation, Ray Bakke commented that Antioch crossed cultural, socioeconomic, racial, and political boundaries in its leadership team and membership (Acts 11:19-30, 13:1).⁴⁰ That combination of cultures inspired a mission beyond its immediate community. Bosch stated:

Through the ministry of Paul and Barnabas the Antioch church became a community with a concern for people they had never met—people living on Cyprus, the mainland of Asia Minor, and elsewhere. They decided to send missionaries there and went ahead and commissioned their two most gifted and experienced leaders to go (Acts 13:1f). This far-reaching decision and action was, however, not peripheral to the early Christian community, a kind of expendable extra. Rather, in retrospect it becomes clear “that Christianity had never been more itself, more consistent with Jesus and more evidently en route to its own future, than in the launching of the world mission” (Meyer 1986:206).⁴¹

Antioch signaled Christianity's future beyond Israel, while nevertheless retaining Israel's God at her center.

³⁷ Ibid., 43.

³⁸ Ibid., 44.

³⁹ Ibid., 41–42.

⁴⁰ Raymond J. Bakke, *A Theology as Big as the City* (IVP Academic, 1997), 139–47.

⁴¹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, 44.

Such a vision, while eventually embraced as Acts and Paul's letters document, was not received well initially in Jerusalem. Historian Stephen Neill suggested that Bosch's account downplayed the depth of tensions surrounding the assimilation of the Gentiles into the largely Jewish early Christian community. Neill then reminded readers of the larger developmental context of religion in which the early Jesus movement flourished:

Most of the religions of mankind have been local, and even tribal, in their character. 'For all peoples walk each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our god for ever and ever' (Micah 4:5). As in old days every city had its temple and its god, so to this day among simple peoples every tribe and every clan has its spirits many of whom are ancestors, but some of whom represent the hostile and terrifying powers of nature. You cannot worship my spirits, since you have neither connection with them nor claim upon them; neither can I worship yours, for the same reason. Nor can these gods be worshipped outside the territory which is theirs in the sense that it lies under their protection. These ancient ideas are found in almost every part of the Old Testament.⁴²

While readers may criticize Neill's paternalistic language, he buttresses his argument with examples from biblical traditions surrounding David (1 Samuel 26:19) and Ruth (1:16) that confirm the territorial nature of faith and worship in those days.

The early church steeped in Judaism was also steeped in a theological orientation to place. For most Jews, including Jesus, this connection to place centered in Jerusalem and was taken for granted. After acknowledging threads of universalism woven throughout the Old Testament, Neill still admitted:

All this, of course, was not immediately evident to the little group of Jews who gradually became convinced of the truth of the resurrection, and met

⁴² Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, vol. 6, The Penguin History of the Church (London; New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 13.

in Jerusalem to constitute what, by a slight anachronism, we may call the first Church. Jerusalem was still to them the centre of the world: this was where the Lord had died and risen; this was where he would shortly descend again from heaven, to proclaim his sovereignty and to accomplish what was still unfulfilled in the purposes of God.⁴³

This tight relationship between the church and Jerusalem would last until three factors undermined it: a delayed Parousia, the shift from a centripetal to centrifugal mission, and ultimately, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE.⁴⁴

With that description of early Christianity in mind, Agnew's three-part definition of place as a location, a local and a sense of place provides a helpful lens for analysis. With regard to location, the early church in mission experienced a tension between the Semitic focus on a relatively small area of Palestine (recalling Hargis and Neill's respective claims in chapter 2 concerning the limited geography of Jesus' own ministry) and the missionary imagination of Gentile believers. Most notably, the church's expansion to Rome, and Paul's missionary journeys across southern Europe and Asia Minor, extended the geographical boundaries of Jesus' own ministry by a considerable distance.

But the most significant expression of a commitment to place was not so much the itineraries of biblical figures but rather the ubiquitous designation of local Christian assemblies in Scripture. Newbigin observed "the very elementary point that in the New Testament the Church is always and only designated by reference to two realities: one,

⁴³ Ibid., 6:19.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 6:20–21.

God in Christ, and the other, the place where the Church is.”⁴⁵ For Newbigin, both realities were determinative, but our present focus on place directs attention to the latter reference point.

Newbigin’s comment on location registered a strong theological concern about place. Noting the New Testament authors’ consistent designation of the church as the *ekklesia Theou*, Newbigin explained the term’s historical and theological significance:

There was an enormous number of words available in the contemporary vocabulary of that Hellenistic world to describe religious groups of people who were drawn together by a common quest for salvation under some kind of name and with some kind of discipline and tradition of learning. There were a lot of Greek words for this, like *heranos* and *thiasos* and so on, and opponents of Christianity like Celsus constantly used those words to describe the Church. But in the first five centuries in the Christian Church you never find those words used. The Church never defines itself in the language that was used by these various religious groups composed of people in the quest of salvation. They used only this word—*ekklesia*.... which is the secular word for the assembly to which every citizen is summoned and expected to attend, in which the business of the city is dealt with. Paul always uses the word, all the New Testament writers use the term *ekklesia Theou*, the assembly of God—the assembly, in other words, to which all are summoned without exception. And it is summoned not by the town clerk but by God—not by Peter, not by Apollos, not by Paul, but by God.⁴⁶

The terminology New Testament writers employed for the church, claimed Newbigin, revealed a public missiological commitment to the particular community in which God summoned and, following John 20:19-23, sent the gathered assembly. The triune God gathered the early church not only *in* but in some sense *for* that place.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Lesslie Newbigin, *A Word in Season: Perspectives on Christian World Missions*, ed. Eleanor Jackson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 50–51.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 51–52.

⁴⁷ Newbigin’s conception of the “church *for* this place” factors prominently in chapters 5 and 6.

More, too, must be said about the church as a locale. As a community that transgressed boundaries and created a new social imaginary, the early church, especially when located in commercial capitals, became a seat of cultural exchange where places and place-based identities were both celebrated and relativized. For example, the composition of the church at Antioch's leadership denoted race, nationality, religious background, and political connections (Acts 13:1), which suggested the significance of those distinctions to the local community and, more broadly, to early readers of Luke's history. But in Christ, those identities underwent conversion. Paul insisted:

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:16-17).

Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, and Saul retained their past identities, but those identities were transformed in Christ such that the categories of race, socioeconomic status, and gender no longer obtained in the same ways as they had in the past—at least within the locale of the church (Colossians 3:11, Galatians 3:28).

One of the great struggles of the early church, as recorded in Acts and the letters of Paul, was how to reconcile the diversity of the early Christian communities. In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul claimed that this work of peacemaking found its center, not unlike the early church's missionary paradigm, in the person of Christ Jesus:

For he himself is our peace, who has bade us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility (Ephesians 2:14-16).

Paul identified Jesus and his cross as the place of reconciliation, which created the possibility of a new ecclesial community of former strangers and aliens now reconciled to God and each other. From this communion of saints across time, God is at work fashioning a “dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (2:22).

The church in her common life, under the lordship of Christ and indwelt by the Spirit, replicated the work of the cross to reconcile a diverse humanity to God and one another. The divine work of reconciliation that began in the cross of Christ, found present instantiation in the local congregation, and anticipated a future fulfillment in the triune God. Thereby, the church expressed a tacit commitment to place from the cross to consummation. The new eschatological community that stood at the center of the Early Church missionary paradigm embodied a commitment to place in the local *ekklesia*.

The Eastern Church Missionary Paradigm

Bosch identified six features of the missionary paradigm of the Eastern Church during the second through sixth centuries CE. But perhaps even more determinative of Christian mission during this period was the nature of the church’s relationship to the state. The empire’s adoption of Christianity under Constantine the Great in the fourth century ensured that “the objectives of the state coincided with the objectives of the church and vice versa,” argued Bosch, “and this applied to mission as well (Stamoolis 1986:56-60).”⁴⁸ While such an establishment of church and state shaped mission for better and worse, the Western church too often dismissed the Eastern Church’s conception of mission blithely on cultural rather than theological grounds. While

⁴⁸ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, 205–6.

establishment at times led to compromise, it also reflected a deep commitment to place, which required Eastern Orthodoxy to navigate a close and complicated relationship with the state. The distinctiveness of the Eastern Church's approach to mission also made it prone to later misinterpretation, especially by Protestants.⁴⁹

The characteristics of the Eastern Church paradigm began with the apologetic development of Christian doctrine in the context of intellectual challenge.⁵⁰ Despite later tendencies toward nationalism and ethnocentrism, the development of a disciplined and systematic theology for the church amid competing religious and ethical options advanced the church's missionary interests from Greco-Roman culture to the present. Next, the Eastern paradigm understood mission to have an ecclesial shape.⁵¹ That is, the church was not only the means of mission but also its end. Thus, the mission of the church found expression primarily through the incorporation of new people into its liturgical life rather than any externalized activism, whether social or spiritual in nature. Third, given the ecclesial shape of mission, the performance of the eucharistic liturgy at the heart of its worship was for Orthodoxy an act of mission. Bosch noted that "mission is thus centripetal rather than centrifugal" since "the witnessing community is the community in worship; in fact, the worshipping community is in and of itself an act of witness (Bria 1980:9f)."⁵² Fourth, the unity of the church, as the body of Christ, bore

⁴⁹ Ibid., 206.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 207; for a similar argument from a postliberal Protestant perspective, see Bryan P. Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007).

⁵² Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, 207–8.

witness to the unity of the Godhead (John 17:20-26) in the world.⁵³ Fifth, the kenotic love of God expressed preeminently in Christ Jesus found expression in the church's life among those beyond her membership.⁵⁴ Finally, the Eastern paradigm upheld the cosmic nature of salvation.⁵⁵ Here, the unity of the church found a corollary in the unity of all creation within the triune God's work of redemption. In this way, the church's life in the world reflected her participation in what has been called the "liturgy after the Liturgy (cf Bria 1980:66-71)."⁵⁶

Assessing Place in Eastern Orthodoxy

What role then did place play in the mission of the Eastern Church? For starters, Bosch acknowledged that even "when it was at loggerheads with the empire, the [Eastern] church experienced and viewed the empire as the primary sphere of its activities and expansion; the "world," the "ecumene," was the Roman Empire."⁵⁷ With a horizon only as broad as the empire, Bosch concluded that the church's mission was coterminous with "the empire's borders (cf Holl 1974:3; von Soden 1974:25)."⁵⁸ While the Roman Empire was obviously much broader than the local community summoned in the *ekklesia Theou* of the New Testament, the Eastern Church in mission still retained a discernible geographic focus mapped on the dominant culture.

Bosch, however, criticized the mistaken tendency in this period to dismiss Christian missionary expansion beyond the empire. Beyond the reach of the Roman

⁵³ Ibid., 208.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 208–9.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 210.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 203.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Empire in Asia, he reported that the church “also expressed itself through the liturgies of other cultures: Coptic, Syriac, Maronite, Armenian, Ethiopian, Indian and even Chinese.”⁵⁹ Neill confirmed that claim, stating, “Before the great change which took place in the Constantinian era, the Church had spread far beyond the imperial frontiers.”⁶⁰ Thus, a commitment to place found expression through the translation of Christian faith into multiple cultural forms. This incarnation of the church in new cultures reflected the same commitment to place as the Eastern Church’s experience of converting and being converted by the culture within the borders of the empire.

A commitment to place took shape in several other ways under the Eastern missionary paradigm, but their foundation remained the close identification of Orthodoxy with the culture in which it was planted. This commitment to place was so strong at times that critics disparaged the relationship as a form of syncretism. But as Sanneh acknowledged, the “process whereby the Christian message is appropriated into existing local frameworks but still remains recognizably Christian” was untidy at best.⁶¹ Part of that process was specifically theological in nature where a commitment to place found expression through what Morice-Brubaker described as the Patristic development of “the structures of human knowledge—and the ways in which human knowledge involves place-freighted and space-freighted activities like delimitation and location.”⁶²

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, 6:42; Neill offers a survey of regions beyond the empire to support his claim.

⁶¹ Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity?*, 43–44.

⁶² Sarah Morice Brubaker, “The Place of the Spirit: Toward a Trinitarian Theology of Location” (Ph.D., University of Notre Dame, 2011), 96,

Although an abstract task, the Patristic effort to infuse the larger culture with Christian underpinnings was one of the most ambitious intellectual projects in the history of Christianity and exhibited a strong consciousness of place. Another theological expression of a commitment to place appeared in the apologetic work of the church in the second century. In his *First and Second Apologies*, Justin Martyr identified the *logoi spermatikoi* or seeds of the Word, which represented traces of the divine logos (John 1:1-18) within pagan culture. In Justin's view, those continuities appeared within classical Greek philosophy. While diffuse or incomplete, Justin nevertheless recognized the "implanted seed of the Logos which was grafted into them" that prepared the culture for the eucharistic proclamation of the gospel and provided the church with a basis for identification with the local culture.⁶³ Neill reported similar work undertaken in Alexandria:

The great Alexandrian Christian thinkers and teachers Clement (c. 150-215) and Origen (c. 185-254), while standing firm in the orthodox doctrine of the revelation of the Father through the Son who is also the divine Word [Logos], were able to accord generous recognition to Greek philosophy as a true preparation for the Gospel of Christ, and to believe that the God who guided the destinies of Israel was active also in the history of the Greeks.⁶⁴

If the gospel was to win people's hearts, the Orthodox Church recognized it would need to inhabit the culture's patterns of speech and thought. Such a deep identification moved beyond a mere commitment to location.

<http://search.proquest.com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/pqdtglobal/docview/922575102/abstract/8FE104CED1EC4EF6PQ/1>.

⁶³ Alister E. McGrath, *The Christian Theology Reader* (Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1995), 4; Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford, UK; Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994), 10–11.

⁶⁴ Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, 6:32.

With reference again to Agnew, the Eastern paradigm also addressed the church as a concrete locale of interaction. Specifically, the Eastern Church's liturgy enacted salvation and her unity invited others to "taste and see that the Lord is good" through participation in her common life (Psalm 34:8).⁶⁵ Moreover, the ecclesial shape of mission in the Eastern Church fueled expectations for an especially strong sense of place within the local congregation. On this point, however, the Orthodox mission paradigm proved ambiguous. While the mystical aura of Orthodox worship exuded a strong sense of place for worshippers, the largely homogenous cultural identity of established national churches weakened the welcome to outsiders and thus diminished the church's witness to those not naturally at home in her fellowship.

Finally, the "cosmic dimension" of salvation in the Eastern paradigm held greater potential for the development of a robust doctrine of Creation than more anthropocentrically-focused soteriologies. Consequently, Eastern Orthodoxy exhibited even greater potential for a robust commitment to place. Unfortunately, the Eastern Church never realized that promise. The greatest strength of the Eastern Church's missionary paradigm in relation to place remained its incarnational model.

The Medieval Roman Catholic Missionary Paradigm

Bosch identified six features of the missionary paradigm of the medieval Roman Catholic Church. Spanning 600-1500 CE, the medieval period marked a time of turmoil in the both the world and the church. Latourette dedicated a volume of his history of

⁶⁵ These emphases anticipate the work of theologian Philip Sheldrake on the way in which the Eucharist itself creates a place of intersection and reconciliation. See Philip Sheldrake, "Practicing Catholic 'Place'-The Eucharist," *Horizons* 28, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 163-82.

Christian expansion to the era under the title “The Thousand Years of Uncertainty.”⁶⁶

Less than a century after Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, the Goths would sack Rome in 410 CE. Neill reported:

The vast majority [of invaders] were pagan and hardly touched by civilization. For five hundred years the major task of the Western Church was that of wrestling with the barbarians and with barbarism in the effort to make their conversion something more than nominal; in the process, it found itself transformed from an imperial into a feudal Church.⁶⁷

While Neill’s account disclosed his own cultural bias, he nevertheless captured a sense of alarm that spread across the Roman Empire. Amid this destabilization of early Western culture appeared Augustine of Hippo, whose “monumental *De Civitate Dei*,” Bosch opined, “succeeded in showing a way forward.”⁶⁸ Although Alaric’s capture of Rome (410 CE) and Augustine’s life (354-430) predated the traditional dating of the medieval period, Bosch and others, including Hans Küng and Krister Stendahl, viewed Augustine not only as the quintessential representative of the Western tradition and “inaugurator of the medieval paradigm,” but also as a life lived in direct response to the crises of his day.⁶⁹ Countering not only the barbarian hordes but also other Christians, including the Donatists and Pelagius, there is a general consensus that Augustine’s writings shaped the course of Western civilization—and the medieval Roman Catholic missionary paradigm—more than any other figure.

⁶⁶ Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, vol. 11; cited in Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, 6:52.

⁶⁷ Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, 6:53–54.

⁶⁸ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, 215.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

Due partly to the sheer length of the medieval period, partly to the conflicts and change it endured, and partly to its substantial contributions to the present order, scholarly assessments of this uncertain age abound. Neill's overwhelmingly negative portrayal of the era found a foil in Bosch's measured, if not apologetic account. For example, Bosch referenced Newbigin's discussion of the church's responsibility amid a failing empire no less than three times in his description of the medieval paradigm. Acknowledging the failures of Christendom at many points, nevertheless Newbigin asked:

When the ancient classical world, which had seemed so brilliant and so all-conquering, ran out of spiritual fuel and turned to the church as the one society that could hold a disintegrating world together, should the church have refused the appeal and washed its hands of responsibility for the political order?⁷⁰

Making appeal to the history of Israel and the ministry of Jesus, Newbigin (and Bosch) answered the question negatively. However imperfect the implementation, the church had an obligation to contribute her vision and gifts to the common good. Those imperfections and, even more so, the logic that produced them, drove John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas to very different conclusions.⁷¹

For present purposes, however, the debate over whether or not the church should have attempted to underwrite empire is less useful than Robert's description of the

⁷⁰ Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 101.

⁷¹ In *The Politics of Jesus*, Yoder pointedly criticizes the way in which "this kind of reasoning" with specific reference to "Constantine saving the Roman Empire" (234) renders the teaching and example of Jesus largely irrelevant within mainstream ethical discourse (17, 15) [John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 15–17, 234]; Hauerwas describes the invitation Constantine offered the church in very different terms than Newbigin, as more of a bargain for power that required compromise from the outset [Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1989), 21–22].

processes of Christianization that developed within it, especially from the perspective of converts. Robert explained:

The attraction of Catholicism for the clan leaders and monarchs of Europe was that it welcomed them into a broader worldview, yet served their local needs. With the adoption of Catholicism, tribal elites attached themselves to the expanding concept of Christendom. Clusters of interlinked Christian tribes developed over the centuries into linguistic and cultural blocs—the forerunners of nation-states. In the fourteenth century the last non-Christian tribes of Europe were defeated, and the basic geographic outline of European Christendom was complete.⁷²

Moreover, Robert concluded that “conversion to Christianity in Europe took place on multiple levels,” including the broad appeal of social order, the self-interested appeal of rulers to divine political sanction, the desire of religious leaders to bear witness, and the solace and healing of church rituals in the lives of peasants.⁷³ Everyone along that continuum participated in the adaptation of “the Christian gospel to the cultures and peoples of what today is called Europe.”⁷⁴ What features characterized that process?

Within that larger historical context, Bosch distinguished six features of the medieval mission paradigm. The first feature, which decisively influenced the entire paradigm, was the individualization of salvation.⁷⁵ In response to Pelagius’ optimistic view of human nature, which effectively reduced Christ from mediator of salvation to supreme role model, Augustine constructed the doctrines of original sin and predestination. What humankind needed most was not a patient spiritual pedagogy toward *theosis*, as the Greek Fathers suggested, but rather, interpreted Bosch, “a radical

⁷² Dana L. Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 21–22.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, 215.

conversion experience and an encounter with the irresistible grace of God in Christ.”⁷⁶ Paul’s teaching on justification led Augustine to break from the emphasis on the Incarnation, so central to the Eastern tradition, to embrace the cross of Christ as the center of Christian faith and thought. The cosmic salvation of Orthodoxy became the personal salvation of the sinner through the subjective appropriation of Christ’s objective victory on the cross. This emphasis on the individual thus became a hallmark of Western civilization and a focus of the Western Church’s discipleship and later mission practice.

The second feature of the medieval Roman Catholic paradigm—the ecclesiasticization of salvation—emerged in Augustine’s response to the Donatists in North Africa.⁷⁷ While the controversy centered on what historian Alister McGrath described as “a rigorist view of the church and sacraments,”⁷⁸ Bosch perceived a critical missionary insight in Augustine’s approach, which “insisted that the church was not a refuge from the world but existed for the sake of a world that was hurting.”⁷⁹ The downside of Augustine’s position was his ascription of “authority and holiness” to the Church on an intrinsic basis rather than its empirical demonstration. Since the apostles founded the church, for Augustine it followed that to be in communion with the Church was to be in communion with God. Likewise, the corollary was also true. Shorn of its original context centuries earlier, church leaders adopted Cyprian’s claim of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* as an article of faith “applied universally to the Roman Catholic

⁷⁶ Ibid., 216.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 217.

⁷⁸ McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 496, 407–10; the Donatists feared the corruption of the liturgy and sacraments, and therefore insisted on a rigorous view of moral discipline and church membership.

⁷⁹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, 218.

Church,” Bosch recounted.⁸⁰ Between the reconstruction of salvation on individual and ecclesiastical terms, Augustine offered a major reinterpretation of the Christian tradition to that point.

The remaining features in various ways all addressed the church’s relationship to the world. Mission between church and state was the third feature, by which Augustine’s two kingdoms doctrine—one heavenly, the other earthly—attempted to preserve the spiritual from the worldly but ultimately, Bosch concluded, “compromised the church to the state and to secular power,” including her missionary practice.⁸¹ Next, the compromised relationship between church and state led to direct and indirect missionary wars to restore apostates and convert pagans.⁸² While Augustine may not have endorsed the latter form of warfare, his approach to the Donatists and later writings on just war laid the foundation for it. Moreover, this sanctified view of coercion found ultimate justification in Augustine’s earlier reinterpretation of salvation: conversion by the sword could be exercised for the good of pagans who could not understand properly the stakes of their personal eternal fates apart from the Church. Fifth, colonialism and mission emerged as a feature of the medieval missionary paradigm later in the period as the European age of discovery began and Muslims advanced on Constantinople in 1453. Bosch summarized the situation: “Colonialism and mission, as a matter of course, were interdependent; the right to have colonies carried with it the duty to Christianize the

⁸⁰ Ibid.; Cyprian made this statement in the third century CE under different conditions. Translation: “outside the [Roman Catholic] church there is no salvation.”

⁸¹ Ibid., 221.

⁸² Ibid., 222.

colonized.”⁸³ The application of Augustine’s thought within the Church evolved over a thousand years to undergird the conquest of non-Christian people and lands.

Finally, the last feature of the medieval missionary paradigm offered hope in an era otherwise described as Europe’s “dark ages.” For Bosch, the development of monasticism, including its asceticism, lifestyle, learning, and resilience, represented a major advance within medieval Christianity.⁸⁴ Although not designed for missionary purposes, Bosch argued monastic orders “were permeated by a missionary dimension.”⁸⁵ For example, Celtic monastics merged “*peregrinatio*,” an ascetic pilgrimage, with mission as they ministered to strangers encountered along the way. Conversely, Benedictine monks took a vow of stability to remain committed to a particular people and place.⁸⁶

The intermingling of these two monastic cultures in Northumbria produced a missionary sending culture exemplified by Boniface of Crediton, who undertook a *peregrinatio* to Frisia, east of the Rhine, for missionary purposes and became known as “the apostle to Germany.”⁸⁷ Robert added salient details to Bosch’s account of Boniface, including the papal sponsorship of his mission with funding from the Frankish king and,

⁸³ Ibid., 227.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 230, 232.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 233.

⁸⁶ For a collection of source materials related to the Benedictine vow of stability and its contemporary appropriation in the New Monasticism, see Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *The Wisdom of Stability: Rooting Faith in a Mobile Culture* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2010).

⁸⁷ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, 235.

ultimately, his death by a robber's axe in 754 CE as he evangelized Druids.⁸⁸ Boniface demonstrated that even monastics sometimes needed patrons.

Assessing Place in Medieval Roman Catholicism

Evaluating commitments to place in the medieval Roman Catholic missionary paradigm proves somewhat difficult in comparison to earlier eras. Augustine's reinterpretation of salvation along ecclesiastical lines did not possess the same potential for the cultivation of a sense place as the incarnational model of Orthodoxy, since the action and authority of the Roman Catholic Church resided largely in her hierarchy. Thus, the church was the locale of salvation but functioned more as a dispenser of it rather than an embodiment of a new, local eschatological community. While the coterminous extension of the borders of the Church with the empire under Christendom involved a conscious mapping of geography, the mere appetite for geographic expansion did not represent a commitment to place, only a commitment to its conquest.⁸⁹ In Agnew's terms, the political expansion of the church's borders marked the difference between occupying a location and possessing a sense of place.

Likewise, the emerging colonialism of the medieval period focused consciously on the cultivation of new places as a means of amassing profit and power for the

⁸⁸ Robert, *Christian Mission*, 24.

⁸⁹ The point that an appetite for expansion does not reflect a commitment to place still holds and is especially pertinent to discussions of Christian witness as church growth. For the classic case in support of church growth, see Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970); for theological arguments against church growth theory, see Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, 270–75; Lesslie Newbigin, *Open Secret: Sketches for a Missionary Theology* (London: SPCK Publishing, 1986), 121–59; and assorted essays by J. C. Hoekendijk and others in Donald A. McGavran, ed., *Eye of the Storm: The Great Debate in Mission*. (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1972).

conqueror rather than the cultivation of the place for its own good.⁹⁰ Was it possible for conquerors to develop attachments to places they exploited? Yes, however, such attachments must be distinguished from a missionary commitment that aspires to the full flourishing of a place or, to borrow language from the Eastern Church paradigm, the cosmic salvation of a place within God's economy.

By contrast, the contributions of monasticism to a missionary commitment to place within the medieval period were noteworthy. Observing the Benedictine commitment to place, ethicist Christine Pohl commented:

Benedictine monks and sisters take a vow of stability—a lifelong commitment to a particular group of people in a particular place. This is a powerful context for fidelity because each member of the community can assume that folks won't leave during the hard times and that they will walk through difficulty together.⁹¹

The long-term commitments signified in Benedictine vows moved beyond the mere occupation of a location. The development of such intentional communities created a locale for rigorous discipleship and thereby an incubator of missionary enterprises, as well as both secular and sacred models of education.

But the commitment to place did not end with the internal goods of intentional communities. Rather, Robert described monasticism's role in the larger culture of Christendom as "a powerful countercultural witness during the age of Constantine in the fourth century, when holy celibates moved into the desert in silent protest at the

⁹⁰ Stone develops a compelling critique of the logic of Christian witness surrounding the distinction of means and ends within a virtuous practice. See Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, 17–21.

⁹¹ Christine D. Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 80.

increasing prosperity and power of the now official legalized church.”⁹² Their decision to relocate symbolically “outside the gate” where Jesus suffered (Hebrews 13:12) amounted to a self-imposed missionary displacement “under harsh conditions, often in dangerous settings” to bear critical witness against the Church.⁹³

Conversely, monastic communities also bore constructive witness to the Church among surrounding pagan cultures. The life of St. Martin of Tours (d. 397) displayed a positive commitment to place on multiple levels. After building a monastery atop cliffs surveying Gaul, Martin practiced the rite of exorcism toward evangelistic ends. Robert recounted:

With the wood obtained from the sacred groves of the pre-Christian religion he built monasteries and churches on the sites of the pagan holy places, thereby helping the people to transfer their ritual allegiance to Christianity while retaining their sense of sacred space. With his reputation as a demon fighter, he became bishop of Tours. In the fifth century the tomb of Martin at Tours became a pilgrimage destination for people seeking to be healed, and a basilica was built over it.⁹⁴

Martin displayed an intuitive grasp of the distinctions between Agnew’s definitions of place and a missionary sensitivity to their cultivation for the sake of others and the gospel.

Others, however, viewed Martin’s approach as destructive. Lynn White, Jr. argued, “The whole concept of the sacred grove is alien to Christianity and to the ethos of the West. For nearly 2 millenia Christian missionaries have been chopping down sacred

⁹² Robert, *Christian Mission*, 25.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

groves, which are idolatrous because they assume spirit in nature.”⁹⁵ While White, Jr., did not substantiate this allegation, it still suggested an ambiguity even within the period’s most positive feature. Notwithstanding that concern, monasticism made the greatest contributions to a commitment to place in the medieval Roman Catholic missionary paradigm.

The Protestant Reformation Missionary Paradigm

Bosch identified five key features of the missionary paradigm of the Protestant Reformation. Before reviewing them, however, one must note that the Reformation paradigm reflected two of the qualifications of Kuhn’s paradigm theory mentioned previously. First, in terms of continuities, a significant concern for the precise development of Christian doctrine and a close relationship between church and state continued unabated into the sixteenth century. Anabaptists who registered concerns on both counts offered a notable exception to this pattern.⁹⁶ The Peace of Augsburg (1555) and the Peace of Westphalia (1648), which ended the religious wars of the period, not only secured the alliance between church and state but also held implications for place. Bosch observed that Westphalia in particular established the principle of ‘*cuius regio eius religio* (freely translated, “each region has to follow the religion of its ruler”).⁹⁷ While this commitment ended armed conflicts for a season by constraining the appetites of early nation-states for geographic expansion on the continent, it did not hinder ambitions beyond continental borders.

⁹⁵ Lynn White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* 155, no. 3767 (March 10, 1967): 1206.

⁹⁶ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, 240.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 241.

The second qualification of Kuhn's theory appeared in the form of conceptual recovery efforts among the Reformers and their contemporaries. Advances in philology by figures such as humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam made essential contributions to the reconstruction of the Christian Scriptures in their original languages, which in turn paved the way for vernacular Bible translation, as McGrath attested.⁹⁸ Without the second edition of Erasmus' *Novum Instrumentum omne*, for example, Bernhard Lohse insisted that Luther "would not even have had a usable edition of the Greek New Testament available" to translate his own "September Testament" in 1522.⁹⁹ The parallel development of new technologies like Gutenberg's movable-type printing press in 1493, while not a conceptual retrieval, nevertheless proved essential in the widespread dissemination of the Reformers' ideas. Historian Carter Lindberg reported, "More books were printed in the forty years between 1460 and 1500 than had been produced by scribes and monks throughout the entire Middle Ages."¹⁰⁰ Luther took advantage of his intellectual and technological milieu to effect change on a scale comparable to the namesake of his Augustinian order.

The most significant recovery in the Reformation era was Martin Luther's recovery of a Pauline message that the late medieval church subordinated to other concerns. Bosch remarked:

Augustine had rediscovered Paul for the fifth century; Luther rediscovered him for the sixteenth. And he found the central thrust of Paul's theology

⁹⁸ Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 2nd ed (Oxford, UK; Cambridge, MA: Blackwell; Cambridge University Press, 1993), 53, 55–57.

⁹⁹ Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 63.

¹⁰⁰ Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations* (Oxford, UK; Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 36.

in Romans 1:16, where “the gospel” is described as “the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes,” and even more particularly in the next verse which reads (in the King James Version), “For therein (that is, in the gospel) is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.”¹⁰¹

Thus, justification by faith alone became the first feature of the Reformation missionary paradigm. It was not so much that the medieval Roman Catholic Church denied this doctrine as much as it lacked the “urgency” and “centrality” the Reformers afforded it.¹⁰² Justification by faith became the organizing principle of the Protestant Reformers theology.

Closely related to *sola fide* was a common perspective of the Fall. Theological reflection in the medieval period started with Augustine’s emphasis on human depravity but ended with Thomas Aquinas’ conviction of “the soundness and reliability of human reason.”¹⁰³ The Reformers would not countenance the optimism inherent in Thomas’ view. Rather than a catalogue of personal sins, however, the concern of the Reformers was with the larger state of sinfulness that engulfed humanity as a whole.¹⁰⁴

Next, the third feature of the Reformation missionary paradigm was the subjective dimension of salvation. Having dispensed with pure reason on the grounds of depravity, Luther and others fixated on the existential question of salvation rather than the abstract doctrinal speculation of the high Middle Ages.¹⁰⁵ In this way, the Reformers combined

¹⁰¹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, 240; similarly, one might claim Karl Barth rediscovered Paul in the twentieth century.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 241.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 241–42.

the individualization of salvation initiated under Augustine with an emerging consciousness of the individual in society.

The fourth feature extended the emphasis on the individual to the ecclesiastical office, resulting in the priesthood of all believers. While Luther backtracked on this point, the Anabaptists followed his argument to its logical conclusion in a common priesthood. Bosch described Luther's eventual position:

[Luther] denied the validity of any office that was not linked to the existence of geographically defined parishes and rejected the idea of anybody appealing to the "Great Commission" for the justification of an extraordinary and non-territorial ecclesiastical office (cf. Schick 1943:15-17).¹⁰⁶

But some ideas, Bosch concluded, cannot be taken back.

Likewise, the fifth feature of the Reformation paradigm demonstrated that some actions also cannot be taken back. The Reformers restored the centrality of the Scriptures in the life of the church. Vernacular Bible translations provided the means to that end. Such translations required the aforementioned advancements in philology and technology as well as the Reformers' own theological contributions. The combination of rising literacy rates (especially in urban centers where they could reach 30% of the population), a rapid increase in the supply of books (especially Bibles, which by Luther's death in 1546 reached a circulation of nearly one million German copies),¹⁰⁷ and a newly awakened religious consciousness transformed the liturgical landscape of Protestant

¹⁰⁶ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 1986, 242.

¹⁰⁷ Lindberg, *The European Reformations*, 36–37.

communities and even the interior design of their sanctuaries, as preaching increasingly overshadowed the sacraments for many congregations.¹⁰⁸

But Robert also noted the profound impact of this recovery of Scripture on incipient Protestant mission models. Following the example of Catholic missionaries the generation prior who had served as chaplains to Spanish conquistadors in the New World, early Protestant missionaries attached themselves as chaplains to the early organs of colonial commerce and rule.¹⁰⁹ What distinguished their service, besides independence from Rome, was that they “saw their primary task to be the translation of the Bible into common spoken languages.”¹¹⁰ The emerging individual became the red thread that wove justification, the fall, the subjectivity of salvation, the common priesthood, and the centrality of Scripture into the missionary paradigm of the Protestant Reformation.

Assessing Place in the Protestant Reformation

How then did a commitment to place figure in the Reformation missionary paradigm? To start, Bosch himself acknowledged that the Reformers often received criticism for their relative inattention to mission, but he persuasively rejected that view as both an unfair judgment of sixteenth century figures by nineteenth century standards and as a polemical reading of the Reformers’ theologies by mostly Roman Catholic critics.¹¹¹ In the latter category, Bosch and Neill, alike, cite the work of Robert Cardinal Bellarmine, who considered missionary activity as one of the true marks of the church (*notae ecclesiae*) but concluded, “Heretics [Protestants] are never said to have converted

¹⁰⁸ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, 242.

¹⁰⁹ Robert, *Christian Mission*, 41.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹¹¹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, 243–45.

either pagans or Jews to the faith, but only to have perverted Christians.”¹¹² While Bosch ended Bellarmine’s comments on that polemical note, Neill extended the Cardinal’s remarks:

The Lutherans compare themselves to the apostles and the evangelists; yet though they have among them a very large number of Jews, and in Poland and Hungary have the Turks as their near neighbours, they have hardly converted even so much as a handful.¹¹³

The significance of Bellarmine’s criticism lies not in his unsubstantiated numerical claim but rather in his assertion that geography conveyed missionary responsibility. The triune God sent Lutherans among non-Christians, and they failed to fulfill their missionary vocation.

Neill also offered his own reading of the rule of *cuius regio eius religio* that emerged from the Peace of Westphalia. Although a feature of the context more than the missionary paradigm itself, the doctrine created a regional Church (*der Landeskirche*) where the local political ruler took spiritual responsibility for people under his or her rule in a carefully demarcated area. This arrangement was not altogether dissimilar from the priestly responsibility over a geographic parish, but Neill lamented, “It is hardly possible for a Church so confined within the boundaries of a given geographical area ever to become missionary in any real sense of the term.”¹¹⁴ For Neill, a commitment to place was a barrier to mission; whereas for Bellarmine, it was license for mission.

¹¹² Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, 6:188; Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, 243.

¹¹³ Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, 6:188–89.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6:188.

This unlikely contrast in orientation between Neill, a twentieth-century Anglican missionary, and Bellarmine, a sixteenth-century Catholic controversialist, illustrated what Bosch dubbed “the mystical doctrine of salt water.”¹¹⁵ In his introduction, Bosch discredited “the idea that travelling to foreign lands is the *sine qua non* for any kind of missionary endeavor and the final test and criterion of what is truly missionary.”¹¹⁶ Instead, the traditional distinction between “home and foreign missions is not one of principle,” Bosch explained, “but of scope.”¹¹⁷ A lack of imagination may have constrained Christian witness within the *Landeskirche*, but a commitment to place did not.¹¹⁸

Turning more directly to the Reformation paradigm, the strongest connections to place centered in the congregation through the priesthood of all believers and the restoration of the Scriptures to the center of congregational life. In the former case, the congregation became a locale for mission as believers embraced their common Christian vocations. Moreover, the collective nature of this calling heightened the importance of the local congregation or *ekklesia* as the place where believers pursued Paul’s invitation

¹¹⁵ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, 10.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Such assumptions constitute a major challenge in assessing the role of place in Christian mission in the past and, especially, in the present, where ease of travel and communication fuel widespread participation in short-term missionary tourism that lacks attentiveness to place. Instead, it cultivates an earnest but thin cosmopolitanism that Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove poignantly described in his paean to the Benedictine vow of stability: “Maybe this book is little more than a confession of my own need. I was raised in Christian churches by people who loved me well, charged to go out there and make a difference in the world, and given some of the best resources and training for the task. I showed the Jesus film in the African bush, helped build schools for AIDS orphans, dug latrines in the Dominican Republic, played with kids from the barrios of Venezuela, built houses in Honduras, and tutored kids in Philadelphia’s inner city. A citizen of God’s kingdom, I tried to put my American passport to work for good in the world. But racking up all those frequent flyer miles for Jesus, I felt lonely. I wanted to share God’s love with others, but wasn’t sure where to experience it myself” [Wilson-Hartgrove, *The Wisdom of Stability*, 1–2].

to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling” in community (Philippians 2:12), but it also liberated individuals from past constraints. The Anabaptists, again, carried the logic of Luther’s argument far beyond Luther’s own position. Bosch explained:

Whereas Luther still adhered to the concept of territorially circumscribed parishes and of the ecclesiastical office restricted to such a geographically delineated area, the Anabaptists jettisoned both the idea of any special and exclusive office and of any Christian limited for his or her ministry to a given area. This enabled them to regard all of Germany as well as the surrounding countries as mission fields, without any consideration for boundaries of parishes and dioceses; preachers were, in fact, selected and systematically sent to many parts of Europe (cf Schäufele 1966:74, 141-182; Littell 1972:119-123).¹¹⁹

Besides what historian Alan Kreider once dubbed the “abolition of the laity,”¹²⁰ the Anabaptists also sought the abolition of the parish. On the surface this appeared detrimental to a commitment to place, yet Bosch noted that their newfound freedom did not result in the neglect of their native land.

Concomitant with the priesthood of all believers, the recovery of Scripture to the center of the church’s life also animated the local congregation as a locale of learning and mission. The renewed emphasis on biblical proclamation increased the average Christian’s knowledge of Scripture and inspired new missionary activity. While the Reformers attempted to constrain such evangelistic enthusiasm—“Schwärmer or enthusiast” became a derisive label applied to unlicensed preachers—the Anabaptists adopted the commissions of Mark and Matthew’s Gospels and applied them equitably to

¹¹⁹ David J. Bosch, “The Structure of Mission: An Exposition of Matthew 28:16,” n.d., 246.

¹²⁰ Alan Kreider, “Abolishing the Laity: An Anabaptist Perspective,” in *Anyone for Ordination?*, ed. Paul Beasley-Murray (Tunbridge Wells: MARC, 1993), 84–111.

all believers.¹²¹ While a few leaders on the magisterial side of the Reformation, most notably Dutch theologian Adrian Saravia, contended that the Great Commission still obtained and, in Saravia's case, that the Great Commission pushed the church beyond the borders of Christendom, most demurred.¹²²

In the succeeding generation, Philipp Nicolai (d. 1608), the first mission theologian of Lutheran Orthodoxy, developed a unique interpretation of the church's missionary vocation. Believing, as most in his day, that the apostles had fulfilled the Great Commission, Nicolai maintained that the church still had a witness to bear amid her three great enemies—the Turks, the papacy and Calvinism—as well as her neighbors.¹²³ Bosch stated:

For Nicolai this meant that we should not arbitrarily traverse the world looking for a mission field. God does not chase us here and there. He confines us to the place where we have grown up and calls us to serve the nearest neighbor to whom we do not have to travel more than a thousand yards (cf Beyreuther 1961:6).¹²⁴

Motivated by love, Nicolai interpreted the command of Jesus to love one's neighbor literally (Matthew 22:37-39). His delineation of a 1000-yard border focused the church's commitment to place on her immediate neighborhood. Two features of Nicolai's context informed his narrow construal of place. First, theologian Erich Beyreuther reported that Nicolai's theology exhibited a strong eschatological orientation punctuated by urgency.¹²⁵ Influenced by his study of biblical apocalyptic literature, Nicolai was convinced that the

¹²¹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, 246.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 247–48.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 249–50.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 250.

¹²⁵ Erich Beyreuther, "Evangelische Missionstheologie im 16. Und 17. Jarhundert," *Evangelische Missionszeitschrift*, no. 1 (1961): 4.

world would end in 1670 CE. Traversing the world wasted precious time. Second, historian Fred Stoeffler observed that the plague followed Nicolai's ministerial postings in Westphalia and Hamburg, which may explain both his apocalypticism and his narrow but deep commitment to place.¹²⁶

Finally, a commitment to place found expression in the Reformation paradigm's commitment to the centrality of Scripture through vernacular translation. Robert explained:

The vernacularization process required an insider's knowledge of the local language and customs of the people. If necessary, it required putting the language into written form and creating a grammar. Ultimately it required starting schools to teach ordinary people to read, and using a printing press to spread the message. Vernacularization—and its close cousin inculturation—were two-way processes, for understanding another culture required learning as much about it as possible.¹²⁷

As previous chapters indicated and Robert's research on the vernacularization process confirmed, place, language, and culture exist in intrinsic relationship with one another. The work of translation entailed total immersion in a place and its worldview. Such involvement moved far beyond familiarity with a location or participation in a locale, it fostered a deep sense of place, in Agnew's terms.

And vernacular Bible translation strengthened this sense of place not only for the missionary but also for the receptor culture. Evidence to that effect included Luther's contributions to what Lindberg described as "the normalization of the [German]

¹²⁶ F. Ernest Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, Studies in the History of Religions: Supplements to Numen 9 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), 197.

¹²⁷ Robert, *Christian Mission*, 43.

language” in the Reformation era.¹²⁸ Moreover, Sanneh’s work has documented the safeguards Bible translation afforded indigenous cultures by preserving oral traditions through a written form before imperialism or globalization eradicated them.¹²⁹ In sum, a growing awareness of mission among individuals and congregations, stimulated by reading and hearing the Scriptures in their own languages, contributed decisively to a local commitment to place under the Reformation paradigm.

The Modern Enlightenment Missionary Paradigm

Bosch identified seven key features of the missionary paradigm “in the wake of the Enlightenment.” He confessed, however, the Sisyphean nature of such a task given the complexity of the era:

It was a period in which centrifugal forces were at work. It is therefore both pointless and impossible to try to identify a completely unified and coherent pattern of thinking and action in this era. The Enlightenment macro-paradigm remains elusive and manifests itself, at best, in a variety of sub-paradigms, some of which appear to be in tension, even in conflict, with others. Still, in this entire epoch, virtually everybody operated within the framework generated by the Enlightenment.¹³⁰

Although his statement set a somewhat defeatist tone, Bosch’s acknowledgment of the challenges this period presented for interpretation made a crucial point. Namely, the Enlightenment formed a powerful “plausibility structure,” to borrow sociologist Peter

¹²⁸ Lindberg, *The European Reformations*, 37.

¹²⁹ Lamin O. Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, American Society of Missiology Series, no. 13 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989).

¹³⁰ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, 285.

Berger's term,¹³¹ through which human beings experienced and interpreted the world from the 17th century forward.

As an interpretive structure, Newbigin explained, the Enlightenment was not any more neutral than any other plausibility structure, despite its assertions to the contrary:

The modern scientific world-view functions as a plausibility structure in the same way as does Islam or Catholicism. This is not, of course to say anything about the truth of the views embodied in these structures, but only about the way they function in limiting the freedom of the individual in deciding questions about truth.¹³²

In other words, the scientific plausibility structure of the Enlightenment mediated the world for individuals within a set of assumptions. The chief assumption of that era, Bosch determined, was a “radical anthropocentrism” that largely dispensed with God in the public square.¹³³ This marked a decisive shift from previous periods of Christian history and engendered confusion. Historian Brian Stanley observed, “Some authors have identified the Enlightenment confidence in progress as one source of the missionary imperative, while others have seen Enlightenment values as fundamentally subversive of the Christian missionary project.”¹³⁴ From this complex of competing ideas, Bosch constructed the Enlightenment missionary paradigm.

¹³¹ See Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990).

¹³² Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 1986, 54.

¹³³ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, 267; Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 1986, 65–94; see also Lesslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt, and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995).

¹³⁴ Brian Stanley, “Christian Missions and the Enlightenment: A Reevaluation,” in *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment*, ed. Brian Stanley, Studies in the History of Christian Missions (Grand Rapids, MI: Richmond, Surrey, U.K: Eerdmans; Curzon Press Ltd, 2001), 6.

While a decisive break from the previous paradigm in many respects, the radical anthropocentrism of the Enlightenment missionary paradigm owed its origins to the emerging individual consciousness of the Reformation era wed to a secular recovery of medieval Roman Catholicism's optimism regarding human reason. Thus, the first feature asserted human reason as "the indubitable point of departure for all knowing."¹³⁵ Following Descartes, rationality—especially in its Western form—replaced the soul as the seat of human identity. Next, a subject-object scheme allowed humans to separate themselves from their environment sufficiently to analyze it under the pretense of objectivity (i.e., the scientific method).¹³⁶ Instead of marveling over the grandeur of creation, individuals would analyze the constituent elements of nature to understand naturalistic processes of causality behind them. This led directly to the third feature: the elimination of purpose.

Through the subject-object divide, science could observe direct causality, but divine purposes were inaccessible to unaided reason.¹³⁷ Human beings substituted the explanatory question of 'how' for 'why'. Fourth, the early scientific and technical advances of the period contributed directly to a broad confidence in human progress and cultural (and sometimes religious) triumphalism. Fifth, a division between facts and values carved out private space for religious faith in society but did so on secular terms while asserting the objective neutrality of science.¹³⁸ Sixth, the confidence in human capacity also found expression in the presumption that all problems had a rational

¹³⁵ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, 264.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 265.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 343, 266.

solution.¹³⁹ Last, the Enlightenment paradigm understood human beings to be emancipated autonomous individuals. The Enlightenment retained, in Bosch's view, the emphasis on the individual from Augustine and Luther but liberated the human person from the constraints of a relationship with God to pursue a life of "indiscriminate freedom."¹⁴⁰ These seven overlapping features formed a paradigm brimming with confidence over the progress human reason would deliver the world.

Assessing Place in the Enlightenment

To what extent did a commitment to place find a home in the Enlightenment missionary paradigm?¹⁴¹ Citing William Temple's proud comments on the global expansion of Christianity at his consecration as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1942, Neill asked:

How is it that a religion of the Middle East radically changed its character by becoming the dominant religion of Europe, and is now changing its character again through becoming a universal religion, increasingly free from the bounds of geography and of Western civilization?¹⁴²

Despite Temple's and Neill's enthusiasm for such developments, did Neill's question properly construe the relationship between church and place in the 19th and 20th centuries? Furthermore, was geographic expansion a sufficient criterion for progress in the Christian tradition? Such questions proved difficult to answer from within a plausibility structure designed to discern only direct causality rather than divine purpose and whose confidence in the narrative of human progress created cultural blind spots.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 266–67.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 267.

¹⁴¹ Since globalization and cosmopolitanism, as products of the Enlightenment tradition, received detailed attention in chapter 2 and appear again in chapter 6, they do not appear in the discussion that follows.

¹⁴² Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, 6:14–15.

With regard to Christian mission, the Enlightenment era witnessed the dramatic rise of the modern missionary movement. From William Carey's recovery of the Great Commission and creation of the voluntary missionary society in *An Enquiry into the Obligation of Heathens to Use Means for the Sake of the Conversion of the Heathens* (1792) to the rapid growth of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions at the close of the nineteenth century with its optimistic watchword of "the evangelization of the world in this generation," the Protestant foreign mission enterprise exuded confidence and grew rapidly around the globe.¹⁴³ William Yates reported that not everyone, most notably some Continental and non-Western theologians, shared the enthusiasm that characterized Anglo-American missions at this time, but on the whole the optimism surrounding human potential and progress was shared broadly in Western culture.¹⁴⁴

In terms of specific features of the Enlightenment paradigm, however, the legacy was mixed. The exultation of reason revisited the complex relationship between the universal and the particular discussed in previous chapters. In combination with the subject-object scheme, it accelerated scientific developments that led to modernization, which entailed industrialization and urbanization. Such measures of progress, however, often came at a great cost to place. Historian Lynn White, Jr. concluded that the

¹⁴³ For a study of the shape and impact of Christian student movements within this period, see Dana L. Robert, *Occupy until I Come : A.T. Pierson and the Evangelization of the World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003).

¹⁴⁴ Timothy E. Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 19–20; Gustav Warnack, occupant of the first university chair of mission at Halle and the most important German mission theologian of the period, refused to attend the Ecumenical Missionary Conference of 1900 in New York to protest American enthusiasm and mission as the expansion of "English" civilization.

detachment of nature from God resulted neither in environmental nor human flourishing but their abuse.¹⁴⁵ The extraction of natural and human resources from their native soils produced technological progress and wealth but also degraded the environment and undermined millennia-old social arrangements. Advances in communication and mobility, likewise, connected more people but also enabled their separation. Next, the elimination of purpose effectively desacralized creation into nature and exchanged wonder for mastery. Again, in combination with the earlier features, this shift resulted in a fundamentally different relationship between human beings and the places that surrounded them. Instead of a biblical ethic of stewardship of creation from Genesis, the narrative shifted to dominance. Finally, the radical anthropocentrism of emancipated autonomous individuals reflected a severing of ties to people and places that could not help but to result less in freedom than in narcissism and nihilism.

Despite these setbacks, the Enlightenment paradigm still made notable contributions to a commitment to place. The emphasis on progress fueled much of the Christian mission enterprise, which despite its triumphalism and cultural chauvinism at points, nevertheless contributed to the development of peoples and places through the sharing of resources and advancing the gospel. As James Dennis' three-volume study *Christian Missions and Social Progress* (1897) documented, the missionary enterprise

¹⁴⁵ Geoffrey R. Lilburne, *A Sense of Place: A Christian Theology of the Land* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 24; while White attributed this shift to an anthropocentric reading of Scripture that began to develop in the late medieval period, he found a corrective in St. Francis of Assisi's attempt "to depose man from his monarchy over creation and set up a democracy of all God's creatures" (White, 1206). Lilburne's discussion centers on White's rejection of Harvey Cox's conclusions in *The Secular City* (discussed in chapter 2); for White's influential 1967 essay in the journal *Science*, which originated as a lecture on December 26, 1966, to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, see White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," 1206.

did not limit itself to narrowly religious concerns but also cultivated agricultural, educational, medical, and other social advancements. This work developed critical infrastructures that led to the flourishing of people and places, alike.¹⁴⁶ Conversely, the spread of the gospel, especially through vernacular proclamation and Bible translation, as Walls and Sanneh attested, not only transformed people but transformed the Christian faith itself.¹⁴⁷ Thereby, Western progress in some sense planted the seeds of its own eclipse a century later in what Robert described as “the southward shift of Christianity.”¹⁴⁸

Closely related to confidence in human progress was the sense that a solution to every problem was within reach, which included a wide range of environmental concerns from agricultural techniques to waste water management and political advocacy. But Bosch himself also acknowledged the roots of the voluntary missionary society within this principle. Human confidence fueled the growth of the modern missionary movement

¹⁴⁶ Dennis, a Presbyterian USA missionary to Syria and the Beirut Theological Seminary, made a significant contribution to the field of Sociology. But his work also proposed an evolutionary scale for assessing cultures, which confirmed his view of Christianity as the “supreme force in the social regeneration and elevation of the human race” (I-ix) and the “regenerator of society and the maker of a new civilization” (I-x) [James S. Dennis, *Christian Missions and Social Progress; a Sociological Study of Foreign Missions* (New York, Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1897)]; referencing the self-contradictory character (or, at least, internal tensions) of Western progressivism, historian William Hutchison rendered this judgment on Dennis’s writings: “Though in some respects the most thoroughly progressive statement of missionary ideology in its generation, Dennis’s book was among the most regressive from the viewpoint of anyone who hoped to disentangle missionary purposes from those of an implicit cultural imperialism” [William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 109].

¹⁴⁷ Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*; Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*; Sanneh, *Translating the Message*; Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity?*; Lamin O. Sanneh, *Encountering the West: Christianity and the Global Cultural Process: The African Dimension* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993).

¹⁴⁸ Dana L. Robert, “Shifting Southward: Global Christianity since 1945,” in *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 117–34; see also Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone*, Christian Doctrine in Global Perspective (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003); Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

by expanding the positive influence of mission work but also by exacerbating the problems associated with it.¹⁴⁹

Finally, the fact-value divide's impact on place proved ambiguous. Although Newbigin denounced its exclusion of religious concerns from the public square, the attention the sciences and social sciences like geography directed toward the natural world contributed to a concern for place and the cultivation of actual places. But the costs of that validation on secular terms were high. The legacy of the Enlightenment missionary paradigm toward place was mixed.

The Ambiguous History of Place in Christian Mission

A historical review of Christian missionary paradigms yields a complex and ambiguous portrait of the church's commitment to place. Tensions span the paradigms at multiple points. Consider, for example, the competing interpretations of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) expressed in William Carey's voluntary society under the Enlightenment model and Philipp Nicolai's commitment to evangelize only his immediate neighbors in Reformation-era Germany. Or, compare the medieval Catholic paradigm's individualization of salvation to either the cosmic salvation of Eastern Orthodoxy or the local reconciliation of the *ekklesia Theou* in Christianity's earliest days. Clear conflicts exist between these missionary paradigms, which is precisely why Bosch interprets them as radical paradigm shifts rather than minor recalibrations of the church's mission.

¹⁴⁹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, 343.

But the most interesting tensions appear internal to a single paradigm. The Jewish roots of the early church connect her closely to Palestine, but in so doing impede the launch of the Gentile mission. The Eastern Church's emphasis on the ecclesial shape of salvation births close-knit communities with exceptionally strong cultural ties that often struggle to welcome strangers. The same medieval Catholicism that baptizes colonialism also births a monasticism that flees the cities to dwell with Jesus on the margins of the empire. The Reformers, who express little interest in lands beyond their political sovereign's authority, initiate vernacular Bible translation that produces a truly global church. Finally, the Enlightenment offers social progressivism but weds it to cultural chauvinism, even as the indigenous appropriation of the gospel undermines the colonial structures that first deliver the gospel to those places. The emergent portrait of place is ambiguous at best, and Christian tradition seldom discusses place directly.

One of the few instances in which an author addresses a theology of place overtly within a discussion of mission appears in Donald C. Posterski's recent work, *Enemies with Smiling Faces* (2004). Posterski dedicates a chapter to outreach in which place factors prominently.¹⁵⁰ He juxtaposes a *theology of place* with a *theology of people* to demonstrate a complementary relationship between the two concepts, but his method ultimately diminishes the former with the latter. Posterski observes that "churches represent the best central idea of a theology of place. They exist as faith communities within a broader community."¹⁵¹ The local church, for Posterski, offers the most basic

¹⁵⁰ See chapter 17, Outreach: Making Meaning of God's Gospel Story in Donald C. Posterski, *Enemies with Smiling Faces* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009).

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 196.

expression of a theology of place, which accords both with Bosch's early church paradigm and Newbigin's contention that Scripture references the church only in regard to God and to place.¹⁵²

Likewise, his initial comments on a theology of people invite comparison to Doreen Massey's contrarian reading of place as intersection.¹⁵³ Posterski explains:

A theology of people invites a mindset that motivates ministry wherever God's people go. Rather than being residential, a theology of people assumes that ministry is mobile and itinerant. Such ministry celebrates people's spiritual gifts and counts on interpersonal interaction and the flow of influence in relationships.

The attention to mobility recognizes that place is neither a static concept nor necessarily a set of static coordinates on a map. Place can be a dynamic and constructive locale where human lives intersect rather than a mere location. Unfortunately, four critical errors leave the potential of his discussion unrealized and the comparison to Massey unwarranted.¹⁵⁴

First, Posterski's conception of outreach fails to recognize the church's fundamental mission as a community of worship rather than as a service provider for the larger community. He states:

The residential presence of churches positions them to engage, serve, offer programs and welcome the people in the surrounding community. Churches that take their theology of place seriously remain flexible

¹⁵² Newbigin comments, "It is, I think, very significant that in the consistent usage of the New Testament, the word *ekklesia* is qualified in only two ways; it is 'the Church of God,' or 'of Christ,' and it is the church of a place" [Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 229]; see also, Newbigin, *A Word in Season*, 50–51.

¹⁵³ See her influential essay, "A Global Sense of Place," which receives attention in chapter 4 [Doreen B. Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 146–56].

¹⁵⁴ While this discussion criticizes Posterski's construction of the relationship between mission and place, one suspects his writing inadequately communicates the totality of his views. The author of multiple books on evangelism, Posterski served previously as the director of church relations for World Vision, the largest Christian social ministry in the world. That experience suggests he may have achieved a better balance between *kerygma*, *koinonia* and *diakonia* in life than in his argument in *Enemies with Smiling Faces*.

enough to change their ministry focus when the demographics of the neighborhood shift around them. If their setting is urban, they resist being lured to the suburbs.¹⁵⁵

While this statement has much to commend, especially the insistence on remaining in a community amid changing demographics, it nevertheless remains inadequate. Posterski reduces a theology of place to a mixture of marketing and the meeting of felt-needs. The church's witness, however, extends beyond helpfulness; the character and foundation of her service matters.

Twentieth-century ecumenists, including Lesslie Newbigin, observed that the absence of *diakonia* and *koinonia* in a community that claims to bear witness to the Triune God renders its *kerygma* empty; but so too the absence of *kerygma* within a community of *koinonia* and *diakonia* renders that community something less than the church of Jesus Christ. "The means by which the good news of salvation is propagated," writes Newbigin, "must be congruous with the nature of the salvation itself."¹⁵⁶ Johannes C. Hoekendijk concurs, the church's witness requires all three elements "to be integrated in our work of evangelism" and "only so, are our methods of evangelism justified."¹⁵⁷ Moreover, Hoekendijk criticizes approaches that reduce Christian ministry solely to *kerygma* and even more narrowly to *plantatio ecclesiae* as the end of God's mission rather than its instrument.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 196.

¹⁵⁶ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of Church* (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009), 148.

¹⁵⁷ Johannes C. Hoekendijk, "The Call to Evangelism," in *Eye of the Storm; the Great Debate in Mission*. Donald McGavran, Editor, ed. Donald A. McGavran (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1972), 50; for extended treatment, see pages 48-54.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 53-54.

As evidence, Hoekendijk cites the example of Roman Catholic priests in the 1970s in Marseilles, France, who were addressing “the three contexts of the industrial worker’s life—his factory, his living quarters, and his pub fellowship.”¹⁵⁹ For Hoekendijk and others, contexts matter, because the places in which one encounters others indelibly shapes the form ministry requires. People not only shape the community in which they live, the community in which they live shapes them and by extension their relationships—even when those places are contemporary virtual communities that ecumenists like Hoekendijk never anticipated. Thus, Posterski draws too hard a line between the residential and the mobile and thereby fails to offer a sufficiently robust *kerygmatic* account of place.

Next, Posterski contrasts his positive appraisal of a theology of people with the confining limitations of a “residential” theology of place. Posterski asserts that freedom from the ties that bind people to places allow Christians to pursue “outreach lifestyles” that produce strong, even virtuous, relationships and communities.¹⁶⁰ By contrast, traditional arguments for Christian presence and the discipleship it engenders—whether the prologue to John’s Gospel or the Benedictine vow of stability—run counter to Posterski’s celebration of unfettered mobility and flexibility. Those traditions alternatively root their understanding of Christian presence in the doctrine of the Incarnation and appeal to longevity and longsuffering. Eugene Petersen laments that “religion in our time has been captured by the tourist mindset.”¹⁶¹ He concludes:

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Posterski, *Enemies with Smiling Faces*, 196.

¹⁶¹ Eugene Petersen, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*, 20th Anniversary edition (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 16.

The Christian life cannot mature under such conditions and in such ways. Friedrich Nietzsche, who, at least, saw this area of spiritual truth with great clarity, wrote, “The essential thing ‘in heaven and earth’ is...that there should be long obedience in the same direction; there thereby results, and has always resulted, in the long run, something which has made life worth living.” It is this “long obedience in the same direction” which the mood of the world does so much to discourage.¹⁶²

A theology of place envisions a long obedience, which refuses to abstract people from the places they inhabit to promote a form of Christian cosmopolitanism discussed in chapter 2. Posterski’s failure to reflect sufficiently on the qualities constitutive of virtuous relationships leads him to attribute the creation of an ideal community to a life free from commitments to an actual one.

Third, Posterski’s shift from a theology of place to a theology of people also shifts implicitly from the ministry of the community to the ministry of individuals. In eschewing place for people, Posterski reflects the individualism characteristic of Western culture since Augustine. Thus, an ironic lack of awareness of the power of place that has shaped him personally underwrites Posterski’s overstatement of the contrast between respective theologies of place and people.

Finally, Posterski credits the success of mission to human agency rather than divine initiative. Again, championing a theology of people over place, Posterski states:

Such ministry celebrates people’s spiritual gifts and counts on interpersonal interaction and the flow of influence in relationships. Mission impact is dependent on the spiritual integrity and the social skills of those who intentionally live outreach lifestyles.¹⁶³

This claim invites multiple criticisms. While personal integrity and social skills are desirable qualities, their presence or absence neither ensures nor restricts the mission of

¹⁶² Ibid., 17.

¹⁶³ Posterski, *Enemies with Smiling Faces*, 196.

the triune God. Here, Augustine's arguments against the Donatists (discussed in the review of the medieval Roman Catholic missionary paradigm) find contemporary application.

Posterski's construction of mission presents a case study for Hoekendijk's critique of ecclesiocentrism. While he attempts to qualify his previous statement by noting that "a theology of people mindset cherishes the presence of Christ that is resident in people of faith and counts on that presence within relationships and interactions," Posterski's qualification is insufficient to safeguard mission against the human subversion of the divine.¹⁶⁴ At the Brandenburg Mission Conference in 1932, such anthropocentric reductions of the *missio Dei* prompted Karl Barth's influential proposal to move discussions of mission from the doctrine of the Church to the doctrine of God.¹⁶⁵ Posterski's juxtaposition of a theology of people not only invalidates his stated purpose but, if pressed, leans toward idolatry. A more robust theology of place could correct such deficiencies by developing stronger doctrines of Creation and Pneumatology in addition to a clear *kerygma*.

Perhaps this reading of Posterski is overly critical. Newbigin himself frequently describes the church as an "instrument" of the kingdom of God.¹⁶⁶ But to assert that God enlists human beings to accomplish God's purposes in history is quite different than claiming God's purposes are dependent upon those human agents. The former construction acknowledges God's freedom, while the latter metaphorically ties God's hands. In *The Household of God*, Newbigin insists that the church is an instrument, but

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, 389–90.

¹⁶⁶ Newbigin, *The Household of God*, 147–48.

she is never only instrumental.¹⁶⁷ These concerns notwithstanding, Posterski deserves credit for drawing the connection between mission and place so frequently absent in other theologies of mission. Moreover, if one excises certain aspects of Posterski's proposal, then his initial attempt to balance a more residential conception of the church's mission with a relational one holds promise, but questions remain.

Why has a commitment to place proven so elusive in church history? In other areas of doctrinal development, a gradual process of challenge and refinement advances until a consensus is achieved or a few viable positions become entrenched over time. Here Posterski's argument helps the church by identifying the tension between a residential and relational theology. In other words, a commitment to place represents the intersection of the universal and the particular in Christian history.

Andrew Walls reflects theologically on the tension Posterski identifies. In his essay, "The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture," Walls describes this intersection as "a battleground for two opposing tendencies" that find their "origin in the Gospel itself."¹⁶⁸

On the one hand it is of the essence of the Gospel that God accepts us as we are, on the ground of Christ's work alone, not on the ground of what we have become or are trying to become. But, if He accepts us "as we are" that implies He does not take us as isolated, self-governing units, because we are not. We are conditioned by a particular time and place, by our family and group and society, by "culture".... The impossibility of separating an individual from his social relationships and thus from his society leads to one unvarying feature in Christian history: the desire to "indigenize," to live as a Christian and yet as a member of one's own society, to make the Church (to use the memorable title of a book written

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 135–52.

¹⁶⁸ Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 7.

in 1967 by F.B. Wellbourn and B.A. Ogot about Independent churches in Africa) *A Place to Feel at Home*.¹⁶⁹

Note three significant features of the *indigenizing* principle in Walls' account. First, place matters. Places, according to Walls, shape human lives on par with the times in which they live. In line with our assessment of the impact of historical conditions on Christian mission, Walls affirms the impact of place upon human identity and the gospel. Next, against the Enlightenment view, empirical evidence suggests that human beings exist historically in intricate webs of social relations rather than as "emancipated autonomous individuals." Third, the *indigenizing* principle shares a close connection with God's work of redemption in Jesus Christ.

Walls next finds a counterweight to the *indigenizing* principle in church history in the *pilgrim* principle. He explains:

Not only does God in Christ take people as they are: He takes them in order to transform them into what He wants them to be. Along with the *indigenizing* principle which makes his faith a place to feel at home, the Christian inherits the *pilgrim* principle, which whispers to him that he has no abiding city and warns him that to be faithful to Christ will put him out of step with his society; for that society never existed, in East or West, ancient time or modern, which could absorb the word of Christ painlessly into its system.¹⁷⁰

Whereas the *indigenizing* principle roots human beings in a particular place, the *pilgrim* principle uproots them by "adoption" into the history of Israel to create a "universalizing" factor. This process draws Christians of all cultures and ages together through a common inheritance, lest any of us make the Christian faith such a place to feel

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 8.

at home that no one else can live there'.¹⁷¹ On the surface, the pilgrim impulse in Christian history seems to erode a commitment to place. However, on closer inspection, the adoption of Israel's story and the alternative community it engenders bears close resemblance to the features of the early church paradigm and effectively forms a new place named *ecclesia*.

In conclusion, evaluating a commitment to place in the history of Christian mission is a difficult task, since the concept of place assumes different functions in different periods. Yet in every missionary paradigm, a commitment to place nevertheless finds substantive expression. This consistency across time and paradigms suggests the significance of place in Christian mission, even though its shape remains as elusive or as malleable as the paradigms of mission themselves. Lesslie Newbigin observes:

It follows that the missionary encounter of the gospel with the modern world will, like every true missionary encounter, call for radical conversion. This will be not only a conversion of the will and of the feelings but a conversion of the mind—a “paradigm shift” that leads to a new vision of how things are and, not at once but gradually, to the development of a new plausibility structure in which the most real of all realities is the living God whose character is “rendered” for us in the pages of Scripture.¹⁷²

Likewise, a missionary perspective on place anticipates that the church's commitment to place in different contexts must experience its own conversion and in some sense involve a conversion of the place itself.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 9.

¹⁷² Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 64.

Echoing the appeals to the Incarnation at the beginning of this chapter from Bosch and Walls, Wilson-Hartgrove adds:

Central Christian doctrines describe God's action. Incarnation, for example, is the teaching that God became human in Jesus so that humanity might have a way to become like God. This is infinitely practical. God does not take on flesh and move into the neighborhood *without changing the place*. Believing that this is true changes the pattern of our everyday lives.¹⁷³

And consistent with Newbigin's comment, the relevance of place across Bosch's longitudinal study suggests that the church's commitment to place always factors into the plausibility structure made possible by the life of the missionary God revealed in Christ and narrated in Scripture. With that affirmation in mind, the next chapter attempts to map the missions of the triune God in the world in conversation with human geography.

¹⁷³ Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *The Awakening of Hope: Why We Practice a Common Faith* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2012), 26; emphasis mine.

Ch. 4 Place and the *missio Dei*

In light of the ambiguous history of place in Christian mission, what conceptual resources would allow the church to construct a commitment to place that is constitutive of her mission rather than in opposition to it? Such a question invites the church not only to search for tools from other disciplines that attend to place but also to mine Christian tradition for a larger framework for discussion of place. To review the argument thus far, the first chapter introduced the concept of place and its promise as a missionary commitment. The second chapter built on that foundation by locating a commitment to place within the wider theological, ecclesial, and worldly contexts in which place shapes the formation of human identity and community. Next, the third chapter examined different ways in which place has or has not factored into the church's missionary practice at different times and in different places. The historical review yielded a complex and sometimes contradictory account of place in Christian mission as the church struggled to strike a balance between its universal and particular impulses.

The present chapter represents the first installment of a two-stage construction of place in missionary perspective, which involves a (re)reading of categories already common to sacred and secular discussions of place. Following Lesslie Newbigin's approach to culture, chapters 4 and 5 disclose the hidden missionary dimension within three prevailing approaches to place.¹ This method rests on a rejection of the

¹ Although chapter 6 focuses exclusively on Newbigin's life and thought, his influence shapes the present argument at multiple points. Most notably, Newbigin played a leading role in ecumenical discussions of mission for the second half of the 20th century. Newbigin opens *Foolishness to the Greeks* with a concise discussion of the relationship between gospel and culture [Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*:

Enlightenment paradigm's fact-value divide that posited an unbridgeable chasm between the sacred and the secular in modernity.² Following a detailed (re)construction of the doctrine of the *missio Dei* in the present chapter, the next chapter will complete the argument that the church should embrace a trinitarian conception of place as *sacred creation, sacred journey, and sacred construction*.

Plausibility Structures

The previous chapter concluded with the claim that the church's commitment to place always functions within the plausibility structure made possible by the life of the missionary God revealed in Scripture.³ This claim rests on the church's confession that the triune God not only exists but also provides a more adequate grounding for the church's witness than the radical anthropocentrism of late modernity.⁴ Such a demanding

The Gospel and Western Culture (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 1–4]; with regard to the doctrine of the Trinity, Newbigin's major contributions, include Lesslie Newbigin, *Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (London: SCM Press, 1953); Lesslie Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006); and Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, Revised (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995).

² Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 16–18, 75–77.

³ Here, Michael Polanyi's arguments for the necessity of "fiduciary frameworks" undergirding all knowledge, including the natural sciences (Polanyi's own area of expertise), prove useful and find frequent reference in Newbigin's writings. Polanyi argued against the Enlightenment division of objective and subjective knowledge suggesting that the actual process and progress of scientific knowledge relied on "tacit knowledge," more akin to religious faith claims than the supposed objective certainty claimed by the Enlightenment paradigm. See Lesslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt, and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 39–44; Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge; towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).

⁴ One might challenge the Enlightenment's anthropocentrism further by extending this claim more broadly from the church's witness to the flourishing of all creation, since, as Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana and all Albania argues, "[H]umanity and the entire universe are creations of the infinite and living God, and they were intended to evolve together in harmony" [Anastasios Yannoulatos, *Facing the World: Orthodox Christian Essays on Global Concerns* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 170]. Archbp. Anastasios roots this claim in the Incarnation and draws a stark contrast with other religious traditions and implicitly the European Enlightenment: "The three ecumenical teachers persistently return to the point that Christ our Savior assumed a human body. 'The Word became flesh'--not spirit or ideas, and not a book, as Islam, for example, would like to see the Qur'an. Jesus Christ transformed the body. He resurrected it, and with it he carried out his ministry. The Christian faith does not preach that the body is a prison from which the spirit and the soul must be liberated. The teaching of the Three Hierarchs stands in

task seeks a basis in something larger than a historically-conditioned form of rationality or a claim of empirical progress; rather, it seeks its source in God, “the ground of all being,” in theologian Paul Tillich’s evocative phrase.⁵ The Apostle Paul agrees:

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved (Romans 8:22-24a).

direct contrast to any form of ambiguous idealism or any version of modern, atheistic humanism. It is based on the Incarnation of the Word” (171).

⁵ With imagery befitting a discussion of place, Tillich contends that God “is the ground of the structure of being. He is not subject to this structure; the structure is grounded in him” [Paul Tillich, *Paul Tillich: Theologian of the Boundaries*, ed. Mark K. Taylor, *Making of Modern Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 163]. This is an important affirmation, and one that intentionally evokes a sense of place. That said, my use of Tillich’s phrase also requires qualification, since it departs in at least one fundamental respect from Tillich’s own meaning. While there is a contingent character to human language applied to the trinitarian life of God (with the exception of biblical descriptions of Jesus’ earthly life), there need not be as hard a demarcation as Tillich demands against all personal language about God. Tillich rejects categorically such language as primitive, if not idolatrous, on grounds that it confuses infinite Being with finite beings. On the one hand, Tillich’s language here seems overtly (and correctly) concerned not to confuse God with matter (other writings from Tillich, which suggest a pantheistic view, blur that line). Likewise, Karl Barth’s designation of God as the “wholly Other”, first suggested by his pastoral colleague Eduard Thurneysen, communicates a similar concern that no human category can contain the Trinity [Karl Barth, *Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom*, ed. Clifford Green, *The Making of Modern Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 71]. Scripture expresses this concern primarily through the concept of creation *ex nihilo*, which draws a firm distinction between Creator and creation (Genesis 1, Psalm 33:6, 148:5, John 1:3, Colossians 1:16, Hebrews 11:3). On the other hand, Scripture does not shy away from the attribution of personal language to God. Jesus, for example, repeatedly addressed God as Father and taught others to do likewise: “Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name’” (Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2). Even from his cross, Jesus invokes God with the personal term of “Father” (Luke 23:34). In such passages, Tillich discerns the same tensions that precipitate Augustine’s discussion of the divine predicaments, including place (see chapter 2). The problem lies in his resolution. Tillich judges the biblical language to present an inadequate metaphysics; whereas Augustine appeals to the metaphorical character of all theological language to resolve the problem and submit to Scripture’s authority rather than standing in judgment over it. In confronting the same challenge, theologian Roger E. Olson discovered the writings of Edmond La B. Cherbonnier, a twentieth-century theologian who articulated a biblical alternative to Platonism and Aristotelianism. Olson states, ‘According to Cherbonnier, the biblical narrative contains an implied metaphysic and all attempts to interpret Scripture through the “lens” of extra-biblical, philosophical metaphysics or ontologies end up failing to do justice to the biblical revelation of God and reality’; [Roger E. Olson, “Is God ‘A Being’ Or ‘Being Itself?’” *My Evangelical Arminian Theological Musings*, May 16, 2015, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogereolson/2015/05/is-god-a-being-or-being-itself/>]. Tillich appears an easy target for Cherbonnier’s criticism. To follow Tillich’s approach, we must be willing to judge Jesus as either an idolater or a simpleton for not having anticipated better the metaphysics of modern existentialism. Thus, following Augustine and Cherbonnier, my usage affirms the biblical distinction between Creator and creation without rejecting either the appropriateness of some creaturely language for God in Scripture or denying the theological problems it occasions.

Although Tillich might object to this particular juxtaposition of his thought with Paul's, the wider Christian tradition recognizes the redemptive purposes of God in history as the ground of reality. And that ground is personal, communal and missionary in character.

Theologian John Flett explains:

Mission is not a second step in addition to some other more proper being of the church, because, as the living one, God's relationship to the world belongs to his eternal being. The Christian community is, as such, a missionary community, or she is not a community that lives in fellowship with the triune God as he lives his own proper life.⁶

For the church, there is no more capacious frame of reference than the self-revelation of God the Father in the Son by the Spirit, which is the source of her own existence.⁷

The church's credo, which develops in response to the triune God's self-disclosure, finds ultimate expression (and coherence) in the church's common life and thereby offers the world an alternative plausibility structure. Theologian Robert Jenson explains, "The gospel identifies its God thus: God is the one who raised Israel's Jesus from the dead. The whole task of theology can be described as the unpacking of this sentence in various ways."⁸ For Jenson, this includes the church's development of "trinitarian language and thought" to name God properly in worship as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and, further, to trace the implications of that central confession for the church's other commitment-laden practices.⁹

⁶ John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 34. I affirm Flett's statement here, although in later sections of this chapter I depart from some of the conclusions he draws.

⁷ This statement echoes the trinitarian language Karl Barth develops in Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), I/1-2.

⁸ Quoted in Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford, UK; Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994), 263.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 263-64.

With regard to place, the relevance of Jenson's claim becomes evident when theologian Reinhard Hütter unpacks the role of creation within the economy of salvation.

He states:

Creation is redeemed insofar as the triune God draws it into his communion. The eschatological goal is participation in the communion of the Father with the Son in the Holy Spirit. In the incarnation, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the triune God has begun to draw creation into his communion in a completely new fashion transcending its original state. This end time is already present "in the Spirit" now in the economic mission of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit through the communion of the ecclesial body of Christ.¹⁰

Modeling the method Jenson describes, Hütter binds closely the redemption of place—indeed, the redemption of all places—to the triune life of God. Thereby, Hütter also indicates a way of interpreting the world in trinitarian perspective. Theologian Craig Bartholomew agrees:

Any theology of place worth its salt must be *christocentric*. As Newbigin asserts, Christ is the clue to all that is. Thus, Inge is right to make the incarnation central to a theology of place. However, precisely because such a theology is christocentric, it will be *trinitarian*. The remarkable flowering of trinitarian theology in the latter half of the twentieth century is important because "prime reality" for the Christian is the God who has come to us in Jesus, and epistemologically it is essential that a theology of place take this prime reality as its starting point.¹¹

Participation in the triune life of God constitutes its own plausibility structure.¹²

The emphasis on practices and participation here is intentional. Contra Descartes, one cannot merely reason oneself into a new plausibility structure, since such structures

¹⁰ Reinhard Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 124.

¹¹ Craig G. Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 243.

¹² Although Paul S. Fiddes does not employ the term 'plausibility structure', his development of a "pastoral doctrine of the Trinity" offers substantive parallels. See Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000).

function just below the surface of consciousness. Tuan describes this as the difference between “spatial knowledge” and “spatial skills.”¹³ He cites Polanyi’s observation that understanding the physics of riding a bicycle is not the same as possessing the skill to do so. “Such knowledge,” writes Polanyi, “is totally ineffectual unless it is known tacitly, that is, unless it is known subsidiarily—unless it is simply dwelt in.”¹⁴ Newbigin concurs, ‘To “indwell” such a tradition, to live with this paradigm, to show in every new generation its adequacy to human experience, its power to “make sense” of new situations, will be a fully rational enterprise’.¹⁵ But the language of indwelling indicates that while “fully rational” the enterprise nevertheless requires immersion into a different way of life, which Newbigin describes consistently in terms of the congregational embodiment of the biblical story. “A plausibility structure is not just a body of ideas,” he writes, “but is necessarily embodied in an actual community. It cannot be otherwise.”¹⁶ But how does that translate into practice? What does indwelling an alternative plausibility structure look like in history?

The rise of Benedictine monasticism in pre-modern Europe illustrates the transformative impact of an alternative plausibility structure. Newbigin recounts how that structure formed local communities:

¹³ Yi-fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 68.

¹⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 214fn1.

¹⁵ Lesslie Newbigin, *Truth and Authority in Modernity*, Christian Mission and Modern Culture (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 57.

¹⁶ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 99; Newbigin continues: “A plausibility structure is embodied in an actual historical community among all human communities, one which carries forward a tradition of rational discourse and argument as ever new situations have to be met and coped with, and it is therefore something which is always changing and developing” (99).

At the center of the life of each community was the continual reading of the Bible, both in study and in the worship of the community. The biblical story came to be the one story that shaped the understanding of who we are, where we come from, and where we are going. In the constant remembering of the great events of creation and salvation through the liturgical year, in the popular drama of the streets, and in the pictures that surrounded the congregation as they gathered for worship, it was this story that was their mental framework, the story that defined human life and its meaning and destiny. It was this story that shaped those barbarian tribes into the cultural and spiritual entity that made Europe something other than simply a peninsula of Asia.¹⁷

The Benedictine example reflects what theologian Stanley Hauerwas describes as a “narrative-formed community” that offers the world a distinctively Christian social ethics.¹⁸ In more traditional terms, the church names the adoption of a new plausibility structure with the term ‘conversion’. Consistent with Newbigin’s account, theologian Bryan P. Stone explains:

Conversion cannot be a matter of being “convinced” of the truth, credibility or utility of Christian claims within a non-Christian plausibility structure. Such a notion would be intrinsically self-contradictory. Conversion is a matter of being formed into a new world, a new way of life called *ecclesia* that is itself the plausibility structure from within which Christian claims begin to have meaning and truth.¹⁹

¹⁷ Newbigin, *Proper Confidence*, 13.

¹⁸ Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 4; Hauerwas clarifies that the content of the story matters more than the mere form: “The distinctive character of the church’s social ethics does not follow from the fact that it is a narrative-formed community, but rather from the kind of narrative that determines its life” (4). For a more detailed development of a “story-formed community”, see pages 9-35.

¹⁹ Bryan P. Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 269.

Therefore, appeals to ground the church's witness or commitment to place within the *missio Dei* presuppose a local community that bears witness to and participates actively in the life of the triune God in union with Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.²⁰

On this basis, the next chapter will argue that the church should embrace a trinitarian conception of place as *sacred creation*, *sacred journey*, and *sacred construction* to frame her commitment within the *missio Dei*. Such a description allows a synthesis of sacred and secular sources and creates space for conversations across different religious and philosophical traditions, which are essential features of a missionary orientation. Furthermore, this approach to place does not require a rejection of Agnew's useful definition of place as a "meaningful location" that has guided the study thus far.²¹ Instead, the three conceptions of place mentioned above represent different approaches to place rather than a new definition.²² Before exploring place through those categories in chapter 5, however, we first need to offer some preliminary qualifications and then explicate the *missio Dei* as the proper plausibility structure for a missionary commitment to place.

Preliminary Qualifications

Given the pliability of place as a concept, the first qualification is that place resists neat categorization. Consider the example of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Under which heading should it appear: sacred creation, sacred journey, or sacred construction?

²⁰ The language of "union with Christ" emphasized within the Reformed tradition finds fresh expression in J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

²¹ Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 7.

²² Cresswell, *Place*, 2004; as Cresswell attests, various approaches to place, no less than formal definitions, remain contested matters, which situates the constructive work of the present study in a dynamic conversation on the meaning and significance of place as a concept.

As a ubiquitous element in biblical literature irrespective of genre or Testament, the Temple Mount was an important feature of the natural topography of the Old City of Jerusalem. Moreover, it occupies a central place in the larger sacred landscape of the Jewish “promised land” (Genesis 15:18-21, 26:3, 28:13). Thus, the Temple Mount is an expression of sacred creation. But it is also true that the remnants of the Western Wall of the ancient temple hold abiding religious significance to Jews (as well as Christians and Muslims) as a place for prayer and pilgrimage. Thus, the Temple Mount is a site of sacred journeys. Finally, whether studying the construction of the First Temple in 1 Kings or the Second Temple in Ezra-Nehemiah, the actual process of building the Temple provided a common spiritual and spatial center around which Israel’s national identity coalesced through mutual sacrifice and service. In the present day, the Temple Mount still contributes to the identity formation of multiple communities as a hub of religious, political, cultural and economic activity. Although contested ground, it thus exhibits a long and continuing history as a place of sacred construction.²³

This multi-layered reading of place invites a loose comparison to classical trinitarian terminology. That is, the Temple Mount is a sacred place that expresses a

²³ This multivalent reading of the Temple Mount finds validation in the reflections of Jewish philosopher Raphael Jospe on the place of Jerusalem. Jospe criticizes the attempt to fit the Temple Mount or the city into discrete categories as an attempt “to falsify Jewish history and to violate the Jewish religious experience.” The dichotomies between the physical and the spiritual, or the particular and the universal common in Christianity and Islam, are foreign to Jewish tradition. That is, the Temple Mount’s significance resides not only in the historic acts that have occurred there or even events yet to come; its significance lies partly in its location in the Holy Land. The Temple Mount and the city express multiple overlapping identities that are not easily separated. Again, in a much more limited way, perhaps here too exists a subtle trace of the Trinity [Raphael Jospe, “The Significance of Jerusalem: A Jewish Perspective,” *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture* 2, no. 2 (1995), <http://www.pij.org/details.php?id=647>].

common identity in three distinct yet mutually interpenetrating ways.²⁴ McGrath's discussion of the trinitarian concepts of perichoresis and appropriation sheds light not only on divine relations but also understandings of place. He explains:

Taken together, the doctrines of perichoresis and appropriation allow us to think of the Godhead as a 'community of beings,' in which all is shared, united, and mutually exchanged. Father, Son, and Spirit are not three isolated and diverging compartments of a Godhead.... Rather, they are differentiations within the Godhead, which become evident within the economy of salvation and the human experience of redemption and grace.²⁵

McGrath's closing emphasis on human interpretation is critical. As the next qualification makes clear, our interest lies not in using place to interpret the Godhead but to enlist the Trinity to interpret place within the human experience of the divine economy of salvation.

The second qualification is the observation that the argument proposed offers a version of *vestigium Trinitatis*—the idea that God leaves “traces of the Trinity” in creation for the sake of human discovery. Such “tracks and traces,” to borrow a phrase from theologian Paul S. Fiddes, always advance by way of analogy to illustrate eternal truths in time.²⁶ Citing Augustine's propensity to indulge such “psychological analogies”

²⁴ Part of the appeal of this example and a trinitarian reading of place, more broadly, is precisely place's resistance of neat categorization. For example, on a pilgrimage, place names the destination as well as the path itself. This also includes the interior work of the journey on the person, and any work undertaken upon arrival or return that is inspired by the experience, including revisions of one's self-understanding in relation to one's old place after encountering a new one. While distinct, it remains impossible to compartmentalize each of those experiences of place from the others.

²⁵ McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 255.

²⁶ With regard to the term 'traces', Fiddes observes, "[I]t hints at uncertainty, at ambiguity in both knowledge and direction. In its most extreme use in our contemporary culture, it indicates doubts about the relation between words and the objects in the world that they supposedly describe. The notion of a “trace” questions “signifiers” have any direct connection with the reality to which they refer ('things signified'), or whether they offer only hints and clues which point to it, and which mark out a path towards other traces which are yet to be. Baptists have characteristically shared this doubt in some areas, notably with regard to

and Calvin's criticism of them, McGrath views this as a point of vulnerability in Augustine's writings, but he infers that Augustine's "doctrine of the Trinity is not ultimately grounded in his analysis of the human mind, but in his reading of Scripture, especially the Fourth Gospel."²⁷ Likewise, after his own extended discussion of the *vestigium Trinitatis* in Augustine, Karl Barth concludes:

What are we to make of it? The first step is naturally to try to think of it in the sense in which it was originally intended, namely, as an interesting, edifying, instructive and helpful hint towards understanding the Christian doctrine, not to be overrated, not to be used as a proof in the strict sense, because we need to know and believe the Trinity already if we are really to perceive its *vestigia* as such in the microcosm and the macrocosm, but still to be valued as supplementation and non-obligatory illustrations of the Christian Credo which are to be received with gratitude.²⁸

The trinitarian reading of place that follows does not attempt to interpret the Trinity in reference to place so much as it interprets a missionary commitment to place in light of the Trinity.²⁹ That focus is consistent with and essential to the larger emphasis of this study on the reformation of ecclesial practice, as opposed to purely systematic interests.

A final qualification is the acknowledgement that this geography of place does not purport to be exhaustive. Instead, the argument, in particular its discussion of human geography, engages a select group of place theorists to introduce contemporary

the power of reference of creeds and the sacraments: they have suspected that some church dogmas, despite professed intentions, have tended to confuse the signifier with the thing signified" [Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003), 1–2].

²⁷ McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 260.

²⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, §8.3, 338; although the term "traces" (*vestigia*) strikes a decidedly more friendly tone with Barth than Paul S. Fiddes, on substance their accounts concur. The analogies draw loose connections [Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, 1–2].

²⁹ For a formal interpretation of the Trinity through the lens of place, see Sarah Morice Brubaker, "The Place of the Spirit: Toward a Trinitarian Theology of Location" (Ph.D., University of Notre Dame, 2011), <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/pqdtglobal/docview/922575102/abstract/8FE104CED1EC4EF6PQ/1>.

approaches to place and to provide conceptual foil for Newbigin's position, described in chapter 6. With those qualifications, let us now consider the life of the missionary God as a plausibility structure for place.

The *Missio Dei* in Scripture and Tradition

Before an eruption of interest in the mid twentieth century, the doctrine of the *missio Dei* experienced a long period of dormancy within church history. While the biblical and conceptual foundations of centuries past still undergird the doctrine, the missiological debates of the twentieth century evidenced a neglect of the careful distinctions achieved in classical Trinitarian theology. Epitomizing this tendency, Tormod Engelsen, a recent interpreter, remarked:

The term *missio Dei* has a long history that goes back to Augustine and relates to the doctrine of the Trinity, but this is not our main concern here. It is the use of the phrase in missiology that is our topic.³⁰

Such neglect of the doctrine's classical roots, however, had consequences. First, defenders of the classical doctrine forfeited substantial resources to resist distortions of the *missio Dei* in the mid twentieth century. Next, as John Flett acknowledged, "The doctrine of the Trinity played little constructive role in shaping the missionary act—little, that is, apart from the language of 'sending.'"³¹ Third, the language of sending, when detached from a classical trinitarian framework, proved incapable of securing the concept's meaning over time. Therefore, contemporary appeals to the *missio Dei* demand

³⁰ Tormod Engelsen, "Missio Dei: The Understanding and Misunderstanding of a Theological Concept in European Churches and Missiology," *International Review of Mission* 92, no. 367 (October 1, 2003): 482, doi:10.1111/j.1758-6631.2003.tb00424.x.

³¹ John G. Flett, "Missio Dei: A Trinitarian Envisioning of a Non-Trinitarian Theme," *Missiology: An International Review* 37, no. 1 (Jan): 1.

a reconsideration of its origins. Let us now consider the foundations of the doctrine in Scripture and the classical Christian tradition.³²

While advocates have marshaled a wide array of passages to support the church's missionary task, two biblical texts have dominated the discussion of a trinitarian basis for mission.³³ In the familiar "Great Commission" text that concludes Matthew's Gospel (28:19-20), the risen Jesus, claiming full authority "in heaven and on earth," sends the church on a disciple-making mission into the entire world. Jesus commanded: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). The publication of William Carey's *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (1792) supplied the foundation of the modern missionary movement.³⁴

Geoffrey Wainwright commented on its trinitarian significance:

Since the making of disciples from all nations is, by dominical command, sealed by baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:16-20), the missionary activity of the Church bears an integrally trinitarian character.³⁵

³² Henceforth, I will use the term 'classical Christian tradition' to refer broadly to the writings of Christian Scripture, the Church Fathers, and ecumenical councils.

³³ This is not to suggest, however, that other biblical passages have not received attention in discussions of *missio Dei*. For a canonical perspective from an Old Testament scholar, see Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), and from a New Testament perspective, see J. Ross Wagner's analysis of an "apostolic hermeneutic" in select epistles in J. Ross Wagner, "Missio Dei: Envisioning an Apostolic Reading of Scripture," *Missiology* 37, no. 1 (January 1, 2009): 19–32.

³⁴ Dana L. Robert, "The Great Commission in an Age of Globalization," in *Considering the Great Commission: Evangelism and Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit*, ed. W. Stephen Gunter and Elaine A. Robinson (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 23; while other biblical texts exerted influence, none compared to Matthew 28, which still exerts greater influence than any other text in spite of some scholarship criticizing its history of interpretation and application. See also Paul W. Chilcote and Lacey C. Warner, eds., *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

³⁵ Geoffrey Wainwright, *Embracing Purpose: Essays on God, the World and the Church* (Peterborough, UK: Epworth, 2007), 66.

If the church takes the Matthean text as its basis for mission, then the church has no mission that is not properly trinitarian.

The second text that has guided discussion of the *missio Dei* appears toward the end of the Gospel of John. Again, in the context of a post-resurrection appearance, John recorded:

Jesus said to them [his disciples] again, “Peace be with you.” As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld” (John 20:21-23).

More frequently cited than Matthew in discussions of *missio Dei*, this passage portrays the church’s mission as a direct extension of the mission of God, which Jesus conceived as the redemption of human beings from their sins.³⁶ While John lacks the explicit trinitarian baptismal formula of the Matthean text, his commission nevertheless names all three persons of the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and perhaps offers greater insight into their operations *ad extra* in mission. Together, these passages provided the church with basic building blocks for a trinitarian doctrine of mission. A mature doctrine, however, eluded the church for more than three centuries.

Arthur W. Wainwright’s perceptive study, *The Trinity in the New Testament*, drew two major conclusions related to the development of trinitarian doctrine. First, the New Testament indicated that some biblical authors recognized the problem of the

³⁶ For examples of the prominence of this Johannine text in discussions of the *missio Dei*, see Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 4; and Michael W. Goheen, “‘As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You’: J.E. Lesslie Newbigin’s Missionary Ecclesiology” (Universiteit Utrecht, 2001), <http://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/597>. Also noteworthy is that John’s Gospel is the subject of Newbigin’s sole biblical commentary. See Lesslie Newbigin, *The Light Has Come: An Exposition of the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987).

Trinity within the church's earliest language. Second, the biblical authors provided the church with inchoate fragments of a response to that problem rather than a definitive answer to it.³⁷ By the end of fourth century, however, significant advances toward a full-fledged doctrine of the Trinity occurred. Saint Augustine crowned these patristic achievements with his prolonged composition of *De Trinitate*, which spanned the late fourth to early fifth centuries.³⁸

Augustine's thought figured prominently in the orthodox formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity. With regard to mission, three contributions merit close attention. The first contribution was terminological. Augustine introduced the language of 'missions' to Christian theology in Books II – IV of *De Trinitate*.³⁹ In Books II and III, respectively, Augustine considered the Old Testament theophanies and the works of angels. He reserved his discussion of the missions of the triune God, however, for Book IV *Missions: The Work of the Mediator*.⁴⁰ In the fifth and concluding chapter of Book IV, Augustine narrowed his focus to the divine missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit, where he alluded repeatedly to John 20:21-23.

Augustine's second contribution resided in his insistence on the unity of the Godhead. In Book IV, ch. 5, par. 27, Augustine declared, "There is nothing at all to stop

³⁷ Arthur W. Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1962), 4.

³⁸ Saint Augustine, *The Trinity*, ed. John E. Rotelle OSA, trans. Edmund Hill OP (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 7–9.

⁴⁰ Although Augustine speaks of 'divine missions' in the plural, at the outset of this paragraph I intentionally use the term 'mission' in the singular. In contemporary discussions of missiology, the singular usage generally refers to divinely-initiated activity, whereas the plural 'missions' refers primarily to human-initiated activity. For example, when one speaks of the history of Protestant or Catholic missions, one refers primarily to the organized efforts of human missionaries. The balance of this chapter details efforts in the mid-twentieth century to recover Augustine's emphasis on the mission of the triune God as a corrective to overly anthropocentric and ecclesiocentric models of mission that developed in the medieval and early modern periods.

us believing that the Son is equal to the Father and consubstantial and co-eternal, and yet that the Son is sent by the Father.”⁴¹ Likewise, in par. 29, Augustine extended these claims to the Holy Spirit: “The Father and the Son are one; so too the Holy Spirit is one with them, because *these three are one* (1 John 5:7).”⁴² To conclude Book IV, Augustine explicitly wed divine unity with the divine missions in par. 32:

The Son is not less than the Father just because he was sent by the Father, nor is the Holy Spirit less simply because both the Father and the Son sent him. We should understand that these sendings are not mentioned in scripture because of any inequality or disparity or dissimilarity of substance between the divine persons, but because of the created visible manifestation of the Son and the Holy Spirit; or better still, in order to bring home to us that the Father is the source and origin of all deity.⁴³

Augustine not only reiterated his concern for unity in the context of divine missions but also demonstrated the unfinished character of the doctrine of the Trinity in the New Testament, which Arthur Wainwright later described.⁴⁴

Augustine’s third contribution was to distinguish between divine processions and missions. In a subtle series of interlocking theological claims, Augustine drew several crucial distinctions in Book IV, ch. 5, par. 29 between the operations of the Trinity. One may best enter the argument through a careful reading of his prose:

And just as being born means for the Son his being from the Father, so his being sent means his being known to be from him. And just as for the Holy Spirit his being the gift of God means his proceeding from the Father, so his being sent means his being known to proceed from him.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Ibid., 172.

⁴² Ibid., 174, emphasis original.

⁴³ Ibid., 176–77.

⁴⁴ Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament*, 4.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 174.

In this passage, Augustine first differentiated between processions and missions. In the case of the Son, he was born from the Father and was sent into the world. Likewise, the Spirit proceeded from the Father and was sent into the world. Augustine concluded that the processions—the begetting of the Son and the gifting of the Spirit—were eternal relations existing between the divine persons that logically preceded any temporal missions to the world. As “created visible manifestations” (par. 32) of the Son and the Spirit, the missions made the divine persons “known to be from” (par. 29) or “known to proceed from” (par. 29) the Father.

Therefore, the temporal missions of the divine persons revealed their eternal processions but did not constitute them. In other words, the Father’s sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit from eternity into time allowed the world to see God, as God truly is, in himself. In his classic study of the *missio Dei*, Georg F. Vicedom concurred:

If we want to do justice to the Biblical conception, *missio Dei* must be understood also as an attributive genitive. God becomes not only the Sender but simultaneously the One who is sent. Thus Catholic dogmatics since Augustine speaks of sendings or *missio* within the triune God.⁴⁶

While Augustine did not believe such revelatory acts *ad extra* secured for the world an exhaustive knowledge of God *in se*, they nevertheless did depict God’s redemptive and sanctifying purposes for the world.⁴⁷

Flett worried that Augustine introduced at this very point a division between God’s being and act so great that it undermined the development of the *missio Dei*, by

⁴⁶ Georg F. Vicedom, *The Mission of God; an Introduction to a Theology of Mission*, trans. Gilbert A. Thiele and Dennis Hilgendorf, The Witnessing Church Series (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), 7.

⁴⁷ Edmund Hill, O.P. makes a somewhat similar point about the relationship between mission and divine purpose in his introduction to *De Trinitate* [see Augustine, *The Trinity*, 49].

relegating mission to a second-order attribute of the divine life and, thereby, the church's life. Theologian Stephen R. Holmes countered, however, that "events of the gospel story must be revelatory of God's eternal life, but they need not be definitive of it."⁴⁸ In his discussion of the "Triunity" of God, Barth also offered a compelling (albeit lengthy) rejoinder in defense of the Augustinian view:

To the unity of Father, Son and Spirit among themselves corresponds their unity *ad extra*. God's essence and work are not twofold but one. God's work is His essence in its relation to the reality which is distinct from Him and which is to be created or is created by Him. The work of God is the essence of God as the essence of Him who (N.B. in a free decision grounded in His essence but not constrained by His essence) is revealer, revelation and being revealed, or Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer. In this work of His, God is revealed to us. All we can know of God according to the witness of Scripture are His acts. All we can say of God, all the attributes we can assign to God, relate to these acts of His; not, then, to His essence as such. Though the work of God is the essence of God, it is necessary and important to distinguish His essence as such from His work, remembering that this work is grace, a free divine decision, and also remembering that we can know about God only because and to the extent that He gives Himself to us to be known. God's work is, of course, the work of the whole essence of God. God gives Himself entirely to man in His revelation, but not in such a way as to make Himself man's prisoner. He remains free in His working, in giving Himself.... On this freedom rests the incomprehensibility of God, the inadequacy of all knowledge of the revealed God. The triunity of God, too, is revealed to us only in God's work. This is why the triunity of God is incomprehensible to us. This is why all our knowledge of the triunity is inadequate.⁴⁹

Barth affirmed the essential unity of God's being and act, but he also recognized the human dependence on divine revelation freely given to secure that understanding. This dependence rendered all human insights into the triune nature of God partial and limited. Returning to Augustine, his serious engagement with Scripture contributed new

⁴⁸ Stephen R Holmes, "Trinitarian Missiology: Towards a Theology of God as Missionary," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8, no. 1 (January 2006): 83. Holmes is guarding against Hegelian or process theologies that suggest God's action in the world is constitutive of God's being.

⁴⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, §9.3, 371.

terminology to the church's lexicon, stressed the unity of divine purpose, and recognized the revelatory character of divine missions for the church's own understanding of mission.

The *Missio Dei* as Emerging Consensus

The crises that divided the world in the early twentieth century also divided Christian mission and eventually led to the recovery and redevelopment of the classical Christian doctrine of the *missio Dei* among conciliar and evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics, alike. Despite mid-century disputes over the doctrine that first erupted at the International Missionary Council's 1952 meeting in Willingen, Germany, and continued throughout the 1960s and 1970s, by the end of the century a broad ecumenical consensus emerged around the *missio Dei* as the church's theological basis for mission.

Evidence of this convergence appears in the *missio Dei*'s prominent inclusion in Bosch's "Emerging Ecumenical Paradigm" and, more broadly, in the missional church movement whose popularity, theologian J. Todd Billings notes, presents its own challenges to the doctrine.⁵⁰ Tormod Engelsen confirms, "One may notice a certain convergence of views between the ecumenical and evangelical streams of missiology when it comes to the trinitarian understanding of the basis of mission."⁵¹ Bosch extends that assessment to include "virtually all Christian persuasions," including Eastern

⁵⁰ See pages 389-393. Bosch begins, "During the past half a century or so there has been a subtle but nevertheless decisive shift toward understanding mission as God's mission" [David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series, no. 16 (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), 389]; Billings describes the ways in which the widespread popularity of the missional church movement has proven detrimental to its theological underpinnings. See J. Todd Billings, "What Makes a Church Missional?," *Christianity Today*, March 2008.

⁵¹ Engelsen, "Missio Dei," 490.

Orthodoxy and even documents at Vatican II.⁵² Of course, in some quarters the mid-twentieth-century debates over the *missio Dei* still rage. While detailed discussion of those arguments lie beyond the parameters of this study, they nonetheless inform the construction of the *missio Dei* that follows.⁵³

The emerging consensus shares three normative theological judgments requisite to the church's maintenance of the *missio Dei* as her theological basis for mission. The chief flaw of the *missio Dei* as a doctrine is not, as Flett suggests, a "trinitarian façade" but rather a non-Trinitarian, non-redemptive conception of the *missio Dei* that relies upon a certain indeterminacy.⁵⁴ Thus, to safeguard the doctrine from the arguments that

⁵² Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390–91.

⁵³ While I do not engage those arguments directly, I do broach them indirectly in a discussion of John Flett's work in the following footnote. Moreover, two leading journals of mission studies have dedicated entire theme issues to debates over the *missio Dei*. See Jacques Matthey, ed., "Willingen 1952-Willingen 2002," *International Review of Mission* 92, no. 367 (October 1, 2003): 463–587, doi:10.1111/j.1758-6631.2003.tb00420.x; J. Nelson Jennings, "Re-Envisioning *Missio Dei*," *Missiology: An International Review* 37, no. 1 (January 2009): 3–104.

⁵⁴ Flett, *The Witness of God*, 77; to be fair, Flett's magisterial argument offers the most developed theological discussion of the *missio Dei* since Georg Vicedom's *The Mission of God* (1965) and pertains to the mutual assumption of a trinitarian flaw that both the classical and radical streams of the *missio Dei* at Willingen accepted without question (N.B., Flett distinguishes the streams as "classical" and "ecumenical"). Flett locates the indeterminacy of the doctrine in "an identical and insufficient Trinitarianism" (56). Specifically, he discerns a "disjunction between God's being and his act" that afflicts the doctrine of the Trinity from Augustine forward and replicates itself secondarily in a disjunction between the church's being and action in the world. Flett may be correct to identify this particular weakness as a problem with the broader formulation of trinitarian doctrine, but I remain unconvinced that (1) this explains divisions between proponents of the *missio Dei* in the 1950s and 1960s, (2) Flett's proposal resolves the problem adequately, and (3) the secondary ecclesiological problem he names obtains equally across all of the historical mission paradigms explored in chapter 3. The first two objections require further discussion.

By Flett's account, both streams are identical partly due to historical reductionism, because he does not acknowledge the continuity of the classical stream with Augustine, and partly on theological grounds, because his preoccupation with the problem of relating being and action trumps all other variables. Therefore, he downplays other differences between the positions and views both streams as slight variations of the same problem emerging in the same period. Even more significant, the only way to overcome this problem in Flett's estimation—and thus improve the classical version and curtail the radical one—is to secure God's missionary identity within the immanent relations of the Godhead rather than in God's economic activities in the world. This, of course, requires speculation beyond Scripture. I share the reservations of Jacques Matthey and Carl Braaten, both of whom Flett cites (50), to speculate about the nature of intra-trinitarian relations or the "divine processions" in Augustine's terms—not to mention Barth's concerns quoted at length in the body of the previous section.

plagued it previously, the church must insist that the terms of its construction include a *trinitarian basis*, a *redemptive focus*, and an *ecclesial locus*. Let us now consider briefly the significance of these three commitments for a faithful construction of the church's commitment to place within a larger trinitarian plausibility structure.

A trinitarian basis

The commitment to a trinitarian basis for mission involves two primary claims that constitute the church's submission to her earliest confession of faith: "that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:11). The first claim is that God, not human beings, stands at the center of mission. The church therefore can affirm

Flett's concern that locating the *missio Dei* in the economic rather than the immanent Trinity leads Flett to claim repeatedly that the doctrine of the Trinity "holds no constructive place in that [*missio Dei*] theology", hence it offers a "trinitarian façade" rather than a substantive account (77). However, this appears problematic on two counts. First, by this logic, it would seem that any attempt to ground church practices retroactively in historical doctrines is illegitimate or insincere (i.e., an instrumental attempt to find past justifications for present commitments). Likewise, efforts to correct distorted practices also would seem invalid, since the theological rationale of the practice was insufficiently developed in advance. Surely Flett does not intend this, but his unwillingness to recognize any meaningful connections between the classical stream of the *missio Dei* and the Trinity overstates his case and inadvertently posits an overly linear conception of the progression from *theoria* to *praxis*, which Newbigin notes was common to Hellenistic thought but is entirely absent from Scripture [Newbigin, *Proper Confidence*, 12].

Second, even if those efforts do not resolve every trinitarian problem—or, what Flett considers the main problem—the aforementioned denial and his proposed solution create two additional trinitarian dilemmas. Namely, the denial creates its own disjunction between the economic and immanent Trinities and his solution requires dubious speculation on the life of God *ad intra*. In formal terms, the former point risks a rejection unity of the Trinity, which ironically is Flett's central concern. McGrath explains, "Taken together, the doctrines of *perichoresis* and appropriation allow us to think of the Godhead as a 'community of being,' in which all is shared, united, and mutually exchanged.... [This] allows a rigorous correlation between God's self-disclosure in history, and God's eternal being" [McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 254–55]. McGrath appeals to Karl Rahner's famous axiom for confirmation: "The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and vice versa" [Quoted in *ibid.*, 255].

Although Flett never addresses Rahner's claim, he does discuss "Triune Immanence and the Act of God" (204-208). Consistent with other sections of his work, Flett judges all Patristic and contemporary authors, alike, complicit in an over-differentiation of immanent and economic Trinities, which results in a privileged ordering of the life of God first *in se* and then *ad extra*. This move, Flett insists, always renders God's act a derivative of God's being and thus inscribes that same disjunction on the church. Following Rahner, however, Flett overstates the problem and over-differentiates the economic and immanent Trinity in the opposite direction of those he criticizes. Further, drawing such a tight correspondence between the immanent life of the Trinity and the immanent life of the church seems to overreach and, again, overstate what we can claim confidently on a scriptural basis.

with J. C. Hoekendijk, the leading radical voice in the missiological debates of the mid-twentieth century, the need for a shift from an ecclesiocentric conception of mission to one centered properly on the activities and attributes of the triune God.⁵⁵ As Newbigin concludes:

The mission of God is not to be prosecuted after the manner of a human crusade. It is the participation of the Church in the Spirit's witness to what the Father is doing with the whole maze of events which make up human life—namely to sum up all things in Christ, in whom they were all created.⁵⁶

Such a clear trinitarian understanding of mission restores a proper confidence in the church's missionary task by reminding her that mission finds its first cause and final consummation in the triune God. Newbigin's statement also offers the added reminder that human misconceptions of mission never offer the last word. Instead, the Apostle Paul assures the church that that word is reserved for Christ alone:

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth (Philippians 2:9-10).⁵⁷

Christian mission emanates from and ends in the life of the triune God.

The second claim within a trinitarian basis for mission pertains to the identity of the God the church worships. While the church properly rejects ecclesiocentrism, the church cannot affirm Hoekendijk's move toward an indeterminate theocentrism that ignores the achievements of classical trinitarian doctrine. Within the 1960s, especially,

⁵⁵ Johannes C. Hoekendijk, "The Church in Missionary Thinking," *International Review of Mission* 41, no. 163 (July 1952): 324–36; Johannes C. Hoekendijk, *The Church Inside Out* (Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 1966).

⁵⁶ Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission*, 54–55.

⁵⁷ Scholarly consensus views Philippians 2:6-11 as a fragment of an early Christian hymn. Thus, at the beginnings of Christian community, the church's worship funds her mission in the world.

the radical stream of *missio Dei* interpretation conflated the revolutionary *zeitgeist* with the work of the Holy Spirit. The *missio Dei*, however, does not describe the activity or attributes of a generic divinity but, as Jenson claimed earlier, the God of Israel whom the church confesses as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. While there exists within the Trinity a diversity of function reflected most naturally in the diversity of persons, there remains always a unity of will and of substance. As Augustine observes, “The sent and the sender are one.”⁵⁸ Therefore, no matter how compelling the cause, the church is free neither to purport economic activities that imply a disjunction within the divine will nor to discard classical orthodox claims for extra-biblical speculation on divine immanence.

Such caution extends also to claims for the *missio Dei*. Here, the Eastern Orthodox emphasis on mystery over explanation might serve the emerging ecumenical consensus on the *missio Dei* well. The traditional Orthodox description of mission as “the liturgy after the liturgy” reminds the church to subordinate its activism to her worship. Whatever the identity and function of the church in God’s mission may be, her witness begins with worship of the triune God; and mission, properly conceived, extends that worship into the world. This is why, reports theologian Ion Bria, St. John Chrysostom spoke of two altars, one in the sanctuary and one in the world.⁵⁹ The Trinity, Colin Gunton confirms, is not a stumbling block to the church’s witness, but rather it constitutes the only good news the church has to offer.⁶⁰ No genuine friendship, dialogue across difference, or quest for justice can proceed from a denial of this fundamental truth,

⁵⁸ Quoted in Edward W Poitras, “St Augustine and the *Missio Dei*: A Reflection on Mission at the Close of the Twentieth Century,” *Mission Studies* 16, no. 2 (1999): 32.

⁵⁹ Ion Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996).

⁶⁰ John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 68–69.

which grants the church her very identity. The church's confession of faith, Newbigin explains, draws the boundaries of her ecumenism.⁶¹ Thus, the church must insist on a trinitarian basis for the *missio Dei*.

A redemptive focus

The commitment to a redemptive focus for the *missio Dei* follows closely from its trinitarian basis. Reflecting on Augustine's *De Trinitate*, Edmund Hill states:

Mission implies purpose; the Son and the Spirit were sent on a mission of redemption and sanctification. So until we find evidence of full divine redemption and sanctification, we cannot talk about divine mission; which means that we cannot talk about it until we come to the New Testament.⁶²

The church understands the *missio Dei* to relate directly to her understanding of God's eternal purposes revealed in Scripture. To that end, St. Paul writes to the Colossians:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross (Colossians 1:15-20).

Paul's depiction of the divine mission culminates with God's redemptive action in the cross of Christ. This event in the life of the God achieves reconciliation not only for human beings but for all creation. Thereby, Paul subordinates all other foci to the divine pursuit of redemption in Jesus Christ.

⁶¹ Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission*, 14–20.

⁶² Augustine, *The Trinity*, 49.

This redemptive perspective is not limited to Pauline literature. In contrast with Edmund Hill's claim, Old Testament scholar Christopher J. H. Wright argues that God's redemptive mission pervades the entire canon of Scripture:

YHWH presents himself as the God who wills to be known. This self-communicating drive is involved in everything God does in creation, revelation, salvation and judgment. Human beings therefore are summoned to know YHWH as God, on the clear assumption that they can know him and that God wills that they should know him. Those who stand in elect and covenant relationship with God are entrusted with this knowledge and must live accordingly, but ultimately all humanity will know YHWH to be the true God one way or another. Accordingly, making God known is part of the mission of those who are called to participate in the mission of the God who wills to be known.⁶³

To know the God who wills to be known, sinful human beings must experience the redemption God offers in Jesus Christ. However, Paul suggests that Wright does not go far enough in this passage: not only humanity has fallen, but all creation awaits redemption in Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:15-20, 2 Corinthians 5:19).⁶⁴

The broad emphasis on the redemption of all creation receives attention in the Eastern Church's teaching on the "cosmic dimension" of salvation, which attends not only to people but to all of the places the triune God has created and loves. This claim highlights a theologically significant difference between two Gospels. Whereas Matthew's Great Commission (28:19-20) restricts its redemptive focus to the nations ("*panta ta ethne*"), Mark's commission by contrast supports a much broader conception of salvation that encompasses all creation:

⁶³ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 74.

⁶⁴ Later in the same work, however, Wright redeems himself with separate discussions of "God's Redemption of the Whole Creation" and "The Care of Creation and Christian Mission", which are welcome and uncharacteristic additions to an evangelical Protestant theology of mission [ibid., 407–12, 412–20].

And he [Jesus] said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover” (Mark 16:15-18).

The disciples not only proclaim the gospel to creation, in the Gospel of Mark they also exercise divine authority over it: “And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs” (Mark 16:20). Archbishop Anastasios concurs, the triune God “sanctifies the universe.”⁶⁵ In some ecumenical circles, where the doctrines of human sinfulness and the fall of creation have lost purchase, the church must insist again on a redemptive focus for the *missio Dei*.

An ecclesial locus

The commitment to an ecclesial locus involves at least three factors: divine freedom, the church’s witness, and the limitations of history. First, an ecclesial locus respects God’s freedom to pursue God’s mission through whatever means God freely employs. If it is the case in John 20:21-23 that the Son in response to the Father sends a community of witnesses into the world in the power of the Holy Spirit, then no human observer occupies a vantage point from which to critique that commission. Newbigin confirms, “The witness which the church bears to the world is thus not something contrived by the church itself. It is the work of the triune God.”⁶⁶ And the triune God, recalling Barth’s comments, remains always free to express the divine will.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Quoted in Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 209.

⁶⁶ Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today’s Mission*, 48.

⁶⁷ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, §9.3, 371.

The second factor within an ecclesial locus pertains to the church's own testimony. The prophet Jeremiah proclaims:

If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name," there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot (Jeremiah 20:9).

Likewise, the church has a witness to bear. In his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope John Paul II expresses a similar sentiment:

In this definitive Word of his revelation, God has made himself known in the fullest possible way. He has revealed to mankind *who he is*. This definitive self-revelation of God is the fundamental reason why the Church is missionary by her very nature. She cannot do other than proclaim the Gospel.⁶⁸

The church has no choice but to share her good news or, as Bosch warns, "it denies its very *raison d'être*."⁶⁹

But the church does not exhaust her testimony in verbal proclamation. Rather, the church exists as a community that embodies the gospel she proclaims. How else, Newbigin might ask, would one "indwell" her story? Stone, who described the local congregation earlier as an alternative plausibility structure, responds to a similar question in this way:

The most evangelistic thing the church can do today is to be the church—to be formed imaginatively by the Holy Spirit through core practices such as worship, forgiveness, hospitality, and economic sharing into a distinctive people in the world, a new social option, the body of Christ. It is the very shape and character of the church as the Spirit's "new creation" that is the witness to God's reign in this world and so both the source and aim of Christian evangelism. On this understanding, the *missio Dei* is neither the individual, private, or interior salvation of individuals nor the

⁶⁸ Pope John Paul II, "*Redemptoris Missio*: Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II," Papal encyclical (Rome, December 7, 1990), paragraph 5, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/index.htm.

⁶⁹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 9.

Christianization of entire cultures and social orders. It is rather the creation of a people who in every culture are both “pulpit and paradigm” of a new humanity (Yoder 1997:41).⁷⁰

For Stone, an ecclesial locus is essential to the *missio Dei*, because it demonstrates for the world the reign of God made possible in the world through Jesus Christ.

Finally, an ecclesial locus reminds human beings of the limitations of their own history. In another variation on a recurrent theme, the radical stream of the *missio Dei* sought to move beyond the particularity of ecclesial and doctrinal strictures to tap into a universal spirit. Newbigin identifies two basic problems with that approach. First, the Bible presents Jesus Christ alone as the way of salvation:

To affirm the unique decisiveness of God's action in Jesus Christ is not arrogance; it is the enduring bulwark against the arrogance of every culture to be itself the criterion by which others are judged. The charge of arrogance which is leveled against those who speak of Jesus as unique Lord and Savior must be thrown back at those who assume that "modern historical consciousness" has disposed of that faith.⁷¹

Second, the radical shift from sacred to secular history limits one's perspective.

Newbigin explains:

World history does not contain in itself the secret of its own redemption. The Church, which is embedded in world history, belongs to it, and bears witness to its true beginning and end, is nevertheless apart from world history, in the sense that its witness is to an end which is not merely implicit in the story itself.⁷²

Newbigin reverses the argument of those who claim that the biblical worldview obscures the church's perception of reality. To the contrary, the radicals trapped themselves, the

⁷⁰ Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, 18; Newbigin's claim that the church is “sign, instrument and foretaste” of the kingdom of God is a close and concise approximation of Stone's point.

⁷¹ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 166; see also, Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission*, 51; Lesslie Newbigin, “Religion for the Marketplace,” in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. Gavin D'Costa, Faith Meets Faith Series (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990), 135–48.

⁷² Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission*, 50.

church, and the *missio Dei* within the much narrower confines of human history.

Therefore, an ecclesial locus for the *missio Dei* respects divine freedom, permits the church's witness, and broadens the world's perspective.

In sum, the church should endorse a classical construction of the *missio Dei* distinguished by a *trinitarian basis*, a *redemptive focus*, and an *ecclesial locus*. In the absence of those conditions, the term signifies nothing more than an empty container prone to distortion. However, with such assurances, theologian Darrell L. Guder confesses, "In a sense, it is like starting one's theological formation all over again, when one begins to work from the basic assumptions of the *missio Dei*."⁷³ What Guder describes is a conversion to a new plausibility structure. Thus, the church discovers in the *missio Dei* not only her commission but also a plausibility structure capacious enough to hold a missionary commitment to place.

Place as a Secular Concept

In Bosch's description of the Enlightenment missionary paradigm, a Cartesian approach to rationality coupled with a hard division between facts and values conspired to separate sacred from secular in Western culture and banish the former from the public square.⁷⁴ Since place remains a term somewhat foreign to the soil of missiology, the

⁷³ Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), x.

⁷⁴ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 264, 266; a critique of this modern Western plausibility structure lies at the heart of many of Lesslie Newbigin's later writings [see Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*]; while some, including Jose Casanova and Peter L. Berger, argue that religion has made a dramatic and undeniable comeback in the public square in late modernity, the underlying terms of that presence have not changed [see José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Peter L. Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Washington, DC; Grand Rapids, MI: Ethics and Public Policy Center; Eerdmans, 1999)]. That is, the criteria on which religious truth claims are evaluated differ from the criteria for science. Religion may

sacred use of this secular concept invites brief discussion of its suitability for the task at hand. This account builds on the discussion from chapters 1-2, especially regarding the origins of the *ekklesia* in the public square.

While the concern for place crosses ideological fault lines within the field of geography, it also extends far beyond that discipline's borders. Cresswell argues:

Place is one of the two or three most important terms for my discipline—geography. If pushed, I would argue that it is the most important of them all. Geography is about place and places. But place is not the property of geography—it is a concept that travels quite freely between disciplines and the study of place benefits from an interdisciplinary approach. Indeed, the philosopher Jeff Malpas (2010) has argued that "place is perhaps the key term for interdisciplinary research in the arts, humanities and social sciences in the twenty-first century."⁷⁵

A narrow literature review substantiates this claim from Cresswell and Malpas. Since the mid-1990s at least 21 authors have entitled books *The Power of Place*. These volumes explore a broad range of subjects, including environmental science, sport, archeology and even the racial history of real estate transactions on Martha's Vineyard.⁷⁶ Interspersed

express itself publicly, but its claims concern the private realm of subjective values and beliefs; whereas, the public realm of universally-accessible facts is reserved for science. This accounts for why Western culture presently experiences Islam as a threat, because the Enlightenment provides no other model for religious integration into modern society besides domestication. For a perceptive account of modernity's domestication of Christianity and Western culture's quasi-religious justification for "bombing Islamic fundamentalists into a higher rationality", see; William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). The Enlightenment's fact-value divide has proven as determinative for American culture as in French culture, even though religion factors more prominently in American life. Despite that surface-level difference, the underlying conditions governing the status of its claims remains the same. .

⁷⁵ Tim Cresswell, *Place: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 1.

⁷⁶ A focused literature review of works published since 1995 with "the power of place" in their title yielded 19 titles under six broad disciplinary categories: 1. Art and Art History, see Gerald McMaster, *Reservation X: The Power of Place in Aboriginal Contemporary Art* (Seattle, WA; Hull, Quebec: University of Washington Press, 1999); Helen Hills and Melissa Calaresu, eds., *New Approaches to Naples c.1500–c.1800: The Power of Place* (Abingdon, UK; New York: Routledge, 2016). 2. Business/Marketing, see Keith Peterson, ed., *The Power of Place: Advanced Customer and Location Analytics for Market Planning* (San Diego, CA: Integras, 2004); Richard L. Taylor, *Martha's Vineyard: Race, Property and the Power of Place* (Boston, MA: Richard L. Taylor, 2016). 3. Environmental Studies, see Winifred Gallagher, *The Power of Place: How Our Surroundings Shape Our Thoughts, Emotions, and Actions* (New York: Harper

among those titles are works of religious studies, as well. In contrast to the unhelpful indeterminacy of the *missio Dei* at mid-century, the elasticity of place proves helpful in bridging the Enlightenment's false divide of sacred and secular. Let us reconsider the role of place in the context of that divide from a few different vantage points.

Place, Geography, and Religion

First, from the perspective of human geography, place supplies natural connections to religion. The approach of Yi-Fu Tuan, who distinguished between space and place in chapter 1, centers on cataloguing the human experience of place. In *Space and Place* (1977), he maintains that knowledge of a place “can be direct and intimate, or it can be indirect and conceptual, mediated by symbols.”⁷⁷ Scripture confirms both readings of place. Here again, the Temple and the city of Jerusalem offer useful

Perennial, 2007); James Swan, *The Power of Place: Sacred Ground in Natural & Human Environments* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 1995). 4. Geography, see Gil Latz, *The Power of Place Study Guide: World Regional Geography* (South Burlington, VT: Wiley, 1999); Harm J. De Blij, *The Power of Place: Geography, Destiny, and Globalization's Rough Landscape* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); John A. Agnew and James S. Duncan, eds., *The Power of Place: Bringing Together Geographical and Sociological Imaginations*, Routledge Library Editions: Social & Cultural Geography (Abingdon, UK; New York: Routledge, 2014). 5. Historical and Literary Studies, see Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997); Janet Browne, *Charles Darwin: A Biography, Vol. 2 - The Power of Place* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003); Roger C. Aden, *Huskerville: A Story of Nebraska Football, Fans, and the Power of Place* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 2007); Keith Thor Carlson, *The Power of Place, the Problem of Time: Aboriginal Identity and Historical Consciousness in the Cauldron of Colonialism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010); Joan Cowen Bowman, *The Power of the Place* (New York: The Homestead Press, 2010); Marianna Poutasse, *Power of Place: Herman Melville in the Berkshires* (Pittsfield, MA: Berkshire Historical Society, 2014); David Rollason, *The Power of Place: Rulers and Their Palaces, Landscapes, Cities, and Holy Places* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016). 6. Religious Studies, see Mary Lethert Wingerd, *Claiming the City: Politics, Faith, and the Power of Place in St. Paul* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); James Robson, *Power of Place: The Religious Landscape of the Southern Sacred Peak*, Harvard East Asian Monographs (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009); Zayde Antrim, *Routes and Realms: The Power of Place in the Early Islamic World* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁷⁷ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 6.

examples, since they both constitute physical sites where direct encounters occur between people and God.

2 Samuel 6 narrates the physical transfer of the Ark of the Covenant from Baale-judah to Jerusalem. King David assembles 30,000 men of Israel to assist the transport and guard Israel's most sacred treasures. In transit, one of the sons of Abinadab, who was helping drive the cart on which the Ark rested, touched the Ark, which was forbidden. Scripture reports the deadly consequences of that mistake:

And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God. And David was angry because the Lord had broken out against Uzzah. And that place is called Perez-uzzah to this day (6:7-8).

The Ark symbolized God's presence among God's people—not unlike the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night by which Moses led Israel through the wilderness (Exodus 13:21). But Uzzah did not experience the Ark as a mediating symbol, to borrow Tuan's phrase; rather, he experienced the Ark as a direct and deadly encounter with a holy God. Note that David was upset that "the Lord had broken out against Uzzah" (6:8a), which, read literally, places God in a golden box and epitomizes Augustine's concerns with the "predicaments of place" in chapter 2.

Tuan's analysis takes one important step further at this point. He acknowledges that "people tend to suppress that which they cannot express."⁷⁸ He then cites examples to confirm the way in which the larger culture "deems [such experiences] private—even idiosyncratic—and hence unimportant."⁷⁹ What Tuan describes here is the unspoken enforcement of the Enlightenment's plausibility structure against any human experience

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

that does not fit its account of reality.⁸⁰ The concept of place, at least in Tuan's existential interpretation, provides a tool of resistance against modernity's relegation of the sacred to a private, hence inconsequential, realm. Insofar as religion offers a meaningful location to encounter God and others, whether directly or indirectly, then a missionary commitment to place may prove to be an essential element in the church's pursuit of a "fresh encounter of the Gospel with western culture," which Newbigin championed.⁸¹

That said, Newbigin's long immersion in Hindu culture confirms his own suspicion of what Barth describes as the problem of "religion as unbelief."⁸² Newbigin questions why observers so frequently want to locate and limit God's activities in the world to the sphere of religion. He comments:

In most human cultures religion is not a separate activity set apart from the rest of life.... The sharp line which modern Western culture has drawn between religious affairs and secular affairs is itself one of the most significant peculiarities of our culture and would be incomprehensible to the vast majority of people who have not been brought into contact with this culture.... The unspoken assumption [is] that "religion" is the primary

⁸⁰ Perhaps most significant within the Enlightenment's account of reality is its account of rationality, which again prescribes the criteria upon which truth claims are adjudicated in society. Beyond Newbigin and Polanyi, whom we have cited previously, the writings of moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre offer an important account of the dependence of all models of rationality upon the respective tradition that produced them. His argument appeared first in a monograph and then was developed further in his Gifford Lectures. See Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988); Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

⁸¹ Lesslie Newbigin, "The Gospel and Modern Western Culture" (Unpublished manuscript, 1993), DA 29/12/2, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham.

⁸² While this statement still broadly obtains, two comments are necessary. First, for those unfamiliar with Newbigin's life, he was a sympathetic and learned critic of Hindu culture and, by all accounts, a master of Tamil language and literature. He also engaged in regular comparative study of sacred Hindu texts with priests at the Ramakrishna mission in Kanchipuram in his early years in India. Second, regarding Barth, Garrett Green's recent (re)translation of *Church Dogmatics I/II*, §17 renders the German term *Aufhebung* as "sublimation" of religion rather than its "abolition", which yields a decisively different interpretation of Barth's views on religion and, in Green's judgment, one more faithful to Barth's original intention [Karl Barth, *On Religion: The Revelation of God as the Sublimation of Religion*, trans. Garrett Green (London; New York: T & T Clark, 2006), viii–ix].

medium of human contact with the divine. But this assumption has to be questioned. When the New Testament affirms that God has nowhere left himself without witness, there is no suggestion that this witness is necessarily to be found in the sphere of what we call religion. The parables of Jesus are notable for the fact that they speak of secular experiences.⁸³

Newbigin's criticism of hegemonic Western cultural assumptions entails his tacit resistance to the subordination of the sacred to the secular and an explicit defense of God's freedom to work wherever God wills. But these arguments ultimately complement rather than diminish the value of Tuan's contribution.

Newbigin shares Tuan's concern for what Polanyi calls "personal knowledge" against the reductionist tendencies of modern empiricism. While religion may not be the only theater for divine drama, it is in no way bereft of God's witness. Following Barth, a christological reordering of religion's relationship with revelation, in which the former assumes a posture of response to God's initiative in Christ, may set the stage for the future "*sublimation* of religion."⁸⁴ Likewise, when understood within the plausibility structure of the *missio Dei*, place also may prove to be an instrument of divine purpose.

Place, Geography and History

Another perspective from geography adopts a more historical approach than Tuan's humanism.⁸⁵ Claire Brickell starts with a sharp judgment: "The paucity of contemporary studies around mission(aries) can be partly attributed to the pervasive grip that theories of modernisation and secularisation have had on modern social scientific

⁸³ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 172.

⁸⁴ Barth, *On Religion*, 52 [CD I/2, §17.1]; emphasis original.

⁸⁵ For a concise summary of Tuan's innovation and impact on geography, see Cresswell, *Place*, 2004, 19–21.

scholarship.”⁸⁶ Where Tuan discerns a subtle subordination of experience, Brickell sees the clear bias of the reigning plausibility structure against religion. As one of a small company of contemporary geographers who conducts research on the impact of missionaries, Brickell recognizes the way in which Enlightenment presuppositions restrict the range of scholarly research:

Indeed, whilst studies of religious tourism abound, scholars have thus far restricted their gaze to participants in pilgrimages, religious performances, festivals, and places that function as tourist attractions (see for example, Strausberg 2011). Consequently, the activities of mission organisations in planning and executing mission trips, along with the experiences of missionaries themselves, remain key areas for research.⁸⁷

Such gaps in scholarship weaken rather strengthen the study of place. Although she minimizes (incorrectly) the loss that theology suffers from inattention to place, she reprimands her fellow geographers on empirical grounds:

That Christian Theology might not have been quick to apply a spatial lens is not necessarily surprising (See Derogatis 2003; for one notable exception), but for Geography it has been a major oversight, particularly given that the very origins of the discipline are tied to the missionary activity of mapping. Indeed, as Bridges (2008) outlines, the Royal Geographic Society was formed in 1856 in response to the first mapping of Mount Kilimanjaro and its surrounding area, undertaken by missionaries in 1855.⁸⁸

For Brickell, the contributions of missionaries to cartography alone justify their inclusion within the scope of geographic research, but the structural resistance to religion remains strong in some quarters of her field.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Claire Brickell, “Geographies of Contemporary Christian Mission(Aries),” *Geography Compass* 6, no. 12 (December 2012): 726.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 730.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 727.

⁸⁹ Here it is important to acknowledge that Brickell’s research has appeared only in the last four years. This timeframe matters for at least two reasons: (1) she is a young scholar whose research may yet impact the field in significant directions, and (2) she issues her criticisms of the reigning modernist plausibility

Place and the Plunder of Cultural Resources

Next, from the vantage point of Christian theology, place supplies invaluable conceptual resources from the wider culture. Israel's departure from Egypt after generations of enslavement occasions the development of the most enduring theological trope of the Patristic period: plundering the Egyptians.⁹⁰ The Book of Exodus reads:

But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go. And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty, but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall *plunder the Egyptians* (Exodus 3:19-22).⁹¹

As early Christians struggled with how best to translate Christian faith into Greco-Roman culture—how to balance what Walls describes in the previous chapter as the pilgrim and indigenizing principles—several prominent theologians, including Irenaeus, Origen, Gregory of Nazianzen and Augustine, explicitly employed the biblical metaphor of “plundering the Egyptians” to characterize their engagement with local culture.⁹² The emphasis on doctrinal development within Bosch's Eastern Church paradigm epitomizes

structures with awareness of contemporary postmodern critiques of Enlightenment thought. Thus, her views are more likely to have both impact in the former case and longevity in the latter. See Brickell, “Geographies of Contemporary Christian Mission(aries)”; Claire Brickell, “Migration with a Mission: Geographies of Evangelical Mission(aries) to Post Communist Albania” (PhD, The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), 2013), <http://etheses.lse.ac.uk/3288/>.

⁹⁰ For an insightful yet inconclusive survey of biblical, rabbinical and historical-critical evidence on the length of Israel's bondage to Egypt, see David A. Glatt-Gilad, “How Many Years Were the Israelites in Egypt?,” *TheTorah.Com*, January 11, 2016, <http://thetorah.com/how-many-years-were-the-israelites-in-egypt/>.

⁹¹ Emphasis mine. See also Exodus 12:35-36.

⁹² Pier F. Beatrice, “The Treasures of the Egyptians: A Chapter in the History of Patristic Exegesis and Late Antique Culture,” in *Studia Patristica* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 159–83.

this practice. From a missionary perspective, place provides a critical resource for constructive theology.⁹³

Place as Secular Context

Perhaps more obvious than a source for the church's theology, however, place provides a secular context for the church's witness. Richard Bauckham observes:

The church's own history has been significantly shaped by geography. Of special interest for us now is the fact that the gospel has so often impelled Christians to cross geographical boundaries and to journey to unknown places in obedience to the direction from the particular to the universal that the Bible points.⁹⁴

From Jonah's reluctant journey to Nineveh to Paul's intrepid travels across Asia Minor, the human response to the divine call in Scripture often involves crossing geographic borders that mirror the boundary between belief and unbelief. The titles of many mission histories confirm Bauckham's point: consider Miriam Adeney's *Kingdom Without Borders*, Ruth A. Tucker's *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*, William R. Hutchison's *Errand to the World*, and Sanneh's *Disciples of All Nations*.⁹⁵ Geography shapes indelibly the church's presence in the broader world.

⁹³ For a useful comparison beyond Christian contexts and the plausibility structures of the Enlightenment, see Diana L. Eck, *India: A Sacred Geography* (New York: Harmony, 2012).

⁹⁴ Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Cumbria, UK: Paternoster, 2003), 55.

⁹⁵ Miriam Adeney, *Kingdom without Borders: The Untold Story of Global Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009); Ruth A. Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya: A Biographical History of Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1983); William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Lamin O. Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Of equal significance to the borders Christianity crosses are the borders it indwells.⁹⁶ As Newbigin indicates, the early Christian assembly or *ekklesia* was a public forum that rejected in its very constitution the separation of sacred and secular that the Enlightenment demands. Pushing the church to reclaim her roots as the *ekklesia*, George MacLeod, the founder of the Iona Community in Scotland, expresses the public character of the church's mission when he states:

I simply argue that the Cross be raised again at the center of the marketplace as well as on the steeple of the church. I am recovering the claim that Jesus was not crucified in the cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves; on the town garbage-heap; at a crossroad so cosmopolitan that they had to write his title in Hebrew and in Latin and in Greek (or shall we say in English, in Bantu and in Afrikaans?); at the kind of place where cynics talk smut, and thieves curse, and soldiers gamble. Because this is where He died. And that is what He died about. And that is where the churchmen should be and what churchmanship should be about.⁹⁷

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus were not private religious affairs but public events—even if the latter event redefines human existence historically understood.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ American religious historian Thomas Tweed's ethnographic research on a Cuban Catholic shrine in Miami, Florida, produced a monograph that then piqued his interest in theorizing about its pilgrims and religion more broadly. That research resulted in a new theory of religion that combines the motifs of crossing and dwelling. See Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁹⁷ George F. MacLeod, *Only One Way Left* (Glasgow, Iona and Edinburgh: Iona Community Press, 1961), 38.

⁹⁸ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 133–36; Luke Timothy Johnson's discussion attempts neither to deny nor evade the matter of historicity but to acknowledge that the traditional (and certainly modern) conditions of historical existence prove inadequate to account for (or, contain) the new form of existence disclosed in the resurrection of Jesus. Indeed, Johnson argues that after his death Jesus "entered into an entirely new form of existence, one in which he shared the power of God and in which he could share that power with others. The resurrection experience, then, is not simply something that happened to Jesus but is equally something that happened to Jesus'" followers. The sharing in Jesus' new life through the power of the Holy Spirit is an essential dimension of the resurrection. This power of new life, furthermore, is understood by Christians to be the basis for claiming that they are part of a new creation, and a new form of humanity shaped according to the image of the resurrected One" (134). Hence, the continuing life of the church imbued with the power of the Holy Spirit extends the public character of the resurrection into the present and even future."

Next, it is noteworthy that MacLeod issues this charge in the same era that burgeoning interest in the theology of the laity develops in Catholic and Protestant circles.⁹⁹ For Yves Congar writing on the eve of Vatican II, and Hendrik Kraemer in the aftermath of the International Missionary Council meeting at Willingen, the laity represent a new frontier for the church's witness in the world. Finally, as the reference to Willingen indicates, these reflections on the public place of the church in society occur against the backdrop of mid-century debates over the *missio Dei*.

In sum, this chapter develops the first half of a missiological account of place in response to the devaluation of place described in the first section of the study. The chapter began with the development of a framework for the church's commitment to place based on a classical construction of the *missio Dei*, featuring a *trinitarian basis*, a *redemptive focus* and an *ecclesial locus*. Next, we examined some of the critical resources place offers for overcoming the sacred-secular divide that has undercut the church's commitment to place in late modernity. This constructive argument extends into chapter 5 with the development of a trinitarian conception of place as *sacred creation*, *sacred journey*, and *sacred construction*.

⁹⁹ For a Catholic view, see Yves Congar, and, in Reformed Protestant perspective, see Hendrick Kraemer [Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of the Laity*, trans. Donald Attwater (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1957); Hendrick Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity*. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958)].

Ch. 5 Place in Trinitarian Perspective

Three Approaches to Place

Beyond the construction of a classical framework of the *missio Dei*, the development of a missionary theology of place invites a conversation between theology and geography. Working at this intersection, theologian Kimberly Whitney acknowledges that "the category of place must attend to questions of gender, culture, power, quality of life, worldview, religious experience of land, and loci of meaning-making."¹ In other words, theologian Mary McClintock Fulkerson observes, "The convergence of different places also entails relations of power."² Ernst M. Conradie agrees with this assessment but adds a caution:

One can easily add to these themes (for example with reference to the sacred and the built environment, architecture, art, gardening, urban theology and rural theology), but this should suffice to indicate not only that Christian theology is almost necessarily a theology of place, but also that a theology of place can soon become rather slippery and extremely diffuse.³

The downside of the elasticity of the concept of place becomes apparent. Conradie offers a useful reminder: to make any particular case for place, much that could be said about a commitment to place must be left unsaid.

¹ Kimberly Whitney, "Greening by Place: Sustaining Cultures, Ecologies, Communities," *Journal of Women and Religion* 19/20 (2002 2001): 18.

² Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 34.

³ Ernst M Conradie, "Towards a Theology of Place in the South African Context: Some Reflections from the Perspective of Ecotheology," *Religion & Theology* 16, no. 1–2 (2009): 4, doi:10.1163/156973109X449967.

Given this caution, three critical observations follow. First, the discussion ahead samples judiciously from the broad literature on place and draws insights across disciplines. Next, it filters those insights through the *missio Dei*. Third, the discussion discerns a trinitarian pattern within the cross-disciplinary literature on place. What follows is not an attempt to build a natural theology of the Trinity from sources related to place, but conversely an attempt to allow the classical doctrine of the Trinity to illumine patterns in present discussions of place—to ask how the *missio Dei* informs respective approaches to place as sacred creation, sacred journey, and sacred construction.

Since this study seeks to make a particular case for a *missionary* theology of place, as opposed to a more generic treatment of the subject, the question of missiological significance requires constant attention lest we slip back into familiar patterns of thought.⁴ As mission scholar Samuel Escobar observes:

While Christians confess in their creeds and their worship that they believe in a God who loves the world so much that he sent his Son to reveal his love and accomplish salvation for all humankind, frequently they do not care much about what has to be done today to demonstrate that love and to communicate this good news to the world. Thousands of churches carry on “business as usual” without ever asking the simple question, “Why has God placed us as a community, at this time, in this neighborhood, in this city, in this country, in this world?”⁵

Beyond refocusing the church’s attention to place, Escobar’s question invites the church to reflect on the divine purpose behind her location in the world—namely, its missiological significance. By design, the plausibility structures that inform human

⁴ That does not mean the discussion in this or the next chapter will avoid prominent themes in the preexisting literature on place, like pilgrimage or the sacraments. Instead, we query those themes from a missionary perspective.

⁵ Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone*, Christian Doctrine in Global Perspective (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 93.

geography and much modern theology display little interest in a recovery of teleology. Newbigin confirms this observation by way of complaint: “Little has so far been done to bring the insights of missiology to bear on the inculturation of the gospel in a now largely pagan Europe.”⁶ Where then might the church discern her missionary purpose in the following approaches to place?

Place as Sacred Creation

Creation and Divine Love

Christians claim that the natural world evinces supernatural origins and artistry. The Apostles’ Creed, the most widely accepted Christian confession of faith, begins, “I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of the heavens and earth.”⁷ But approximately 1700 years before that Christian confession, the Hebrew psalmist proclaims that “the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork” (Psalm 19:1, KJV). McGrath notes historically that the “image of God as artist conveys the idea of personal expression in the creation of something beautiful.”⁸ The worship of the God of Israel frequently celebrates divine creativity.

Appealing to more agrarian sensibilities, theologian Norman Wirzba observes that the Bible’s opening scenes portray “God with knees and hands in the dirt, breathing into soil the breath of life that creates you and me, along with all the plants and animals and

⁶ Lesslie Newbigin, “Culture and Theology,” in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, ed. Alister E. McGrath (Oxford, UK; Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993), 100.

⁷ The Apostles’ Creed, which has roots in the earliest Christian confessions, found final form in the eighth century and, by the twelfth century, became the most widely accepted confession of faith across the Christian *oikoumene*. See Alister E. McGrath, ed., *The Christian Theology Reader* (Cambridge, MA; Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1995), 7–8.

⁸ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford, UK; Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994), 237.

birds. God is a Gardener who loves soil and delights in fertility.”⁹ Although it assumes a different mode of expression, this biblical image also celebrates divine creativity.

Whether as artist or agriculturalist, the church recognizes in the triune God the creative and sustaining force behind the natural world (Genesis 1-2, John 1:1-5, Colossians 1:15-17). In the context of a discussion of place, the stakes of that theological claim are high, and they are central to a Christian commitment to place.

Inasmuch as a loss of a commitment to place characterizes late modernity, so too a loss of appreciation for the beauty of the natural world attends our time. While debate exists over the sources of this loss— McClendon, for instance, acknowledges Christianity’s complicity but also assigns blame to science and technology¹⁰—it motivates Wirzba to call Christians to cultivate “an *imagination* for the world as created, sustained, and daily loved by God.”¹¹ This echoes Escobar’s concern for a church that does not seem to love the world as God loves it. “To know imaginatively,” Wirzba continues, “is to try to see the world with the love by which God sees and sustains the world.”¹² And Wirzba’s claim pertains not only to the opening chapters of Genesis or the Johannine epistle he cites (1 John 4:8), but with equal force to famous evangelistic proof texts like John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” The remedy to the

⁹ Norman Wirzba, *From Nature to Creation: A Christian Vision for Understanding and Loving Our World, The Church and Postmodern Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 1–2.

¹⁰ James Wm. McClendon, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 2: Doctrine* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 157; by contrast, Wirzba redirects the question away from science Wirzba, *From Nature to Creation*, 3.

¹¹ Wirzba, *From Nature to Creation*, 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, 4; perhaps not surprisingly, Wirzba’s next publication focuses on love as the hallmark of Christian faith. See Norman Wirzba, *Way of Love: Recovering the Heart of Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 2016).

modern degradation of nature resides in a recovery of love for God's creation, which finds its wellspring in God's prevenient love for us (1 John 4:19).

A practical theology, however, must guard against generic appeals to love that risk devolving into sentimentality. Love requires concrete expression and definition. Recognizing this danger, Jacobsen devotes the penultimate chapter of *The Space Between* to "Loving Place."¹³ His conclusion moves beyond a mere receptive attachment to place toward the generative call to love in practice:

Love bonds us to the place we live. But our love also can shape the place we live. G. K. Chesterton claims that love is a key element to a city becoming great: "Men did not love Rome because she was great. She was great because they had loved her."¹⁴

These complementary accounts of the biblical call to love God's creation reveal a consistent missionary concern to love place in a manner consistent with the divine pattern established in Jesus. That is, in Christ, love takes a cruciform shape, which finds continuing expression through a community living in anticipation of new creation, as Hays contends.¹⁵

Others, however, reject the characterization of love as the foundation of the Christian understanding of creation. Religion and geography represent two different human responses to the natural world based on a common assumption. Tuan asserts:

Nature appeased through prayers and rights gives us religion; nature controlled through the exercising of human physical power gives us geography. In both cases, nature was our adversary. And it still is, though, in developed countries, people tend to forget this in their awareness that

¹³ Eric O. Jacobsen, *The Space between : A Christian Engagement with the Built Environment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 239–69.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 240.

¹⁵ Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996).

human power, indiscriminately used, threatens to degrade nature beyond rehabilitation.¹⁶

In Tuan's view, religion, as well as geography, originates not in love but in domination. As a historical description, the church must confess that too often Tuan's indictment of religion has been justified; as a theological assessment, however, his argument falters.

In *Religion: From Place to Placelessness*, Tuan attempts to construct a phenomenology of religion. His comparisons of Buddhism and Christianity, while insightful at points, too often suffer from the lack of a consistent theological frame or a deep knowledge of either tradition. In the previous comment, his analysis resembles less the soft relativism common to a phenomenological approach than a raw Nietzschean analysis of the will to power. While an extended rebuttal lies beyond the parameters of this study, Wirzba's reflections on love offer the beginnings of a credible theological response to Tuan.¹⁷

Creation and Christian Doctrine

The persistence of misunderstandings of the Christian doctrine of creation, the direct challenges it faces in modernity and the substantial overlap it shares with the

¹⁶ Yi-Fu Tuan and Martha A. Strawn, *Religion: From Place to Placelessness* (Chicago, IL: Center for American Places, 2010), 5.

¹⁷ Tuan's assumption, however, begs at least one further observation. Namely, a sadness attends Tuan's words. Instead of viewing his own discipline of geography as an instrument for exploring the wonder of the world, of engendering love for creation, he instead views geography as the product (and, in the absence of any qualification, then presumably a means) of controlling place. Despite its common origins, religion conversely reflects a constant striving to escape the attachments of place in his view. Although Tuan displays familiarity with both Buddhist and Christian traditions, he does not identify his own commitments explicitly. That said, whatever his confession or lack thereof, his descriptions of ultimate reality reveal a greater debt to Buddhism than to classical Christianity. When Christianity has been given over at times to the abuses Tuan identifies, then the work of theology consists in casting down idols and calling for repentance; but the larger more joyful tasks of theology involve the cultivation of a Spirit-filled community that bears witness to God's reconciliation of all things in Jesus Christ, cultivates God's good creation, and engenders praise for her Creator.

category of sacred creation invite special attention to the classical construction of the doctrine itself.¹⁸ Since the Enlightenment, theologian Jürgen Moltmann observes that the doctrine of creation has suffered neglect.¹⁹ The Lausanne Covenant (1974), a widely accepted confession of faith for evangelical Christians in more than 150 nations, confirms Moltmann's judgment. While the text from Lausanne's 2010 Congress in Cape Town, South Africa, does address the doctrine of creation,²⁰ the original Lausanne Covenant omits any mention of the doctrine, except for a single titular reference in the first section to God as Creator.²¹ Such inattention from churches, who otherwise promote mission vigorously, helps to explain why a missionary commitment to place has proven ambiguous in late modernity. But what accounts for such neglect?

Bartholomew traces the doctrinal connections between commitments to creation and place. He writes:

The doctrine of creation is fundamental to a theology of place. Indeed the failure of Christians to attend to place is largely owing to the eclipse of the doctrine of creation. A theology of place is rooted in the sort of theology of creation we discussed in relation to Genesis 1-2, which is itself fundamental to the entire biblical narrative. The doctrine of creation resists all dualisms which undermine the good materiality of our world and any attempt to privilege the soul or the "spiritual" over the material.²²

¹⁸ Due to the natural overlap between the classical doctrine of creation and our discussion of place as sacred creation, this section receives significantly more attention than the respective discussions of place as sacred journey and sacred construction. Rather than suggesting creation overshadows the other approaches in importance, this imbalance owes more to the neglect of the doctrine of creation in modern theology and mission studies, respectively. As the next chapter discusses, at least one interpreter of Newbigin has leveled the same criticism against his theological work. Additional stress on place as sacred creation, if anything, constitutes an act of theological remediation.

¹⁹ Conradie, "Towards a Theology of Place in the South African Context," 8.

²⁰ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action*, Didasko Files (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2011).

²¹ The International Congress on World Evangelization, "The Lausanne Covenant" (The Lausanne Movement, 1974), <http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lausanne-covenant.html>.

²² Craig G. Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 244.

In essence, Bartholomew argues that a doctrine of creation safeguards the proper balance between the universal and the particular, such that the church neither collapses into the materialism of pantheism nor evaporates into the ether of Gnosticism.

In the absence of a robust doctrine of creation, a commitment to place lacks sufficient foundation to withstand perennial gnostic and pagan challenges to orthodox Christian faith. Part of the vulnerability of place in the late modern context is the Enlightenment's intentional challenge of key elements in the Christian doctrine of creation and the Enlightenment's corresponding lack of concern with competing religious traditions. Hence, Newbigin concludes:

We have learned, I think, that what has come into being [in modernity] is not a secular society but a pagan society, not a society devoid of public images but a society which worships gods which are not God. But the myth of the secular society remains powerful.²³

The Enlightenment's attack on the Christian doctrine of creation was effective, but the unintended consequence of constraining Christian faith in society was not secular advance so much as the removal of any barriers to a burgeoning religious pluralism.

Four key elements distinguish the traditional Christian doctrine of creation from other constructive projects. First, theologian John Webster explains that creation *ex nihilo* "asserts that the divine act of origination, unlike all creaturely acts of production, is accomplished without any pre-existent matter and is thus qualified by nothing external to God's freedom."²⁴ Alister McGrath describes this differentiation of God from creation as a "central task of a Christian theology of creation... while at the same time affirming that

²³ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 219–20.

²⁴ John B. Webster, "Doctrine of Creation," in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, ed. Alister E. McGrath (Oxford, UK; Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993), 94.

it is *God's* creation.”²⁵ Next, the Creator inscribes order upon creation (Genesis 1-2), which includes an anthropocentric hierarchy of relations between all creatures. Third, as an expression of divine authority and freedom, God purposefully orders creation to fulfill divine ends. Finally, God's goodness infuses creation with a goodness of its own. McGrath observes that the refrain, ““And God saw that it was good” (Genesis 1:10, 18, 21, 25, 31)’, punctuates every act of creation in the first biblical account. Thus, Webster locates creation's goodness in a synthesis of “a structured system ordered to divinely intended ends.”²⁶ While faithful to tradition, this account feels sterile.

What is the connection between the purpose and order of Webster's account and the delight of Wirzba's? In an unrelated discussion of the *Pickwick Papers*, G. K. Chesterton captures something of this relationship between doctrine and delight when commenting on the relationship between Charles Dickens as an artist and his art:

The whole difference between construction and creation is exactly this: that a thing constructed can only be loved after it is constructed; but a thing created is loved before it exists, as the mother can love the unborn child.²⁷

Likewise, creation reflects an outpouring of divine love into the void of space to define a beloved place intended for communion between Creator and creation. As such, creation reflects the goodness, order, purpose and artistry of its Creator for whom love is the first and the last word of creation (Colossians 1:15, Revelation 22:13).

Under the conditions of modernity, however, the classical doctrine of creation, whether in its more logical or amorous form, collapses. Recalling Bosch, the

²⁵ McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 234; emphasis original.

²⁶ Webster, “Doctrine of Creation,” 95.

²⁷ G. K. (Gilbert Keith) Chesterton, *Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens* (London: Dent, 1911), 14, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/22362/22362-h/22362-h.htm>.

Enlightenment paradigm eliminates both order and purpose while subordinating revelation to reason.²⁸ These shifts effectively remove half of the constitutive elements of the doctrine, which in turn circumscribes traditional Christian claims and bolsters challenges to the doctrine of creation. Webster cites Darwin's naturalism, Hume's deism, Spinoza's metaphysical pantheism, Hegel's monism, Whitehead's process philosophy and Fichte's self-determinism among creation's chief competitors in the modern marketplace of ideas.²⁹ Add growing recognition of an ecological crisis attributed often to the anthropocentric views of Christianity, and the Christian doctrine of creation faces severe scrutiny in late modernity.

In response, Christian theologians largely pursue one of two courses of response in Webster's view. First, a revisionist strategy reconstructs the doctrine along symbolic lines to imagine God "as ultimate ground" on terms dependent upon philosophy and the sciences.³⁰ The reference to Paul Tillich at the outset of this chapter exemplifies such an apologetic approach. In contrast to the revisionists, a revivalist approach emerges that attempts to recover "the internal logic of Christian theology" on its own terms and reassert them with vigor.³¹ The goal for the revivalists, like Karl Barth, is not dialogue with Enlightenment philosophy and science but witness.

²⁸ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series, no. 16 (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1991), 262–67; Webster, "Doctrine of Creation," 95.

²⁹ Webster, "Doctrine of Creation," 95–96.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 97.

³¹ *Ibid.*

Representing the latter view, McClendon diagnoses a problem within the classic constructive of the doctrine of creation that requires correction. At the outset of his own discussion of the doctrine, he argues:

Those who expect here to find a 'doctrine of man' or 'theological anthropology' in classic modern style are making an understandable but unfortunate mistake. The practice in some theologies of introducing such a 'doctrine' among Christian doctrines is justified neither on biblical nor on historical grounds. The early Christians who confessed faith in God's reign, Christ's redemption, and the Spirit's fellowship (or, later, in the triune God) did not set alongside these an article of faith in *anthropos* or *homo*—in human nature as such. No book of the Bible is devoted to the classical and modern task of devising a philosophical or theoretical anthropology. To be sure, the psalmist asks "What is a frail mortal?" but does so only while exclaiming at "your heavens, the work of your fingers" as well as "all sheep and oxen, all the wild beasts, the birds in the fish in the sea, and everything that moves along ocean paths" (Ps. 8:3-8).³²

McClendon does not deny that the "frail mortal" has pride of place in the biblical narrative, but he insists that the heavy emphasis on the position of human beings—which Webster reports and McGrath endorses—invites problems such as Christian complicity in the degradation of creation based on utilitarian views of nature and the idolatrous anthropocentrism of modernity. Wainwright locates these problems in an interpretive imbalance between the creation accounts in Genesis and relays a way forward:

With growing awareness of the modern ecological crisis, theologians turned rather to the other creation story in Genesis: the human task is to 'till the earth and keep it' (Gen 2:15), and the power to 'name' the non-human creation (2:19f) is less the right to exploit it than the duty to give it meaning.³³

³² McClendon, *Doctrine*, 156–57.

³³ Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life : A Systematic Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 23.

Such a corrective resonates with the intentional shift in perspective for which Wirzba calls: “from nature to creation.”³⁴

This formal discussion of doctrine in service of a missionary commitment to place offers five lessons. First, the church must recognize that the interconnected web of commitments that constitutes Christian doctrine bears directly upon ecclesial practices related to place. The church’s inattention to such matters of practice leads theologian Willie J. Jennings to ask an unusual and provocative question, “How should we *perform* a doctrine of creation?”³⁵ Second, for the church to turn away from models of environmental exploitation that compromise her witness, she first must adopt Wirzba’s prescription for a shift in perspective “from nature to creation,” which involves repentance.³⁶ Ecumenical leader Wesley Granberg-Michaelson contends that within the World Council of Churches “the paradigm of mastery over the earth has been replaced by a search for new models of inter-relationship.”³⁷ Next, the adoption of the *missio Dei* as a plausibility structure requires the church to reevaluate long-settled doctrinal formulas in light of Scripture and changing contexts. The Eastern Church of the Patristic era did not exhaust the need for doctrinal development as a continuing feature of the church’s missionary paradigm. Fourth, the church must reject revisionist approaches to creation in favor of a revivalist response due to her intentional adoption of the *missio Dei* as an

³⁴ Wirzba, *From Nature to Creation*.

³⁵ Willie J. Jennings, *The Christian Imagination* (St. Paul, MN, 2012), sec. 15:15-15:39, <http://vimeo.com/39627157>; emphasis mine. Jennings concludes, “I am convinced that we modern Christians really do not have a serious or active doctrine of creation at work in our collective imagination.”

³⁶ Geoffrey Lilburne claims that the “salvation of the environment” requires economic repentance and conversion, which the church thus far has been reluctant to undertake [Geoffrey R. Lilburne, *A Sense of Place: A Christian Theology of the Land* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 9].

³⁷ Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, “Creation in Ecumenical Theology,” in *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*, ed. David G. Hallman (Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications; Orbis Books, 1994), 103.

alternative plausibility structure. This frees the church to challenge the reigning canons of rationality in any period. Finally, love must characterize the church's witness among both people and places. These adjustments to the doctrine of creation create conditions under which the church may bear faithful witness to the Creator of all things. That said, three additional elements of place as sacred creation deserve mention: belonging, awe and story.

Creation and Belonging

From its origins in the opening scenes of Scripture (Genesis 1;1-2:3, 2:4-25), the Christian account of creation always involved a sense of belonging. In his chapter on "Loving Place," Bartholomew identifies two components of that practice: beauty and belonging.³⁸ For many place theorists, belonging finds expression through the language of "a sense of place." Agnew's definition of place as "meaningful location," which still guides this study, specifies a sense of place as its third feature. Toward similar ends, Tuan coins the term "topophilia" to describe the "affective bond between people and place."³⁹ Such an understanding of place also finds expression in agrarian literature. Farmer and writer, Kyle T. Kramer, reflects on the patient commitment required to belong to a place, to learn and eventually become a part of its story and topography:

As experience shifted my thinking from an abstract "field" and "woods" to *this* field and *these* woods, my farm revealed itself to me in wonderful and difficult ways. I learned where the soil is eroded and exhausted or deep and fertile, where it grows great melons or poor hay, where the sandy loam drains well and the heavy clay lies wet. In the woodlot, I discovered the black walnuts and their green-globed gifts in the fall; the shagbark and

³⁸ Jacobsen, *The Space Between*, 239–69.

³⁹ Tim Cresswell, *Place: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 35.

slickbark hickories, which split easy and burn hot in the wood stove—and the elms, which do not; the few old black cherry and tulip poplar trees that somehow escaped the chain saw and whose girth I cannot get my arms halfway around (though I have tried). And I am coming to know the unkindness of lightning strikes and strong winds, the slow-healing scars of poor logging, the valiant and doomed struggle of trees against disease or the life-choking shade of a closing forest canopy. A commitment to a particular place means learning not just what it truly is, but who you are in relationship to it.⁴⁰

Besides a clear love of the land, notice how Kramer discovers rather than imposes order upon it. Place offers not only a meaningful location for him but a meaningful relationship.

A sense of belonging speaks to a deep human need for connection between creatures and creation. Art critic and activist Lucy Lippard describes this as the “lure of the local.” “Place for me,” Lippard writes in sensuous terms, “is the locus of desire.”⁴¹ Although an atheist, Lippard confesses that the experience of nature arouses in her a profound sense of gratitude toward something greater.⁴² That desire points beyond the yearning for creaturely connection with creation toward the common yearning of all creation for its Creator. “For we know,” the apostle Paul writes, “that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now” (Romans 8:20-22). Likewise, Newbiggin interprets the sort of longing Lippard expresses with reference to the *missio Dei*:

The biblical insistence that God’s universal purpose of salvation is accomplished through the choosing of a particular people from this fundamental insight

⁴⁰ Kyle T. Kramer, “Fidelity and Fecundity: Confirmation of the ‘Vocation of Location,’” *America* 198, no. 20 (2008): 33.

⁴¹ Lucy R. Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: New Press, 1997), 4.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 17.

concerning human nature. If each human being is to be ultimately understood as an independent spiritual monad, then salvation could only be through an action directed impartially to each and all. But if the truly human is the shared reality of mutual and collective responsibility which the Bible envisages, then salvation must be an action which binds us together and restores for us the true mutual relation to each other and the true shared relation to the world of nature.⁴³

Citing this passage, Bauckham adds, “Newbigin helpfully relates this pattern of divine purpose to something very fundamental about human nature as the Bible and the Christian understand it.” The lure of the local, therefore, may disclose a deeper spiritual longing.⁴⁴

Other place theorists describe this sense of belonging in more material terms of embodiment rather than affective ones. Whitney defines embodiment as “the means by which place is apprehended and engaged through practice” including “all creatures and landscapes therein.”⁴⁵ And while she captures a sense of the connection with place, ecological philosopher David Abram takes embodiment several steps further to blur lines between humans and what he describes famously as the “more-than-human-world”:⁴⁶

Every perceived thing... is felt to be animate—to be (at least potentially) alive. Death itself is more a transformation than a state; a dying organism becomes part of the wider life that surrounds it, as the hollowed-out trunk of a fallen tree feeds back into the broad metabolism of the forest. There is thus no clear divide between that which is animate and that which is inanimate. Rather, to the oral awareness, everything is animate,

⁴³ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, Revised (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 70; for a discussion (and partial quotation) of this passage, see also Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Cumbria, UK: Paternoster, 2003), 85.

⁴⁴ Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, 84.

⁴⁵ Whitney, “Greening by Place,” 18.

⁴⁶ Abram coins this phrase to break down the partition between popular notions of “nature” and “culture” or the distance he sensed between humans and “the environment” within the environmental movement itself. The ‘more-than-human-world’ gained traction within ecological circles. See David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997).

everything moves. It's just that some things (like granite boulders) move much slower than other things (like crows or crickets). There are only different speeds and styles of movement, these divergent rhythms and rates of pulsation, these many different ways of being alive. The surrounding world, then, is experienced less as a collection of objects than as a community of active agents, or subjects. Indeed, every human community would seem to be nested within a wider, more-than-human community of beings.⁴⁷

Human embodiment or creatureliness, for Abram, is not somehow separate from—set above or even merely set against—the rest of the more-than-human-world, but it exists as part of a complex and deeply interconnected ecosystem. Within Abrams' phenomenological philosophy, all matter exists on a broad continuum of life, so Abram consciously champions a version of animism.

While there is much to resist here—most notably, the hard-fought distinction between Creator and creation in the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* and the oppressive superstition-based systems common among animists—there remains something compelling, even holy, about the sacred reverence Abram affords the more-than-human-world. And while Christians should heed Paul's warning to the church at Rome not to “exchange the truth about God for a lie and worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator (Romans 1:25),” Abram nevertheless may teach the church how to pay attention to place, how to discern the sacred character of creation where others see only the opportunity for mastery. Moreover, Abram may yet teach the church how to interpret the words of Jesus who claims, “If these [people] were silent, the very stones would cry out”

⁴⁷ David Abram, *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology* (New York: Vintage, 2011), 269.

(Luke 19:40).⁴⁸ A sense of belonging not only characterizes a commitment to place, but it also orients creation toward praise.

Creation and Awe

As the personal examples of Lippard and Abram suggest, a close kinship exists between a connection to sacred creation and a sense of awe that naturally gives way to praise. “The proper relationship between creature and Creator is, in Christian eyes, the relationship of worship,” Wainwright observes.⁴⁹ Agrarian *littérateur* Wendell Berry affirms Wainwright’s point through his writings and his rural life in Henry County, Kentucky. In his poem, “How to Be A Poet,” Berry muses:

Breathe with unconditional breath
the unconditioned air.
Shun electric wire.
Communicate slowly. Live
a three-dimensioned life;
stay away from screens.
Stay away from anything
that obscures the place it is in.
There are no unsacred places;
there are only sacred places
and desecrated places.⁵⁰

Like the psalmist, Berry reminds readers that creation displays God’s handiwork (Psalm 19:1). All places are sacred, therefore, to those willing to be fully present to them.

Such attentiveness constitutes its own form of praise. In a letter to a government land-use commission, Berry’s teacher, the writer Wallace Stegner, makes a similar point:

⁴⁸ For additional examples of inanimate creation praising the Creator, see Isaiah 55:12, Psalm 19, Habakkuk 2:11.

⁴⁹ Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life : A Systematic Theology*, 16.

⁵⁰ Wendell Berry, “How to Be A Poet,” *Poetry*, 2001, 270.

Sherwood Anderson, in a letter to Waldo Frank in the 1920s, said it better than I can. "Is it not likely that when the country was new and men were often alone in the fields and the forest they got a sense of bigness outside themselves that has now in some way been lost...? Mystery whispered in the grass, played in the branches of trees overhead, was caught up and blown across the American line in clouds of dust at evening on the prairies.... I am old enough to remember tales that strengthen my belief in a deep semi-religious influence that was formerly at work among our people. The flavor of it hangs over the best work of Mark Twain.... I can remember old fellows in my home town speaking feelingly of an evening spent on the big empty plains. It had taken the shrillness out of them. They had learned the trick of quiet...." We could learn it too, even yet; even our children and grandchildren could learn it. But only if we save, for just such absolutely non-recreational, impractical and mystical uses as this, all the wild that still remains to us.⁵¹

Stegner writes of a commitment to preserve sacred creation, to protect the places where people may yet learn the lessons of the psalter:

"Be still, and know that I am God.
I will be exalted among the nations.
I will be exalted in the earth!" (Psalm 46:10).

Stegner understands that the land, especially the untamed wilderness, tells human beings a story about their own identity and place in the world that quiets their souls.

Stegner's view finds confirmation in the spirituality of indigenous peoples who live life close to the land. Theologian Belden Lane identifies axioms for the study of sacred place, and one is simply being present to it.⁵² After drawing a necessary contrast between certain indigenous understandings of "mythical space" that locate intrinsic power in place and the biblical notion that power resides not in a place but in the persons

⁵¹ Wallace Stegner to David E. Pesonen, "Wilderness Letter," December 3, 1960, <http://wilderness.org/bios/former-council-members/wallace-stegner>; what came to be known as the "Wilderness Letter" was Stegner's attempt to influence the judgments of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission on wilderness preservation decisions in the Western United States in the 1960s.

⁵² Belden C. Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality*, Expanded ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 29–32.

of the Trinity, Lane observes that ‘religious experience is invariably “placed” experience and that those places are frequently the most ordinary ones entered with awe.’⁵³ We may infer from Lane that awe is a close companion of attentiveness.

Such sensitivity to place finds expression in George Tinker’s influential essay, “The Full Circle of Liberation: An American Indian Theology of Place,” which Conradie credits for introducing place as a theme in ecotheology.⁵⁴ Tinker, a Lutheran theologian and Osage Indian, summarizes the significance of place in Native American spirituality:

That the primary metaphor of existence for Native Americans is spatial does much to explain the fact that American Indian spirituality and American Indian existence itself are deeply rooted in the land, and why our conquest and removal from our lands was so culturally and genocidally destructive to our tribes. There is, however, a more subtle level to this sense of spatiality and land-rootedness. It shows up in nearly all aspects of our existence, in our ceremonial structures, our symbols, our architecture and in the symbolic parameters of a tribe’s universe.⁵⁵

For many indigenous peoples, the land provides the raw materials of what sociologist Peter Berger calls a “symbolic universe” or “sacred cosmos” by which they order and interpret their lives.⁵⁶ In other words, sacred creation serves as a plausibility structure.

⁵³ Ibid., 32.

⁵⁴ Conradie, “Towards a Theology of Place in the South African Context,” 11.

⁵⁵ George Tinker, “The Full Circle of Liberation: An American Indian Theology of Place,” in *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*, ed. David G. Hallman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 222.

⁵⁶ The meanings of “sacred cosmos” and Berger and Luckman’s earlier term “symbolic universe” overlap substantially according to Berger (176-177). However, sacred cosmos relates more specifically to religious plausibility structures. Berger explains, ‘Religion is the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established’ (25) [Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), 25, 176–77]; the argument of this classic work in sociology of religion decisively influences the development of Lesslie Newbigin’s critique of Enlightenment plausibility structures [Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 92–103].

Creation and Story

Finally, as Stegner suggests, a conception of place as sacred creation invites human beings to interpret their lives within a larger story. Tuan acknowledges that “narrative is, of course, central to Christianity and to the Christian worldview. It may be cosmic, beginning with creation and ending with consummation; or, as is more common, it is the life story of Jesus.”⁵⁷ Newbigin affirms that the church too often has neglected the larger story of God's mission spanning from creation to consummation, but he rebuts Tuan's assertion that the story of Jesus is somehow tangential to or could be excised from that larger story. He states:

[The Bible] sets before us a vision of cosmic history from the creation of the world to its consummation, of the nations which make up the one human family, and—of course—of one nation chosen to be the bearer of the meaning of history for the sake of all, and of one man [Jesus] called to be the bearer of that meaning for that nation. The Bible *is* universal history.⁵⁸

Jesus is integral to the larger narrative of Scripture. And since Scripture describes him as "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation" (Colossians 1:15), Jesus is also integral to the story of creation itself.

Of course, perhaps Tuan meant only to offer a descriptive account of his own experience of Christians narrating their faith, and in so doing he inadvertently belittles those unaided by modern scholarship. If so, then McClendon, with appeal to Catholic understandings of the Eucharist, defends a form of biblicism that insists “the church now

⁵⁷ Tuan and Strawn, *Religion*, 13.

⁵⁸ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 89; emphasis original. Newbigin makes this point in many places, but perhaps most poignantly in the published version of a series of radio broadcasts for Premier Radio in which he retells the story of the entire Bible. See Lesslie Newbigin, *A Walk through the Bible* (London: SPCK, 1999).

is the primitive church; *we* are Jesus' followers; the commands are addressed directly to *us*."⁵⁹ The adoption of such a hermeneutic enables the church to find herself in the plotline of Scripture and, therefore, is more likely to read the story with a greater interest in the whole narrative. In contrast to Tuan, McClendon attributes the atomization of the biblical story instead to modern biblical criticism that often displaces the writings of Scripture from their proper contexts in the Canon and the church.⁶⁰

In either case, the recovery of the larger narrative of Scripture funds a missionary commitment to place. Abram observes:

To an oral culture, the world is articulated as story. The surrounding cosmos is not experienced as a set of fixed and finished facts, but as a story in which we (along with the moon sliding in and out of the clouds, and the trout leaping for a fly) are all participants.... To a deeply oral culture, the earthly world is felt as a vast, ever-unfolding Story in which we—along with the other animals, plants, and landforms—are all characters.⁶¹

This view conforms closely to the way the earliest followers of Jesus experienced the world surrounding them. And within the plausibility structure of the *missio Dei*, as McClendon suggests, the church finds herself in a similar position as a character in the

⁵⁹ James Wm McClendon, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 1: Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 33; emphasis original.

⁶⁰ This is not to suggest that McClendon rejects modern biblical criticism. But he does question scholarly approaches that deconstruct the whole to pursue the intensive study of parts without regard for their reintegration with the whole. Consistent with the larger Enlightenment trends that eliminated purpose, synthetic projects of biblical theology suffered neglect in modernity. In a broad sense, McClendon seeks to recover the purpose of the larger narrative of Scripture and locate the church's place within it. He elaborates: "This version of the [baptist] vision endorses the positive content of Smucker's "biblicism:" the church, as the apostolic community, reads (in community) the apostolic writings, the New Testament, and with the primitive church lives also under the guidance of the Old. The Bible is in this sense the church's book: we are the people of that book. But by shifting the emphasis from mere biblicism to a vision that shows how the church sees itself as that people, we avoid any dogmatic bibliolatry which could substitute attention to the book for participation in the life. That shift seems small; the consequences, though, are momentous" [ibid., 32].

⁶¹ Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 270.

unfolding narrative of the triune God's redemption of all things in Jesus Christ. "What makes a community "Christian," writes theologian Brad J. Kallenberg, "isn't simply the fact that all the members hold roughly the same beliefs, but that they live out those beliefs with each other in ways that are faithful to the story of Jesus."⁶² Consequently, a church committed to place will "live to tell" the story of God's love for a sacred creation.⁶³ For Kallenberg, this requires the church to indwell a "form of life" patterned on the story of Jesus as its most basic mode of proclamation.⁶⁴

Place as Sacred Journey

While obvious connections exist between the natural world and geography, the literature on place does not confine itself to ecological concerns of a sacred creation alone. In particular, the turn toward humanistic geography signals a broader interest in the formation of culture and the reciprocal impact of people, places and forces upon each other, which recalls McClintock Fulkerson's comment on power relations. As contemporary debates between geographers like Doreen Massey and David Harvey indicate, the literature on place moves far beyond discussions of human interaction with fixed coordinates on a map toward a dynamic understanding of place, which in its more radical expressions bears comparison to Abram's dynamic view of matter.⁶⁵

⁶² Brad J. Kallenberg, *Live to Tell: Evangelism for a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2002), 91.

⁶³ I borrow the phrase "live to tell" from the title of Kallenberg's postmodern practical theology of evangelism [Kallenberg, *Live to Tell*].

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 48–54, 91–119; perhaps such a form of life offers the beginning of a response to Willie Jennings' question, "How should we perform a doctrine of creation?"

⁶⁵ Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 53–75.

Place is not static. Indeed, in Massey's account, place requires movement. Such insights are readily apparent to those acquainted with the religious literature on place, which features stories of missionary journeys and pilgrimages to thin places. In the previous discussion of place as a secular context for the church's witness, Bauckham noted "that the gospel has so often impelled Christians to cross geographical boundaries and to journey to unknown places in obedience" to the divine call.⁶⁶ From Abraham and Sarah setting out for a promised land to become a blessing to all the peoples of the earth (Genesis 12:1-3) to the commissioning of Paul and Barnabas at the church in Antioch to fulfill the selfsame vocation interpreted in light of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 13:1-3), the Bible depicts faith as a sacred journey from beginning to end. After rehearsing a litany of saints, the author of Hebrews reckons:

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city (Hebrews 11:13-16).

A missionary commitment to place finds expression not only through sacred creation but also through sacred journeys toward a final home with the triune God. While the journeys of missionaries and pilgrims merit attention, the discussion begins properly with God's own journey from heaven to earth (Philippians 2:5-11, John 1:1-18).

Journey and Incarnation

⁶⁶ Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, 55.

Christian worship in word and sacrament has centered always on the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth whom Christian scripture presents as the Son of God (Matthew 3:13-17) and savior of the world (1 John 4:14). Before the Gospels reveal the divine identity of Jesus, however, the accounts of Matthew and Luke attest to the ordinary conditions of Jesus' birth at a specific time and in a specific place under the reign of Herod in Bethlehem of Judea (Matthew 1:18-25, 2:1; Luke 2:1-7). The Gospels narrate the material existence of the eternal God as the son of a Jewish day-laborer in Asia Minor whom the Roman state eventually executes to quell a political rebellion on the outskirts of its empire.

In contexts where the biblical metanarrative does not permeate the culture, the Gospel accounts of the incarnation of God in Christ Jesus strain the underlying plausibility structure. Recognizing this challenge, Paul interprets the incarnation and crucifixion of God as a paradox. To the church at Corinth, he writes:

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men (1 Corinthians 1:20-25)

This event in the life of God, argues Paul, cannot fit within the intellectual frameworks of either the Jews or the Greeks. Theologian Oliver O'Donovan agrees:

“The word became flesh...” (John 1:14). Among the ever-unfolding paradoxes of that pregnant saying, there is, perhaps none more startling than this: that the divine Word, the intelligibility of God, is unlike the

intelligibility of the world, in that it communicates itself in the particular, God makes himself known in election, the principle of particularity, and yet without prejudice to his universal processes of love.⁶⁷

In Jesus, the particular and the universal form an essential union that transgresses human understanding.

One way the church has interpreted that paradox is to speak of God's journey to redeem a wayward creation. In his study of the church's doctrine through the lens of her liturgical life, Wainwright attends carefully to small clues within early Christian worship. Of hymnody, he observes:

Fragments of hymns ascribing pre-existence and agency in creation to Christ may well be embedded in 1 Corinthians 8:6 and Hebrews 1:2f, for example. The clearest case of all is Colossians 1:15-20, which has been the object of much recent detailed study. In some hymns, Christ's pre-existence figures as the starting-point of a movement that passes through abasement/incarnation/death to re-exaltation/glorification.⁶⁸

Here Wainwright references Paul's claim that Christ is "the firstborn of all creation... by him all things were created... in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:15-17).

While the passage from Colossians presents the clearest statement of Christ's agency in creation, the early Christian hymn Paul quotes in Philippians 2 offers the clearest description of the divine *movement* Christ undertakes for creation's redemption:

⁶⁷ Quoted in John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, Explorations in Practical, Pastoral, and Empirical Theology (Hampshire, UK; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 52.

⁶⁸ Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life: A Systematic Theology*, 50; McClendon offers a dissenting view. Coupling a minority report on Origen with a revisionist reading of Philippians 2:5-11 (a passage Wainwright also enlists but to very different ends), he denies the divine descent motif in early Christian theology. His argument proves unpersuasive, largely because he engages a much more limited range of biblical and patristic evidence than Wainwright and, further, requires speculation on Origen's "true" views as opposed to some of his actual statements. But McClendon's argument also strikes this reader as strange, since in a section dedicated to developing a narrative Christology in opposition to the historical models he finds lacking, he seems beholden to some of the same historicist assumptions that plague scholarship he criticizes roundly [McClendon, *Doctrine*, 263-79].

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-11).

The sacred journey captured in early Christian hymnody informs the development of the doctrine of the Incarnation. The inclusion of kenotic imagery suggests its significance to early believers, especially since Paul enjoins them to emulate its pattern—“have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus” (2:5). Such an invitation obtains specifically to the humble obedience and voluntary abasement Jesus models rather than his divine exultation as Lord.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ For some theologians, especially in more traditional Reformed circles, any discernment of christological patterns in reference to the Incarnation imperils the doctrine. Todd J. Billings, for example, rejects popular language of “incarnational ministry” believing that it misconstrues the relationship between believers and the persons of the Trinity, which in turn confuses and distorts the church’s ministry [Billings, *Union with Christ*, 123–66]. For Billings, the proper construal of relations, following Calvin, posits the union of believers with Christ through the Holy Spirit. While I have no objection to such language and appreciate the care Billings demonstrates in expounding the relationship between ecclesial doctrine and practice, I remain unconvinced that the diagnosis is as dire as he and others suggest. From my engagement with Billings and others who share similar concerns, I discern two serious objections: (1) the need to defend the unique character of the Incarnation as a singular event in the life of God in history, and (2) the early church’s subordination of the Incarnation to the Crucifixion and Resurrection. Before responding briefly to each point, one observation is in order: when placed side by side, these two concerns almost cancel each other out. Defenders rally to support the purity of the former doctrine only then to downplay its significance in relation to the latter doctrines.

With regard to uniqueness, the church has a long history of appropriating language of divine imitation without significantly undermining the doctrine of the Incarnation. Jesus, of course, invites his disciples to imitate him—to take up their own crosses and then follow him (Matthew 16:24-28). While they unite with Christ on the journey rather than somehow replace him, they nevertheless do imitate him. The martyrdoms of most of the apostles alone confirm this. And to my knowledge, neither the church nor the world confused them with Jesus, even though they possessed powerful charisms. Next, the call to imitate Christ enjoys a long history of nurturing both Catholic and Protestant spiritual practices. Thomas á Kempis’ *The Imitation of Christ* and Charles M. Sheldon’s *In His Steps* offer examples of a variation on a common theme from those respective traditions. And while I might cringe at the sentimentality of popular WWJD (“What Would Jesus Do?”) wrist bracelets inspired by Sheldon’s writing, my lack of corresponding aversion to Catholic prayer beads leads me to believe that my reaction owes more to a matter of taste than a trinitarian flaw. Third, we do well to recall the earlier comments by Walls, Sanneh and others on the

The Patristic era establishes the language of divine descent in the second stanza of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, which has shaped the church's worship since 318

CE. The church confesses:

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,

significance of the Incarnation as a pattern for translation of Christianity into new cultures. Commenting on the impact of Vatican II on Catholic missiology, Newbigin states, "The Second Vatican Council (1962-5) initiated revolutionary changes. The dignity of local cultures was to be affirmed. Worship was to be in the mother tongue. The new concept of inculturation was vigorously developed from 1970 onwards. The theological authorization for this was in the incarnation itself, where the eternal Word took flesh as a man of a particular culture. In an analogous manner the local church is to be encouraged to take the cultural form of its society" [Newbigin, "Culture and Theology," 99]. Again, there is scant evidence that invitations to imitate the pattern of the Incarnation lead to substantial confusion about Jesus' divinity vis-à-vis his followers or weaker constructions of atonement like the moral suasion theory of Peter Abelard.

With regard to the second major concern, that an emphasis on the Incarnation threatens to undermine the significance of the cross and resurrection, there may be a case for modest concern in modernity, but the evidence from Scripture and tradition presented already belies this claim with reference to the early church. At points, I wonder if some of Reformed critics of incarnational ministry may expect too much precision from popular discourse, such that when they encounter appeals to the Incarnation, they interpret them narrowly in a quite formal Chalcedonian sense, whereas most proponents of incarnational theology intend it as a sort of shorthand for the entire life of Christ, including his cross and resurrection. That said, the concern also may express a fundamental incompatibility between Reformed and Arminian soteriology. As theologian W. Stephen Gunter observes: "It is clear that a Wesleyan soteriology is less rooted in specific moments of spiritual crisis (as important as they are experientially to the person) and more inclined to an entire life of spiritual development. A Wesleyan construal of Jesus Christ as the heart and soul of the Great Commission is more incarnational than it is penal and substitutionary" [W. Stephen Gunter, "Jesus Christ: The Heart of the Great Commission," in *Considering the Great Commission: Evangelism and Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit*, ed. Elaine A. Robinson and W. Stephen Gunter (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 68]. For those that read everything through a soteriological lens framed by predestination, then Arminian language about holiness and sanctification may seem to threaten the doctrine of justification. In my view, they need not, and neither are such Arminian views as Gunter's incompatible with the biblical construction of election that Newbigin favors [Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 80–88]. For these reasons, I remain unpersuaded that calls for incarnational ministry pose a trinitarian problem. If the church, as Paul habitually describes her, is the body of Christ, then it becomes very difficult to avoid incarnational language without jettisoning a primary Pauline metaphor for the church and her witness in the world.

and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.⁷⁰

Notice how the language of divine movement figures into the divine mission: “for us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven.” The *missio Dei* involves a sacred journey of descension that endures incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection to culminate in ascension “to the right hand of the Father.”

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan language not only confirms Wainwright’s account of the early church’s liturgical commitments, but it finds confirmation in the larger history of the church. In the 1330s, Gregory Palamas employs the language of sacred journey to interpret Matthew 16:28 in the context of the Transfiguration account that follows immediately in chapter 17. Jesus addresses his disciples, “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom” (16:28). Gregory’s commentary attends carefully to divine location and movement:

The king of all is everywhere, and his kingdom is everywhere. This means that the coming of the kingdom cannot mean that it is transferred from this place here to that place there, but that it is revealed in the power of the divine Spirit. This is why [Christ] said “coming with power.” And this power does not come upon everyone, but upon “those who have stood with the Lord,” that is, those who are firmly grounded in the faith, such as Peter, James and John, who were first brought by the Word to this high mountain, in order to symbolize those who are thus able to rise above their

⁷⁰ For a brief introduction, see McGrath, *The Christian Theology Reader*, 7; emphasis mine.

humble natures. For this reason, *Scripture shows us God descending from his supreme dwelling place* and raising us up from our humble condition on a mountain, so that the one who is infinite may be surely but within limits encompassed by created nature.⁷¹

In Gregory's view, the Incarnation entails a sacred journey in service to a missionary commitment to place. And the power that divine act entails remains available to accomplish God's purposes through those who will receive it in the obedience of faith.

Journey and Pilgrimage

Shifting attention from the journey of the Son of God to the church, two modes of sacred journey garner significantly more attention than others. The first is pilgrimage—a practice that takes many forms and on which the church holds no monopoly. Several passages in the *Qur'an*, for instance, instruct Muslims to undertake the hajj (2:196-201; 5:1-2; 22:26-30; 48:27), an annual five-day pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, that involves roughly two million people per year in a public demonstration of the unity of their faith. As the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad and site of significant events in the lives of Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael, the hajj is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. For Muslims with financial means and physical ability, there is an expectation to make pilgrimage once in a lifetime.

In contrast to the formal coordination of the *hajj*, *El Camino de Santiago de Compostela*, the Way of St. James, offers an informal network of trails across Europe that lead pilgrims along a medieval Christian pilgrimage route to the tomb of St. James in a small town in northwest Spain. While *El Camino* has clear Christian origins, tens of thousands of pilgrims per year traverse highly commercialized paths that cater more to

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 151; emphasis mine.

the needs of tourists than traditional spiritual seekers. Nevertheless, the multitude of travel guides and spiritual memoirs dedicated to *El Camino* remind readers that figures as influential as St. Francis and Charlemagne have sought spiritual insight on its path.⁷²

Cognizant of the diversity of travelers, Hjalmarson opines:

The tourist and the pilgrim look the same externally.... But in the character of the journey everything is different. The challenge we face as followers of the Incarnate One is to move from the posture of tourist, to the posture of pilgrims. Tourists are escaping life; pilgrims are embracing it. Parker Palmer notes that, ‘In the tradition of pilgrimage... hardships are seen not as accidental but as integral to the journey itself.’⁷³

Thus, the border between tourist and pilgrim is significant but also porous. Still more significant, Hjalmarson maps pilgrimage onto an incarnational pattern, which is to say a missionary one.

Likewise, the range of pilgrimage sites and motivations to visit them are diverse. Jewish artist Marc Chagall describes in reverent terms his journey to Paris in the early twentieth century as the quintessential sacred pilgrimage for a young artist.⁷⁴

Comparative religionist Diana Eck, who specializes in South Asian studies, subtitles one

⁷² I mention the following two books to illustrate the wide diversity of perspective among postmodern pilgrims on El Camino. According to her dust cover, Shirley MacLaine, one of America’s most pilloried yet indefatigable spiritual seekers, travels “back thousands of years, through past lives to the very origin of the universe” where she glimpses its meaning as she completes her 500-mile journey on the Camino [Shirley MacLaine, *The Camino: A Journey of the Spirit* (New York: Atria Books, 2001)]; by contrast, Lauren Brewer Bass, a seminary graduate, used her 500 miles to reflect on the shape of her calling to Christian ministry. While she did not report travelling through any past lives, her pilgrimage on the Camino nevertheless led her to discern a calling to missionary service, which she now pursues with her husband in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship [Lauren Brewer Bass, *Five Hundred Miles: Reflections on Calling and Pilgrimage* (Smyth & Helwys, 2015)].

⁷³ Leonard Hjalmarson, *No Home Like Place: A Christian Theology of Place* (Urban Loft Publishers, 2014), 179; Hjalmarson quotes Palmer’s *Let Your Life Speak* [Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 18].

⁷⁴ Marc Chagall, *Marc Chagall on Art and Culture: Including the First Book on Chagall’s Art by A. Efros and Ya. Tugendhold (Moscow, 1918)*, trans. Benjamin Harshav and Barbara Harshav (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 92.

of her most influential books “a spiritual journey from Bozeman to Banaras” where she explores the idea of pilgrimage and holy places across different continents and different religious traditions.⁷⁵ She entitles a later book, *India: A Sacred Geography*, where readers learn about sacred cities as well as rivers like the Ganges and other sites of hallowed topography.⁷⁶ This recalls Lane and Tinker’s discussions of indigenous Indian spiritual practices such as journeys to sweat lodges, long wilderness rides [on horseback], and vision quests. Historian Thomas Tweed even devotes an entire monograph to the ethnography of Cuban Catholic shrines in Miami, Florida, which attract pilgrims.⁷⁷

Notwithstanding these examples of pilgrimage outside the church, Christian tradition recognizes the enduring value of this spiritual practice within the church on Christian terms. Theologians John Inge and Leonard Hjalmarson both devote an entire chapter in their respective theologies of place to pilgrimage and holy places in the Christian tradition. As a former dean of Ely Cathedral in England, Bishop Inge holds special interest in the potential for reconceiving church meeting houses and cathedrals as Christian shrines.⁷⁸ Inge identifies three components of religious pilgrimage—roots, journey and destination—which he defines as “journey to places where divine human encounter has taken place.”⁷⁹ Pilgrimage reconnects pilgrims with the roots of their

⁷⁵ Diana L. Eck, *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1993).

⁷⁶ Diana L. Eck, *India: A Sacred Geography* (New York: Harmony, 2012).

⁷⁷ Thomas A. Tweed, *Our Lady of the Exile Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), <http://www.myilibrary.com?id=45273>.

⁷⁸ See Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, 91–122; Hjalmarson, *No Home Like Place*, 175–96.

⁷⁹ Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, 92.

Christian heritage by interpreting their entire lives as a “journey to God” that culminates with the eschatological hope of an ultimate dwelling place with God in Christ.⁸⁰

Inge then offers careful examination of the development of his understanding of place over time from the early establishment of Jerusalem as a site of Christian pilgrimage to the medieval development of the cult of saints and the emergence of countless shrines to support it.⁸¹ Hjalmarson interprets those developments as a way that Christians “both embody and ritualize our sense of displacement, being caught between two worlds.”⁸² He then cites Eugene Petersen’s observation that “we necessarily live much of our lives in exile, so to be able to spot the people and places that re-establish our true identity is so important.”⁸³ These comments on pilgrimage and identity recall the discussion in the first two chapters of our study on the connections between place, memory and formation as a response to the threats of displacement in modernity.

Before assessing Inge’s argument for churches as shrines, which for him attends to the missionary dimension of place, one caution deserves mention. Inge cites an opposing view from Joan Taylor who views pilgrimage as a form of religious syncretism that verges on idolatry. She argues that “the concept of the intrinsically holy place was basically pagan, and was not in essence a Christian idea” until after the time of Constantine.⁸⁴ Inge responds:

The notion of the holiness of place can be seen to derive directly from the scriptures, and was an essential part of the Christian tradition from the beginning of Christian history. It is clear from both the scriptures and the

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., 93–98.

⁸² Hjalmarson, *No Home Like Place*, 177.

⁸³ Quoted in *ibid.*

⁸⁴ Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, 100.

tradition, that God chooses some places for self-revelation to people, just as God chose one place for the incarnation.⁸⁵

Setting aside Taylor's pejorative use of 'syncretism', a term which both Sanneh and Walls defend as a necessary feature of translating Christianity into new cultures, her point is very similar to the qualification Lane offers in regard to Native American conceptions of mythical space that locate intrinsic power in places instead of or, at least, independent from God. And Inge does not answer the challenge well. Obviously his latter point that God reveals Godself in various places in history is true, but that claim does not necessarily follow from his former point. That a holy God deigns to reveal Godself in a particular place at a particular time does not necessarily confer holiness on said place permanently—and certainly not intrinsically, since Inge is not claiming that a particular place possesses inherent holiness apart from God—but it is not altogether clear how Scripture substantiates this claim.

Bauckham contends that a decisive relocation of God's presence from the Temple in Jerusalem to the church occurs between the Old and New Testaments (and thus the early church). This shift introduces "the idea of a new Temple that was not a location, but a people," such that "we can see the spatial image of the centre and the periphery beginning to lose its literal geographic reference."⁸⁶ And this transition has direct implications for the church's mission according to Bauckham:

This Christian abandonment of the idea of a specific geographical centre should not be misunderstood along the lines of the idea, much too often encountered, that the Old Testament is particularistic and the New Testament is universalistic. In both testaments there is continual movement from the particular to the universal. In biblical terms we

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, 76.

cannot have the universal without the particular. . . . The church's mission requires both the individuals and groups who, authorized by God to communicate his message, go out from the community to others, near or far, and also the community that manifests God's presence in its midst by its life together and its relationship to others. The image of witness, not a geographical one but one which lies near the heart of the biblical understanding of mission, important in Isaiah, John, Acts and Revelation, transcends the two aspects.⁸⁷

This presents a problem for Inge's argument, since he locates the significance of pilgrimage in the "human divine encounter."⁸⁸ If God is on the move, then pilgrims are left with the mere palimpsests of God's presence in a place rather than God's actual presence.

Recognizing this problem, Inge qualifies his criticism of Taylor, writing, "It is not that some places are intrinsically holy, but that this self-revelation on the part of God is then built into their story, and this makes such places worthy of pilgrimage."⁸⁹ While this correction helps somewhat, there remains a vulnerability in Inge's argument when he continues to speak of a "three-way relationship between people, place, and God which endures across time."⁹⁰ Here Hjalmarson's discussion of Celtic "thin places" proves instructive. Acknowledging their pagan roots, Hjalmarson describes thin places as "places that seemed to bridge heaven and earth," but then he offers a useful clarification: "A sacred place is created in the interaction of God, people, and place. A thin place is really an event, the not-yet-holy becoming holy, where place as the seat of relations is

⁸⁷ Ibid., 77; Bauckham's criticism of facile readings of the Old and New Testaments applies to Tuan. However, when Bauckham identifies "the community that manifests God's presence in its midst by its life together and its relationship with others" (77) as one of the forms of witness in Scripture, he inadvertently allows a geographical reference to enter. Newbigin makes a similar point with reference to the parish.

⁸⁸ Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, 92.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 100.

⁹⁰ Ibid.; to be fair, one also suspects Inge holds the medieval cult of saints in considerably higher esteem than Taylor or this author.

intimately involved in God's interaction with persons." By describing holiness as a revelatory event *in situ*, Hjalmarson injects contingency into the concept of sacred places in a way that protects them from the human tendency toward idolatry.

But how precisely does pilgrimage contribute to a *missionary* theology of place? Inge's three-fold definition of pilgrimage offers a useful frame. First, pilgrimage engages memory to reconnect pilgrims with God's acts in history. Such work often leads to spiritual renewal in the life of the church that strengthens her witness. Next, pilgrimage involves journey. On a symbolic level, the pilgrim's recognition that life is a journey toward God—"a long obedience in the same direction" in Eugene Petersen's appropriation of Nietzsche—invites others in the pilgrim's circle of influence to contemplate the meaning of their own lives in light of this claim.⁹¹ On a more literal level recalling the *peregrinos* of early monastics from chapter 3, the pilgrim's journey often creates moments of evangelistic encounter with other human beings along the way, if the pilgrim remains open to them.

Finally, pilgrimage includes an eschatological dimension. The destination of the journey, the thin place or shrine at its end, points beyond itself to the pilgrim's ultimate destiny in the triune God. Reflecting Inge's influence, Hjalmarson claims that "the shrine... like pilgrimage itself, partakes of an alternative geography, telling a cosmic story."⁹² That is, the temporal destination bears witness to an eternal one. And it is here that Inge sees the missionary potential of church buildings as shrines. He explains:

⁹¹ Eugene Petersen, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*, 20th Anniversary edition (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

⁹² Hjalmarson, *No Home Like Place*, 190.

It is, in other words, a place which witnesses (like *martyria*) to the fact that God *has* acted in history in Christ and in those who have followed him faithfully in the past; that God *is* acting in the world in and through the lives of those who dedicate themselves to his will and whose witness is encouraged by sacramental encounters and the witness of holy places; and that God *will* act in history to consummate all places in Christ. It represents, in one place, all three aspects of the phenomenon of pilgrimage and the Christian commitment which it symbolizes.⁹³

Thus, Inge concludes that if Christians could rediscover their church buildings as shrines, then the church could invite parishioners and outsiders alike to participate in a sacred journey that revitalizes the spiritual life of congregations and challenges “the dominant secular assumptions of late modernity [to] find openings to faith.”⁹⁴ Thus, all three components of pilgrimage contain a missionary dimension.

Journey and Mission

A trinitarian framework for place builds on Bosch’s famous pronouncement: “In the new image mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God.”⁹⁵ In the general revelation of sacred creation and the special revelation of Holy Scripture, the church gleans evidence of the loving Creator who longs for the redemption of all creation and then asks how the church herself might participate in that mission. Likewise, the church also discerns the movement of God on a sacred journey foremost in the incarnation of the Divine Son but also in the lives of those pilgrims who seek God and the hallowed places of encounter between them. And the church asks again how she may participate more fully in that mission. A life of missionary service is one of the church’s responses to those questions patterned on God’s

⁹³ Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, 103.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁹⁵ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390.

own missionary identity. Let us now consider three observations about mission as an expression of sacred journey.

The first observation is that while mission and pilgrimage share enthusiasm and movement, they do not share the same basic orientation toward the world. In his report to the annual Southern Baptist Convention in 2013, Tom Elliff, president of the International Mission Board, the largest denominational mission agency of its kind, remarks, “We’ve also said to our missionaries, don’t move some place, settle down and get so comfortable there that when it gets darker someplace else, you don’t help us go over there and turn on the lights.... We want pioneers not settlers!”⁹⁶ In a generous interpretation, Elliff’s comments echo the midnight cry of the Macedonian man who in a vision entreats Paul, saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us” (Acts 16:6-10). Perhaps some readers also might hear echoes of Roland Allen, the Anglican missionary to China, whose call for a return to an “apostolic model” of mission encourages dependence on the Holy Spirit rather than any other form of power, whether ecclesiastical, financial, educational or cultural.⁹⁷ Still others might perceive a rough

⁹⁶ Tom Elliff, “International Mission Board Report,” *LifeWay Christian Resources*, June 12, 2013, <http://player.316networks.com/player.php?p=to81upsq>.

⁹⁷ Roland Allen’s appeal to a primitivist account of mission from the pages of the New Testament resonates with many but is more complex to appropriate than it appears on the surface. Lesslie Newbigin who contributed a foreword to the 1962 reissues of Allen’s *Missionary Methods: St. Paul’s or Ours?* cautions readers to remember that Roland Allen was a high church, Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) missionary who took sacraments, church order and unity very seriously. And while Newbigin’s own writings frequently reveal dependence on Allen’s insights, Newbigin did not find his own three-decades-long ministry in India incongruent with Allen’s arguments. Instead, Newbigin warns that Allen’s writing “takes hold of you and refuses to let you go till you have admitted he is right.... this is a book that compels decisions!” [*Missionary Methods: St. Paul’s or Ours?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), i]; One of the challenges for someone like Tom Elliff is that Roland Allen also criticized large mission boards and stipendiary clergy as obstacles to the growth of the church. Allen explains: “The spontaneous expansion of the Church reduced to its elements is a very simple thing. It asks for no elaborate organization, no large finances, no great numbers of paid missionaries. In its beginning it may be the work of one man, and that a man neither learned in the things of this world, nor rich in the wealth of this world. The organization of a

missiological equivalence to the itineracy of early Methodist Circuit Riders on the American frontier.

Such echoes notwithstanding, there exists a clear tension between the vision Elliff espouses—as close as it may appear on the surface to the Pauline pattern—and the theology of place characterized by Inge or perhaps any other source presented in this chapter. It would be easy to attribute Elliff’s apparent disinterest in place to an uncritical embrace of Enlightenment technologies, a shallow anthropology, or the long tradition of American missionary enthusiasm for new frontiers. Europeans roundly criticized the latter option in the past century, which continues unabated with the rapid proliferation of short-term mission trips in the present century.⁹⁸ But Andrew Walls offers a more complex interpretation.⁹⁹

Embedded within chapter 3’s conclusion on the church’s ambiguous commitment to place in history was an effort to explain one contributing factor to that state of affairs. Walls identifies twin missionary impulses: the indigenizing principle and the pilgrim

little church on the apostolic model is also extremely simple, and the most illiterate converts can use it, and the poorest are sufficiently wealthy to maintain it” [Roland Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church and the Causes Which Hinder It* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 156].

⁹⁸ Dana L. Robert offers a provocative assessment of the American cultural fascination with crossing frontiers and the way in which that shapes American missiology. See Dana L. Robert, “Mission Frontiers from 1910 to 2010, Part 1,” *Missiology: An International Review* 39, no. 2 (April 2011): electronic issue, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/009182961103900208>; while not the only researchers interested in the phenomenon of Christian short-term missions, anthropologists Robert J. Priest and Brian M. Howell have made prominent contributions to its study, including their joint introduction to an issue of *Missiology: An International Review* dedicated entirely to the theme. See Robert J Priest and Brian M Howell, “Introduction: Theme Issue on Short-Term Missions,” *Missiology* 41, no. 2 (April 2013): 124–29; Robert J Priest and Joseph Paul Priest, “‘They See Everything, and Understand Nothing’: Short-Term Mission and Service Learning,” *Missiology* 36, no. 1 (January 2008): 53–73; Brian M Howell, “Mission to Nowhere: Putting Short-Term Missions into Context,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 33, no. 4 (October 2009): 206–11; Brian M. Howell, *Short-Term Mission: An Ethnography of Christian Travel Narrative and Experience* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012).

⁹⁹ Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 3–15.

principle. He argues that both principles are always in play. The gospel both affirms and critiques any given culture. That is, the gospel can make itself at home in a culture even while it prophetically challenges those elements in the culture which have not yet submitted to reign of God. In a similar discussion of gospel and culture, Newbigin lends his support to this position:

We have to say both “God accepts human culture” and also “God judges human culture.” There will have to be room in the Christian life for the two attitudes which Von Hügel used to call the homely and the heroic. Christian discipleship can never be all homeliness nor all heroism. It has to have elements of both and it has to learn from day to day when to accept the homely duties of life as it is, and when to take the heroic road of questioning and challenging the accepted ways.¹⁰⁰

Granting the complexity of the relationship of gospel and culture, what are the implications of that analysis for a missionary commitment to place as opposed to the peripatetic existence Elliff describes?

To do justice to the tension at the heart of Christian faith between the pilgrim and indigenizing—or, the homely and heroic—Walls and Newbigin agree that neither principle can be absolutized at the expense of the other. While the indigenizing principle undergirds an incarnational commitment to place, the pilgrim principle remembers the church’s eschatological claim that “here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come” (Hebrews 13:14). As such, the pilgrim principle urges Christians to connect with others who constitute a new community grounded not in natural loyalties but the gospel alone and, as significantly, to invite others outside of the community of faith to join it.

¹⁰⁰ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 195.

The pilgrim impulse in Walls' account differs from the previous discussion of pilgrimage in its basic orientation. The pilgrim, walking *El Camino*, the American Indian on vision quest, and the seeker walking the labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral all crave an encounter with the divine—or, at least, crave an encounter with something beyond themselves. Yet their initial focus tends toward inwardness. For many pilgrims, one of the greatest gifts of pilgrimage becomes a growing openness to encounter the gifts and needs of others along the way. Still, the beginning of the journey often centers on self.

Walls' pilgrim principle cuts against that grain to subordinate one's own needs for the sake of the world. In contrast to inward concern, an external focus characterizes the basic orientation of the missionary journey and justifies its attendant risks. Jim Elliot, an American missionary martyr in Ecuador in the mid-twentieth century, offers a well-known example of the pilgrim principle in practice. Raised in a religious American home, Elliot attended evangelical Wheaton College near Chicago and then answered the call to mission service in hopes of translating the Bible for people who had never had the opportunity to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ in their native tongue.

To that end, Elliot relocated to Ecuador and started both mission work and a family with his wife Elisabeth. After a mission aviator discovered a remote Indian tribe, Elliot and four colleagues made friendly contact with a group of Waorani among whom there was no known Christian witness or vernacular Scripture translation. Within five days of establishing a base near the Curaray River, a group of Waorani killed them with wooden spears.¹⁰¹ The entry for October 28, 1949 in Elliot's posthumously published

¹⁰¹ David M. Howard, "Elliot, Philip James ('Jim')," in *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 198.

journal reads, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.”¹⁰² While human motivations are notoriously mixed, Dana L. Robert confirms that student mission movements in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries traded on the earnest faith and idealism of young people like Elliot, plying them with exotic tales of human deprivation and missionary heroism in the context of appeals to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).¹⁰³ For many Protestants, especially evangelicals, missionary service represented (and still represents) a sacred journey of cruciform service that resembles Catholic monasticism more than pilgrimage.

Next, the second observation regarding Christian mission as sacred journey is more historical in nature: the modern missionary movement produced three counterintuitive results associated with Christian internationalism. Owing largely to the generative tension between the pilgrim and indigenizing principles, the first result was the growth of nationalism. In chapter 2, Robert and Brickell both commented on the impact of political, commercial, and technological developments in modernity that created a colonial infrastructure upon which the modern missionary movement relied. While permitting a previously unimaginable ease of international travel and communication, such advances remained outside the experience of most Christians. Therefore, the lives of missionaries, which traversed exotic cultural, linguistic, and geographic boundaries, captured the hearts and minds of people in the pews. Of course,

¹⁰² Elliott’s journal records these words in an entry dated October 28, 1949 [Jim Elliot, *The Journals of Jim Elliot*, ed. Elisabeth Elliot (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1978), 174]; curators at the Billy Graham Center Archives at Wheaton College comment that the wording bears strong affinity to a saying attributed to Bible commentator Matthew Henry’s father Philip Henry (1631-1696) [Jim Elliot, “Jim Elliot, Collection 277,” *Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton College*, October 28, 1949, 277, <http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/faq/20.htm>].

¹⁰³ Dana L. Robert, *Occupy until I Come : A.T. Pierson and the Evangelization of the World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003).

when those missionaries arrived on their field of service, their task shifted from the heroic to the homely as they planted roots by learning language and culture and often translating the Bible. The goal was to make Christianity at home in a new place. If, as previously stated, the universal and the particular formed an essential union in Jesus, then on the mission field the pilgrim and indigenizing principles formed an essential union in the lives of missionaries.

As Christianity became comfortable in new cultural clothes, its relationship with the colonial infrastructure it utilized became increasingly less comfortable. Drawing on the work of anthropologist Paul Hiebert, Michael T. Cooper cites three factors that accelerated the breakdown of the relationship between mission and colonialism.¹⁰⁴ First, mission leaders like Henry Venn and David Livingstone adopted the mantle of social reform from Thomas Fowell Buxton and William Wilberforce.¹⁰⁵ Next, under Three-Self Theory, the church prioritized evangelism over the expansion of Western civilization as a mission model and cultivated indigenous leadership.¹⁰⁶ Finally, the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions (SVM) created a very effective delivery mechanism for

¹⁰⁴ Michael T. Cooper, "Colonialism, Neo-Colonialism and Forgotten Missiological Lessons," *Global Missiology* 2, no. 2 (January 2005): 3–4.

¹⁰⁵ For critical biographical essays on each of these figures, see Gerald H. Anderson, ed., *Mission Legacies: Biographical Studies of Leaders of the Modern Missionary Movement*, American Society of Missiology Series, no. 19 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994); additionally, the writings of Henry Venn, the influential general secretary of the Anglican Church Missionary Society for much of the nineteenth century, offer a useful record of the complex interactions between European colonial and missionary enterprises. See Henry Venn, *To Apply the Gospel: Selections from the Writings of Henry Venn.*, ed. Max Warren (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971).

¹⁰⁶ Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson, leaders of the two largest mission boards in the mid-nineteenth century (Anglican Church Missionary Society and American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, respectively) were the architects of Three-Self Theory. They arrived at the same conclusions in nearly the same language at the same time, which argued that the chief aim of mission was to start self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating churches. See Henry Venn, *To Apply the Gospel: Selections from the Writings of Henry Venn.*, ed. Max Warren (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971); Rufus Anderson, *To Advance the Gospel: Selections from the Writings of Rufus Anderson*, ed. R. Pierce Beaver (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967); Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 331–32.

the dissemination of such ideas.¹⁰⁷ To that list, however, one must add the influence of a mixture of Christian theology and Enlightenment philosophy, which fomented a burgeoning nationalism among the indigenous populations themselves.¹⁰⁸

Sometimes missionaries stoked the fires of nationalism directly. After twenty years or more on the field, young students who had answered early the call of the SVM to “evangelize the world in this generation” began to raise important questions about the methods and even goals to which they had pledged themselves.¹⁰⁹ Against the backdrop of a bloody European war at the start of the twentieth century, growing respect for indigenous Christians and sincere adherents of other religions introduced serious doubts about the facile assumption of Western cultural superiority among missionaries. The writings of figures such as J. N. Farquhar, literary secretary for the YMCA of India and Ceylon, added fuel to the fire.¹¹⁰

By the time of the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910, the missionary community was divided over the proper response to culture. Historian Timothy Yates’ cites the broad concern expressed by many participants over the assertion of local identities—whether Islam in eastern and central Africa or independence movements within China, Japan, and India—which they viewed as a serious threat to the

¹⁰⁷ For a critical study of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, see Robert, *Occupy until I Come*.

¹⁰⁸ The writings of Henry Venn, the influential general secretary of the Anglican Church Missionary Society for much of the nineteenth century, offer a useful record of the complex interactions between European colonial and missionary enterprises [Venn, *To Apply the Gospel: Selections from the Writings of Henry Venn*.].

¹⁰⁹ See Kenneth Cracknell, *Justice, Courtesy and Love : Theologians and Missionaries Encountering World Religions, 1846-1914* (London: Epworth Press, 1995).

¹¹⁰ For Farquhar’s most influential work published following his participation in the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1910, see John Nicol Farquhar, *The Crown of Hinduism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1913). Farquhar makes an early case for what later becomes known as the position of Christian inclusivism within discourse on a Christian theology of religions.

Western mission enterprise.¹¹¹ Within a decade, however, other segments of the mission movement not only had embraced but also encouraged the assertion of local identities. In the interwar period, Robert observes, “Missionaries made a distinctive contribution to it [internationalism] by envisioning a Christian internationalism in which indigenization of Christianity in each culture was a central feature.”¹¹² Robert concluded that Christian internationalism and its flipside of indigenization required missionaries to take three distinct steps: (1) to separate Christ from Western culture, (2) to experiment in indigenizing Christ in the host culture, and (3) to partner with educated Christian nationals to promote internationalism and indigenization.¹¹³ Thus, the sacred journey of mission service planted the seeds of its own transformation and, in some cases, displacement by activists and autochthonous Christian leaders it nurtured.

The second surprising result from Christian internationalism was the way in which the sacred journey of missionaries involved and impacted those churches that stayed behind to support them. Besides the external developments that built infrastructure, we noted previously in chapter 3 that certain internal theological developments contributed significantly to the growth of the nascent modern missionary movement. In particular, William Carey's appeal to Matthew 28 in his *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians* (1792) made an enormous impact on the conception, promotion and resourcing of Christian mission in the era of the Enlightenment. Since

¹¹¹ Timothy E. Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 28–30.

¹¹² Dana L. Robert, “The First Globalization: The Internationalization of the Protestant Missionary Movement between the World Wars,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 26, no. 2 (April 1, 2002): 63.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 64.

that time, excepting a few decades in the mid-twentieth century among conciliar Protestants, Western churches largely have celebrated and supported the willingness of Christians to uproot themselves and often their families to carry the Christian message to places it was unknown or unsung. In obedience to the so-called Great Commission to "go therefore and make disciples of all nations," Western missionaries became early agents of globalization in foreign lands, but that support relied largely on the contributions of Christians back home.¹¹⁴ Besides reclaiming the Great Commission, Carey proposed an innovative funding mechanism to support foreign missions in the voluntary society. Baptizing the trading company model, he redirected public investments toward religious ends rather than company profits.¹¹⁵

For American Christians, especially, who lacked an empire and thereby easy access to the non-Western world, Christian internationalism provided a means to satiate their thirst for the exotic world beyond their borders. A large body of literature—sometimes based on sound history but often hagiography—emerged to recount the heroism of those who sacrificed the security of the familiar environs to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ. Helen Barrett Montgomery, a pioneering American Baptist denominational leader who also was a Bible translator and educator, embodies the quintessential mission promoter. Though never a missionary herself, she penned *Western Women in Eastern Lands* (1910) to raise support for foreign missions. The book sold

¹¹⁴ Robert, "The First Globalization."

¹¹⁵ William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of the Christians: To Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens. In Which the Religious State of the Different Nations of the World, the Success of Former Undertakings, and the Practicability of Further Undertakings, Are Considered* (Leicester: Adam Matthew Digital, 1792), [http://www.empire.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Details/An Enquiry into the Obligations of the Christians](http://www.empire.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Details/An%20Enquiry%20into%20the%20Obligations%20of%20the%20Christians).

over 100,000 copies, and in the year following its publication, Barrett Montgomery fulfilled over 200 speaking engagements to promote the cause.¹¹⁶ As the first female executive leader of an American denomination [the Northern Baptist Convention], she also used her considerable influence as a denominational leader to advance missions education and funding. Thus, mission service not only involved missionaries in a sacred journey, but also the churches that supported them.

The final unexpected result from Christian internationalism revisits one of the challenges raised in chapter 2. Namely, the sacred journey of missionaries complicates the contemporary debate on cosmopolitanism. Working from a similar transnational framework as Robert, Brickell complains that ‘the new focus on missionaries [in Geography] problematizes the concept of “cosmopolitanism,” which commonly appears in the singular and focuses upon "elite travelers"’.¹¹⁷ In contrast, the bulk of research on human migration focuses instead on migration “from below.”¹¹⁸ And despite the attention to religion that that body of research involves, an enormous gap in the literature exists between the global elites and the global masses. Brickell observes:

The experiences of ‘middle’ and ‘upper’ mobile religious people, such as religious businessmen (see Cunfu and Huang 2004; Yamamori and Eldred 2003), companies (Rundle and Steffen 2003), and religious leaders have consequently been elided from research into the relationship between religion and transnational migration so far. Moreover, missionaries, who are typically entirely funded by donations, and therefore do not belong to

¹¹⁶ Helen Barrett Montgomery, *Western Women in Eastern Lands; an Outline Study of Fifty Years of Woman's Work in Foreign Missions* (New York: Macmillan, 1910); William H. Brackney, “Montgomery, Helen (Barrett),” in *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 469.

¹¹⁷ Claire Brickell, “Geographies of Contemporary Christian Mission(Aries),” *Geography Compass* 6, no. 12 (December 2012): 731, 733.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 731.

either a lower, middle, or upper rank, have fallen out of this framework altogether.¹¹⁹

It remains as yet unseen how greater attention to the lives of missionaries by researchers from a variety of disciplines may shed light on discourse surrounding displacement in late modernity, but at very least, Brickell argues, we must speak of cosmopolitanisms in the plural.¹²⁰

Finally, a third observation on place as sacred journey centers on the constructive redefinition of place as encounter or intersection in the writings of geographer Doreen Massey. In her provocative essay, “A Global Sense of Place,” Massey asks:

How, in the face of all this movement and intermixing, can we retain any sense of a local place and its particularity? An (idealised) notion of an era when places were (supposedly) inhabited by coherent and homogenous communities is set against the current fragmentation and disruption. The counterposition is anyway dubious, of course; ‘place’ and ‘community’ have only rarely been coterminous. But the occasional longing for such coherence is nonetheless a sign of the geographical fragmentation, the spatial disruption, of our times. And occasionally, too, it has been part of what has given rise to defensive and reactionary responses—certain forms of nationalism, sentimentalised recovering of sanitised ‘heritages’, and outright antagonism to newcomers and ‘outsiders’.¹²¹

Massey fears that the desire of someone like Wendell Berry to be rooted in a place like Henry County represents a reaction to the threatening flows of people, commerce, and culture that constitute the modern world. Lippard’s appeal to “the lure of the local,” likewise, sounds to Massey like “a form of romanticised escapism from the real business

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ See the constructive gesture in chapter 6, which addresses how the church welcomes refugees in the context of changing cultural attitudes and governmental policies.

¹²¹ Doreen B. Massey, “A Global Sense of Place,” *Marxism Today*, June 1991, 24; given the refugee crisis--Europe reportedly absorbed over a million refugees in 2016 and recent indications of a constriction of shift in US policy--Massey’s assessment has a palpable contemporaneity even though she was writing nearly three decades ago.

of the world.”¹²² For Massey, a useful definition of place must be capacious enough to account for the interplay of competing socio-economic and cultural forces as McClintock Fulkerson noted earlier. That said, Massey readily acknowledges inadequacies in her argument at points, especially the need to admit honestly that all human beings exhibit a hunger for connection to place or something else that provides stability. Nevertheless, she remains concerned about the reactionary tone within many proposals about place.

Cresswell interprets Massey in the context of David Harvey’s more reactionary writings on place and within her own social location of a culturally diverse urban section of northwest London named Kilburn. The context helps not so much to soften the sharp edge of her argument about power dynamics and place but to understand its true target. Drawing a contrast with Harvey, Cresswell summarizes Massey’s three-fold concern with fixed notions of place. First, proponents downplay the complexity of actual places to give them “singular unitary identities—New York means this, Wales means that.”¹²³ Second, to do so, they offer a selective history of the place that often excludes newcomers from the story.¹²⁴ Third, they use the first two elements to draw tight boundaries between insiders and outsiders.¹²⁵ Even in her criticism of fixed notions of place, however, Massey displays a positive concern to welcome rather than exclude.

The constructive side of Massey’s proposal holds surprising promise for a missionary commitment to place. Reflecting on her own love of Kilburn, she conceives

¹²² Ibid., 26.

¹²³ Cresswell, *Place*, 2004, 72.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 73.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

of place as a point of intersection between various social relations that maintain openness to those within and beyond a given community.¹²⁶

It is, indeed, a *meeting* place. Instead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether that be a street, or a region or even a continent. And this in turn allows a sense of place which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local.¹²⁷

Massey's language brings to mind two images. First, Newbigin describes the church as "the visible fellowship, not of those whom we choose out to be our friends, but of those whom God has actually given to us as our neighbours. It is therefore simply humanity in every place re-created in Christ."¹²⁸ For Newbigin, this includes the local congregation but also, tracking with Massey, integration within the global church through the pursuit of ecumenical union that anticipates its eschatological fulfillment.

Hiebert offers the second image of the church as a centered set with porous boundaries rather than a bounded set with fixed ones. As an anthropologist, Hiebert recognized that Western constructions of religious conversion differed dramatically from those in the majority world. Whereas the Western church focused on policing boundaries of belief and behavior consonant with aspects of its Enlightenment heritage, other cultures focused first on belonging.¹²⁹ Massey's description of an "extroverted" place open to the constant flow of people in and out of the community sounds very close to

¹²⁶ Doreen B. Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 28.

¹²⁷ Massey, "A Global Sense of Place," 28.

¹²⁸ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of Church* (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009), 21.

¹²⁹ Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 34–346.

appropriations of Hiebert's thought within contemporary literature on mission and evangelism.¹³⁰ Thus, Massey challenges the church to take seriously what it would mean for the church herself to undertake a missionary journey to become a meeting place where those outside her community as well as *all* of those within it are welcome.

In sum, place understood as a sacred journey characterized by the movements of Jesus, pilgrims and missionaries reminds the church that a commitment to place is never static but always an active journey toward her ultimate destination in the triune God.

Place as Sacred Construction

In the introduction to this chapter, we cited Lesslie Newbigin's frustration that "little has so far been done to bring the insights of missiology to bear on the inculturation of the gospel in a now largely pagan Europe."¹³¹ In Bosch's account, the same Enlightenment culture that launched the modern missionary movement to produce a global church, could not keep the faith. Walls views this as the latest episode in a discernible pattern in Christian history: once Christianity becomes indigenous in a culture, the pilgrim impulse sends it in search of new cultural frontiers, and then it falls into disrepair in the place it once indwelt. Such is the case with European Christendom. Walls reflects:

In keeping with the serial nature of Christian expansion that seems so characteristic of the Christian faith, the dissolution of Christendom made possible a cultural diffusion of Christianity that is now in process of

¹³⁰ For example, see John Bowen, *Evangelism for "Normal" People: Good News for Those Looking for a Fresh Approach* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishing, 2002), 43–48; Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 201–20.

¹³¹ Newbigin, "Culture and Theology," 100.

transforming it.... Christendom is dead, and Christianity is alive and well without it.¹³²

Although Newbigin did not live to see it, the recent tide of human migration on European shores may lead to a post-Christendom form of European Christianity that better reflects the global church whose foundations it laid unintentionally through imperialism.¹³³ If so, that revival will involve the work of translation. Walls explains, “Christian faith... rests on a massive divine act of translation, and proceeds by successive lesser acts of translation into the complexes of experiences and relationships that form our social identities in different parts of the world auditorium.”¹³⁴ Whether making culture, building community or performing liturgy, the church’s sacred construction entails translating the gospel story into the life of the place God has sent her.

To propose sacred construction as an integral approach to a missionary commitment to place entails risk. Two preliminary reminders on the origin of this work are necessary. First, while it may blur the lines that Chesterton draws between creation and construction, Barth’s discussion of the triune God’s creation of the world in *Dogmatics in Outline* (1949) says something important about the work of sacred creation that connects with Wirzba’s comments on divine love and informs the discussion of sacred construction ahead.¹³⁵ Consistent with creation *ex nihilo*, Barth reverses the

¹³² Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 34.

¹³³ For example, at recent European Baptist Federation meetings, the delegation from the German Baptist Union described how work with refugees was revitalizing the fellowship of their churches through the welcoming of strangers—some Christian, many not—as well as rekindling their commitment to evangelism.

¹³⁴ Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 47.

¹³⁵ Stanley Hauerwas’ chapter on creation in his recent eschatology first alerted me to this passage in Barth [Stanley Hauerwas, *Approaching the End: Eschatological Reflections on Church, Politics, and Life* (Grand

common flow of questioning that moves from the accepted reality of an empirical universe to speculation about divine origins. Instead, Barth adopts the triune God as the starting point for reality and then puzzles over why creation exists at all. He states:

God has no need of us, He has no need of the world and heaven and earth at all. He is rich in Himself. He has fullness of life; all glory, all beauty, all goodness and holiness reside in Him. He is sufficient unto Himself, He is God, blessed in Himself. To what end, then, the world? Here in fact there is everything, here in the living God. How can there be something alongside God, of which He has no need? This is the riddle of creation.... Creation is grace: a statement at which we should like best to pause in reverence, fear and gratitude.¹³⁶

Creation is grace, a gratuitous work of love without justification or provocation. As the church considers the correspondence between human and divine agency in her work, the reminder that such work owes its origin to love alone draws a critical connection between the approaches to place in sacred creation and sacred construction.

Second, to the extent that works-righteousness still constitutes the default theology of many human beings, regardless of religious affiliation, a discussion of sacred construction must disavow the notion that human beings can save themselves. The church confesses that only one man's work accomplishes our salvation: namely, Jesus Christ. And God the Father inscribes that work of redemption in the midst of the Son's sacred journey from God's throne to earth and back again. The church's work rests on the foundation laid in the economic missions of the triune God in creation, redemption and consummation. And God invites the church to participate in that mission—not to

Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 8ff]; Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, trans. G. T. Thomson (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949).

¹³⁶ Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 53–54.

accomplish the salvation Christ alone achieves but to embody his salvation in and for the world as a concrete invitation through the Holy Spirit.

Even then, the church does not undertake sacred construction on her own accord but always in union with Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Theologian Miroslav Volf affirms a similar view by developing a pneumatological account of work understood as cooperation with God.¹³⁷ “We are,” writes Butler Bass, “creators, creators who work with the Creator, in an ongoing project of crafting a world.”¹³⁸ Into such joyful work, the triune God invites the church to partner in renewing God’s world. With those qualifications, let us now consider the three spheres of culture, community, and liturgy in which the church pursues sacred construction within a missionary commitment to place.

Construction and Culture

The vocation of culture-making is experiencing a revival in American Christianity. Once known as the patron and inspiration for the highest artistic achievements of Western culture, churches remain the largest regular venue for artistic performance in America, but few contemporary observers would describe the church as the vanguard of artistic and cultural production.¹³⁹ To the contrary, much of the church’s recent history of cultural engagement in America has found expression in political culture wars. At the close of the twentieth century, however, a discernible shift began to take place, especially among evangelical Protestants who had championed the culture wars

¹³⁷ Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

¹³⁸ Diana Butler Bass, *Grounded: Finding God in the World-A Spiritual Revolution* (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 275.

¹³⁹ Mark Chaves, *Congregations in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

since the early 1980s. One scholarly contribution to that shift was historian Mark Noll's jeremiad, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (1994), which exposed the vacuity of evangelical scholarship across multiple disciplines, especially with regard to thinking critically about evangelicalism's relationship with culture.¹⁴⁰

Within a few years, the waters of change were stirring. *Christianity Today* launched *Books & Culture: A Christian Review* to encourage Christian cultural and literary criticism. Appealing to a younger audience interested in cultural transformation, *re:generation quarterly* made a run for several years under the editorial guidance of Andy Crouch and in some ways anticipated the success of *Relevant Magazine*. In 2008, Crouch authored *Culture Making* (2008), which challenged Christians to reclaim their role as creators of culture. While he did not spark interest in his theme as much as capture the spirit of a diffuse movement well under way, Crouch's accessible yet theologically serious account of a classical Christian vocation garnered attention across the theological spectrum. His voice set a very different tone for cultural engagement than the evangelical culture warriors of the preceding decades.

In the same season, a range of new movements, institutions and scholarly ventures accompanied the growth of that popular literature. For example, the theologically amorphous emerging church movement and the more theologically conservative but culturally-attuned Q Ideas conferences—a Christian adaptation of TED Talks aimed at transforming culture—experienced significant publicity and growth. With regard to theological scholarship, David Brown contributed major works on theological aesthetics

¹⁴⁰ Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).

while a new critical edition of Hans Urs von Balthasar four-volume *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics* was released.¹⁴¹ Scholars with serious interest and sometimes cross-training in the arts such as Jeremy Begbie, William A. Dyrness and Nicholas Wolterstorff placed theology and philosophy in dialogue with the arts.¹⁴² Publishers such as Baker Academic launched an “Engaging Culture” series while Eerdmans responded with its own “Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies” series.¹⁴³ And Wheaton College dedicated its annual Theology Conference in 2006 to the intersection of theology and the arts.

Such an account of recent developments in Christian cultural engagement demonstrates interest and offers examples, but it does not explain precisely how culture-making expresses a missionary commitment to place. That requires greater clarity on the meaning of culture as a category. Newbigin defines ‘culture’ always in relation to ‘gospel’. In *Foolishness to the Greeks* (1986), he states:

By the word *culture* we have to understand the sum total of ways of living developed by a group of human beings and handed on from generation to generation. Central to culture is language. The language of a people provides the means by which they express their way of perceiving things and of coping with them. Around that center one would have to group their visual and musical arts, their technologies, their law, and their social and political organization. And one must also include in culture, and as

¹⁴¹ David Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Vol. 1*, ed. John Riches, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009).

¹⁴² Jeremy S. Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000); William A. Dyrness, *Visual Faith: Art, Theology, and Worship in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001); Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought: The Social Practices of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹⁴³ Representative examples from these respective series include Jeremy S. Begbie, *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music*, ed. Robert Johnston and William Dyrness (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007); Lisa DeBoer, *Visual Arts in the Worshiping Church* (Eerdmans, 2016).

fundamental to any culture, a set of beliefs, experience, and practices that seek to grasp and express the ultimate nature of things, that which gives shape and meaning to life, that which claims final loyalty. I am speaking, obviously, about religion. Religion—including the Christian religion—is thus part of culture.¹⁴⁴

In Newbigin's view, culture offers a broad sphere of activity where contributions in fields as diverse as the arts to law and politics can contribute to the betterment of a place. Such contributions, however, must be understood in light of the gospel.

For Newbigin, the gospel is always inseparable from culture, since it concerns the Word made flesh. He explains:

In speaking of "the gospel," I am, of course, referring to the announcement that in the series of events that have their center in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ something has happened that alters the total human situation and must therefore call into question every human culture.... There can never be a culture-free gospel. Yet the gospel which is from the beginning and the end embodied in culturally conditioned forms, calls into question all cultures, including the one in which it was originally established.

Hence, the relationship between gospel and culture is complex. There is no gospel apart from its cultural expression, because the gospel is a story; and stories, by definition, require expression through the medium of language, which is again inseparable from culture.¹⁴⁵

Nevertheless, the gospel exerts a critical function within culture to call for its submission to the lordship of Christ. That is, the church's re-translation of the story of

¹⁴⁴ Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 3; emphasis original.

¹⁴⁵ Here and elsewhere (see *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 24-25), Newbigin's construction of Christian faith shares much in common with the cultural-linguistic approach to doctrine described by theologian George A. Lindbeck. George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984); Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 24-25.

Jesus into new cultures always invites conversion. Walls notes, “Conversion is turning; and Christian conversion is turning towards Christ. This means that the process of conversion involves turning what is already there.”¹⁴⁶ Thus, in Newbigin’s (and Walls’) perspective, culture-making is fundamental to a missionary commitment to place, because it presents an opportunity to turn a culture toward Christ. And such sacred construction can take myriad forms. For example, in their respective theologies of place, Craft and Hjalmarson pay special attention to the role of the arts.¹⁴⁷ Hjalmarson in particular sees the arts as an instrument of mission by which the church may re-enchant the wasteland of modernity.¹⁴⁸ While some artists might object to the instrumentality of Hjalmarson’s proposal, Wainwright acknowledges that human artistry is “another enterprise in which humanity may be considered to image God in relation to creation.... It remains appropriate, therefore, to consider artistic creativity, properly exercised, as a participation in the creative activity of God.”¹⁴⁹ Culture-making offers an opportunity for the church to express God’s love for a particular place God has sent her through a material medium of construction.

Construction and Community

The second sphere of sacred construction is community. Instead of cultural materials, human relationships are the primary medium of community building.

¹⁴⁶ Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, xvii.

¹⁴⁷ The second half of Craft’s dissertation concerns the development of an “artistic theology of place,” which she explores through chapters on mapmaking, quilting and fiction writing [Jennifer A. Craft, “Making a Place on Earth: Participation in Creation and Redemption through Placemaking and the Arts” (Thesis, University of St Andrews, 2013), 128–209, <https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/handle/10023/3732>]; Hjalmarson, by contrast, offers a relatively short account of the relationship between place and the artist [Hjalmarson, *No Home Like Place*, 197–209].

¹⁴⁸ Hjalmarson, *No Home Like Place*, 197.

¹⁴⁹ Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life : A Systematic Theology*, 27.

However, the cultivation of human relationships always involves a context of encounter. Such places take many forms, whether physical or virtual; local, regional, national or global; and ecclesial or secular. Even if the church adopts Massey's definition of place provisionally as an externally-focused *meeting* place, the church need not neglect the landscape of her community, the built environment or sacred architecture. Those concerns and the placemaking practices they entail—explored, for example, by architect Philip Bess and theologians Sigurd Bergmann, Timothy Gorringer and Eric O. Jacobsen, for example—shape human encounters in meaningful ways.¹⁵⁰ For this reason, architect James McCrery interprets his field's work explicitly to the church's witness, noting, "The most conspicuous of the arts, architecture is unavoidable: One can put off visiting the Pietá in St. Peter's, but one may not avoid seeing the dome of the basilica."¹⁵¹ Author David Dark agrees that the built environment bears witness by disclosing our most basic commitments in public. He states:

Our real sense of what's really sacred is regularly on display. David Byrne of the Talking Heads bears witness to the religious situation when he invites us to consider the cities. Having made a regular habit of biking through as many as he can as often as he can, he describes his ongoing realization that cities are nothing less than "physical manifestations of our deepest beliefs and our often unconscious thoughts."¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Philip Bess, *Till We Have Built Jerusalem: Architecture, Urbanism, and the Sacred*, Religion and Contemporary Culture Series (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2006); Sigurd Bergmann, ed., *Theology in Built Environments: Exploring Religion, Architecture, and Design* (New Brunswick, CT; London, UK: Transaction Publishers, 2009); Timothy Gorringer, *A Theology of the Built Environment: Justice, Empowerment, Redemption* (Cambridge, U.K. ; Cambridge University Press, 2002), <http://ezproxy.baylor.edu/login?url=http://www.netLibrary.com/urlapi.asp?action=summary&v=1&bookid=112351>; Eric O. Jacobsen, *Sidewalks in the Kingdom : New Urbanism and the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2003); Jacobsen, *The Space Between*.

¹⁵¹ James McCrery, "A Proper Place," *First Things*, September 2010, 31.

¹⁵² David Dark, *Life's Too Short to Pretend You're Not Religious* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2016), 18.

One suspects that Kyle T. Kramer would lend his support to the same argument from the perspective of the farm. How we treat the land and soil reveals our character.¹⁵³

But however important such a digression into the built environment is, it in no way suggests that architecture is the sole marker of community. To the contrary, the church is not a building but a newly constituted people of God. Even Inge, with his appreciation of church shrines, understands that other elements of the faith community's common life are of equal, if not greater, value than its architecture. The shape of places the church inhabits is one of many factors that affect the sacred construction of community building within a missionary commitment to place.

In a culture of displacement, one of the most conspicuous ecclesial practices for building community is also one of the most basic: hospitality. In Scripture, memory is integral to the practice of hospitality. No less than six times, the Torah reminds the Israelites to show hospitality to the stranger and alien, because the Israelites themselves had been strangers and aliens in a foreign land (Exodus 22:21, 23:9; Leviticus 19:33-34, 25:35; Deuteronomy 10:19, 23:7). Likewise, memory also features prominently in an act of "dynamic anamnesis" at the heart of New Testament faith, which Wainwright explains as "the making effective in the present of an event in the past."¹⁵⁴ When the church celebrates Holy Communion, the past infuses the present. Wainwright cites an Anglican oblation:

¹⁵³ Kramer, "Fidelity and Fecundity;" Kyle T. Kramer, *A Time to Plant* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2001).

¹⁵⁴ Wainwright draws on the formulation of the Windsor statement of the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission pertaining to the Eucharist [Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life: A Systematic Theology*, 297].

Therefore, heavenly Father, with this bread and this cup we do this in remembrance of him: we celebrate and proclaim his perfect sacrifice made once for all upon the cross, his resurrection from the dead, and his ascension into heaven; and we look for his coming in glory.¹⁵⁵

As the church remembers, Christ himself sets the communion table as an act of hospitality rooted in history (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).¹⁵⁶

Next, hospitality also emerges as a prominent theme in the literature on mission and evangelism. Theologian Elaine Robinson claims, “By faith, we are called to live in radical relationship, which means opening ourselves to conversation with God, ourselves, others, and creation.”¹⁵⁷ Such an expansive view of witness implies the same openness to encounter that Massey craves and an intentional connection with sacred creation pertinent to this study. Inge adds that the “witness of neighborliness” expresses the “very best form of evangelism,” though pastors Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon are wary to treat “the art of neighboring” as anything more than obedience to the dominical command to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39).¹⁵⁸ Consistent with Bryan Stone’s arguments concerning the logic of Christian witness as a virtuous practice, Pathak and

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 296; specifically, Wainwright quotes the anamnesis-oblation of the Church of England’s Series 3 Holy Communion rite.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 297.

¹⁵⁷ Elaine A. Robinson, *Godbearing: Evangelism Reconceived* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2006), 145.

¹⁵⁸ Shamed into the love command by their agnostic mayor, pastors Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon propose simple but serious practices for Christians to build community with neighbors among whom the triune God has placed them. Their faithfulness to the love command leads them to eschew as unethical all back door attempts to “evangelize” their unsuspecting neighbors [Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring: Building Genuine Relationships Right Outside Your Door* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012)].

Runyon fear subordinating hospitality to an external end that denies its intrinsic virtue and thereby undermines its value as a practice.¹⁵⁹

In that same body of missiological literature, the metaphor of home often accompanies hospitality. Amy DeRogatis and Eric O. Jacobsen offer very different accounts of homemaking as a way to welcome strangers.¹⁶⁰ An American religious historian, DeRogatis interprets the lives of missionaries from the Connecticut Missionary Society who followed Christ to the frontier in antebellum America. She remarks:

I... take seriously the nostalgic desire to recreate a biblical or Puritan "home" to help the missionaries, settlers, and interested parties form religious identity in a frontier context. The frontier provided a salvific landscape, not only for themselves but also, as they fiercely contended, for the world. Building such a home allowed New Connecticut missionaries and settlers to step into sacred history and to write the penultimate redemptive chapter. The missionaries' work was not simply (or often) to convert souls, but to define religious identity by articulating the relationship between spatial and moral values on the frontier.¹⁶¹

While her sympathetic account leaves open the question of community boundaries,

DeRogatis nevertheless draws useful connections to the place(s) the missionaries settled.

Not known for their openness, what shape did Puritan practices of welcome assume?

¹⁵⁹ Following Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bryan P. Stone argues that a virtuous practice exhibits goods or ends internal to its means, so that the practice itself produces the hoped for end by virtue of its performance. In the case of Christian witness, hospitality or neighborliness, any ulterior motive beyond its origin in love distorts the practice. Such externalized ends invariably damage the relationships involved, since they were pursued under false pretenses. If Christian salvation, as both Stone and Newbiggin contend, is the incorporation of all humanity into a new community called the church, then even a religious motive may undermine the practice, because it damages the relationships that constitute the goods for which the practice aims. [Bryan P. Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 33–34].

¹⁶⁰ For a diverse collection of essays that develop the theme of homemaking, especially in the context of human displacement in modernity, see Leroy S. Rouner, ed., *The Longing for Home* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996).

¹⁶¹ Amy DeRogatis, *Moral Geography: Maps, Missionaries, and the American Frontier* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 183.

How radical, to borrow Robinson's language, was their openness to the souls whose salvation they sought?

In contrast with the frontier Puritanism of the antebellum period, Jacobsen sketches a constructive account of hospitality for churches seeking to welcome strangers in the contemporary urban built environment. He too appeals to home as a central metaphor. Citing Deuteronomy 10, Jacobsen calls the church to develop a theology of strangers and then to construct practices of welcome. This work involves four tasks: (1) developing neutral "third places" for outsiders, which function as a "home away from home;" (2) constructing hospitable homes, even in exurban communities designed originally to discourage encounters with strangers and neighbors, alike; (3) creating appropriate space for relationships as well as appropriate boundaries; and (4) providing the variety of spaces necessary to meet different human social needs.¹⁶² The collection of practices that Jacobsen proposes merit commendation, but there exists a gap in his account of hospitality. What does hospitality require when forces beyond (and sometimes within) congregations conspire either to refuse to welcome newcomers or to actively displace present community members who do not fit the preferred story a place tells about itself? That is, if Massey's fears are realized, how will hospitality give way to advocacy?

Finally, beyond attention to the built environment and a concern for hospitality and homemaking, community building as sacred creation recognizes the distinctively

¹⁶² Jacobsen, *The Space Between*, 243–51.

Christian character of the community the church seeks to build. In her ethnographic study of a local multicultural congregation, McClintock Fulkerson asks:

If place requires attending to the unavoidable ‘messiness’ of situations, the next question is how its features apply to an identity founded in a normative historic (salvific) event. How should the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the literatures that witness to those events shape their continued reenactment? How can Good Samaritan [United Methodist Church] be understood such that the features of place—what it means to call it a *situation*—and the importance of faithfulness to Jesus are both taken into account?¹⁶³

This question anticipates the distinctively Christian identity of the community that sacred construction seeks to build.

The church seeks to build a narrative-based community centered on the story of Jesus. To be clear, such work involves practices of hospitality and liturgy, but it also involves forming a community that invites others into the story of Jesus. But how does one form such a welcoming congregation? Newbigin responds:

Jesus... did not write a book but formed a community. This community has at its heart the remembering and rehearsing of his words and deeds, and the sacraments given by him through which it is enabled both to engraft new members into its life and to renew this life again and again through the sharing in his risen life through the body broken and the lifeblood poured out. It exists in him and for him. He is the center of its life.¹⁶⁴

If, as Newbigin suggests, the biblical story of Jesus and the sacraments provide the essential elements of Christian community, then how exactly do those elements work together to “engraft new members” into the church?

¹⁶³ Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption*, 37.

¹⁶⁴ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 227.

Kallenberg offers a useful redescription of the way churches incorporate outsiders into the community based on his reading of a postcritical philosophy of language.¹⁶⁵ He explains:

Because conversion involves a change in social identity, evangelism must be a corporate practice, executed by the community that is the source of the believer's new identity. Second, because conversion involves the acquisition of a new conceptual language, evangelism must engage outsiders in conversations spoken in that language. Third, because conversion involves a paradigm shift, evangelism must seek to assist that shift by being dialogical in style and by, wherever possible, enlisting potential converts in the telling of the story.¹⁶⁶

The welcome, then, is not generic but focused and it aims at indwelling a new form of life. Cheri DiNovo, a pastor and Member of Parliament in Canada, describes the process as “growing a community from the outside in.”¹⁶⁷ Likewise, in contrast to the centrifugal forces at play in the modern missionary movement, Mortimer Arias discerns in Scripture the centripetal pull of mission towards a common center in Jesus Christ.¹⁶⁸

The vision of a community centered in Jesus leads not only to a community of hospitality but also a community of reciprocity.¹⁶⁹ “To evangelize is to be evangelized,” Arias comments, as he reflects on one of Newbigin's favorite passages of Scripture: the conversion of Peter (Cornelius) in Acts 10.¹⁷⁰ Hospitality leads often to transformation

¹⁶⁵ The influence of Ludwig Wittgenstein and George Lindbeck on Kallenberg is clear [Kallenberg, *Live to Tell*, 47–64].

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁶⁷ Cheri DiNovo, *Qu(e)rying Evangelism: Growing A Community from the Outside In* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2005).

¹⁶⁸ Mortimer Arias, “Centripetal Mission, or Evangelization by Hospitality,” in *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church*, ed. Paul Wesley Chilcote and Lacey C. Warner (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 429.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 433–34 Arias devotes significant attention to a discussion of Christian hospitality.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 434.

not only of the guest but also the host. To extend Kallenberg's analogy, the language of outsiders may enrich the Christian vocabulary with new terminology or provide nuance and insight into the church's own speech. Community building, when understood as sacred construction, invites others to into a community with porous external boundaries whose common practices of language learning circulate around the story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. But the description of such a community would be inadequate—its storytelling incomplete—without reference to the place of Christian worship in sacred construction.

Construction and Christian Liturgy

The sacraments, traditionally understood, are “outward signs of inward grace,” but they also are the embodied practices of a community that would not be the same community without them. Reinhard Hütter defines “core church practices” as “complex and quite distinct contexts of action constituting and characterizing the church.”¹⁷¹ First, such practices “are grounded in a distinct *bios*; that is, they are activities of actualization inhering in a quite distinct comprehensive praxis.”¹⁷² In other words, the practices shape a distinctive form of life that differentiates the church community from other communities. The present study argues that a missionary commitment to place represents just such a comprehensive praxis.

Next, Hütter explains that some practices are “necessary without being constitutive;” whereas some practices are neither necessary nor constitutive of the

¹⁷¹ Reinhard Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 37.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

church's distinctive life.¹⁷³ With reference to Hütter's analysis, Stone comments that denominational differences often correspond to how various Christian traditions interpret certain practices differently than others.¹⁷⁴ What then are those core ecclesial practices which have constituted the church across all times and places?¹⁷⁵ To answer this question from a missionary perspective, Walls concocts an imaginary longitudinal study:

Let us imagine a long-living, scholarly space visitor—a Professor of Comparative Inter-Planetary Religions perhaps—who is able to get periodic space-grants which enable him to visit Earth for field study every few centuries.... to pursue the study of the earth-religion Christianity on principles of Baconian induction, observing the practices, habits, and concerns of a representative sample of Christians.¹⁷⁶

After conducting field research at Jerusalem in 37 CE, Nicea in 325, Ireland in the 600s, London in 1840s and Lagos in 1980, Walls' space visitor concludes that a consistent mixture of beliefs and practices constitute the *bios* of Christianity. Although disguised in “heavy veils belonging to their environment” (i.e., places), these distinguishing marks of Christian community include “continuity of thought about the final significance of Jesus, continuity of a certain consciousness about history, continuity in the use of the Scriptures, of bread and wine, of water.”¹⁷⁷ These elements, as Walls insists, enjoy universal embrace of the church across time and place.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, 25.

¹⁷⁵ This query represents a variation on the classic question of the true marks of the church (*notae ecclesiae*). In 381 CE, the First Council of Constantinople offered the four-fold description of “one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church” in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. The Reformers in the 16th century promoted a different formula. Instead of adjectives, they emphasized practices. The true church is the place where the Word of God is preached, the sacraments are administered and church discipline is exercised.

¹⁷⁶ Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 3.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 7.

A missionary commitment to place involves the sacred construction of liturgy through the mediums of Scripture and sacraments. Following Newbigin, the previous discussion of a narrative-based Christian community envisions a community that prioritizes the corporate study of Scripture and its proclamation in worship as constitutive of its life together. Indeed, the full immersion of the congregation in the stories of Scripture is the primary means by which outsiders learn a new conceptual language. They learn the vocabulary of faith by reading the lives of the faithful in Scripture and in the congregation before them as texts. Likewise, longtime insiders also benefit from the immersion process, because Scripture enlarges their imagination for life's possibilities within the context of the triune God's plans in history. Biblical scholar J. Ross Wagner locates this practice within the *missio Dei*:

Scripture serves “the acts of Father, Son and Spirit which establish and maintain that saving fellowship with humankind in which God makes himself known *to us and by us*” (John Webster, 2003:8), constituting us as recipients and bearers of the message of reconciliation. The necessary context for an adequate dogmatic treatment of the nature and function of Holy Scriptures is, therefore, nothing less than the full scope of the *missio Dei*.¹⁷⁸

Wagner echoes the claim of J. H. Christopher Wright in his discussion of the *missio Dei* that Scripture always presents the triune God as the God “who wills to be known” in creation, redemption and consummation.¹⁷⁹ Therefore, faithful liturgical construction creates space for God's self-disclosure in congregational Bible study and proclamation.

¹⁷⁸ J. Ross Wagner, “Missio Dei: Envisioning an Apostolic Reading of Scripture,” *Missiology* 37, no. 1 (January 1, 2009): 20; emphasis original to Wagner.

¹⁷⁹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 74.

Finally, the sacraments of Lord's Supper and baptism also offer core ecclesial practices that constitute the church as the community of Christ. Implicit in the discussion of Scripture is the performative aspect of the church's proclamation, which also obtains for the sacraments. As an event in the life of a community of faith, the performance of the liturgy requires a literal place to enact the drama of Christian salvation whether in a baptismal pool or at table. Throughout the church's history the designation of that place has mattered significantly. "To practice," concurs Philip F. Sheldrake, "obviously emphasizes the way human actions construct or shape the world of places".¹⁸⁰ Patristic era debates over the appropriate place to conduct water baptism illustrate this Sheldrake's claim. Or, in communities characterized by long-term stability, consider the significance of multiple generations of a single family participating in the same practices in the same places over time. The grandmother who watches her great granddaughter step into the same baptismal pool as she did some 80 years before discovers in the liturgy and in the place it is enacted a deeper meaning. Likewise, when Newbigin waded into the waters of the Edgbaston Reservoir to initiate Sikh converts into the Christian faith in a religiously plural neighborhood of Birmingham (UK), his small United Reformed Church was engaging place intentionally to bear public witness to the Christian message. The place of performance shapes not only the experience of the sacrament for participants, but place also can impact the public meaning of the liturgy.

Besides the significance of the place the church enacts the event when performing the liturgy, the sacraments also create an additional place of encounter between human

¹⁸⁰ Philip Sheldrake, "Practicing Catholic 'Place' - The Eucharist," *Horizons* 28, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 164.

beings and God, which Inge describes as “sacramental encounters in particular places.”¹⁸¹ This two-fold recognition of place as event and encounter, of course, resonates with Massey’s account of place. Moreover, baptism and the Lord’s Supper not only enact the drama of salvation, but they do so specifically through the reenactment of stories from Scripture, which alongside proclamation effectively centers the church within the story of Jesus in both word and deed.

Place shapes indelibly the character of the liturgical performance of Scripture’s stories. While Sheldrake and others think carefully about catholicity in relation to the Eucharist, a missionary commitment to place instead directs us toward the language of the liturgy broadly conceived.¹⁸² In a series of interlocking arguments, Lamin Sanneh, a scholar of the cultural impact of Bible translation, observes, “Translation is the church’s birthmark as well as its missionary benchmark,” which makes it exceptional among other religious traditions in that Christianity has not sought to replicate the “language or originating culture of its founder.”¹⁸³

Three practical results follow from that benchmark. First, Sanneh reports that Christians worship in more than 2000 language groups worldwide—incomparably more than any other tradition—and, consequently, have made disproportionately large cultural and linguistic contributions (e.g., grammars and dictionaries) to many places where

¹⁸¹ Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, 89; the frequent inscription of such human divine encounters through the sacraments on the life and identity of particular places constitutes the basis for Inge’s judgment that certain places are indeed “holy places” (90).

¹⁸² See Sheldrake, “Practicing Catholic ‘Place;’” Philip Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory and Identity* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 64–89.

¹⁸³ Lamin O. Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity?: The Gospel beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 97–98.

Christian membership remains relatively small.¹⁸⁴ Next, the vernacular emphasis in Bible translation and worship affirms the local language and culture of the people, so local communities do not have to denounce their own culture. Citing the growth of African Christianity, Sanneh opines, “Christianity is the language of the people.”¹⁸⁵ Following the second result closely, Sanneh notes that the non-Western cultures in which Christianity has thrived most are the ones in which missionaries and converts retained the indigenous names for God in their lands.¹⁸⁶ Thus, the sacred construction and faithful performance of liturgy ensures that the church’s community-building and culture-making efforts all contribute to the same “distinct comprehensive praxis” that constitutes a missionary commitment to place.

Conclusion

In sum, the church needs a trinitarian framework for mission that takes seriously the place(s) the triune God has sent her. Grounded in our previous construction of the *missio Dei*, which featured a trinitarian basis, a redemptive focus and an ecclesial locus, the present chapter completes the map of a sacred geography of place through the categories of sacred creation, sacred journey and sacred construction. Thereby, the framework provides the church with the conceptual resources necessary to cultivate a commitment to place that is constitutive of her mission rather than in opposition to it. In an era of widespread displacement, the church needs such tools for fresh theological criticism and construction. Noel A. Davies observes:

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 69.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 31–32.

No one fundamental factor can define the contours of our theology of place. It will be rooted in God, Creator of the cosmos and, in Christ, redeemer not only of the human community but of the whole community of life within the cosmos and of the cosmos itself. It will recognise that the earth is the gift of God to all beings and that the earth itself is sacred because here the eternal Word took form within a human life.¹⁸⁷

Davies' description of a theology of place summarizes aptly the approach of the present chapter by offering a clear trinitarian structure within a commitment to the missions of the triune God in and through creation. In the next and final chapter, we test the adequacy of this missionary framework to shape the church's witness against the late modern culture of displacement through the singular missionary life of Lesslie Newbigin.

Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption*, 37.

¹⁸⁷ Noel E. Davies, "Sources for a Theology of Place," *Contact*, Edinburgh: Scottish Pastoral Association, no. 133 (2000): 18.

Ch. 6 A Missionary Commitment to Place: the Case of Lesslie Newbigin

In the final chapter of a long missionary career, Lesslie Newbigin championed the renewal of Christian mission in post-Christian Western culture through a stream of publications and lectures. Concomitant with his advocacy, Newbigin led a small United Reformed congregation in the impoverished urban core of Birmingham, the most culturally diverse city in Great Britain.¹ In a lecture at the Centre for Explorations in Social Concern in London, on November 5, 1985, Newbigin addressed the question, “Does Society Still Need the Parish Church?” His answer underscored the missionary character of the local congregation sent by the triune God into the world:

But in talking about the world you have to talk about that segment of the world in which you are placed, and the Church has to be recognizable as *for* that place. Now, I’ll say later that the geographical definition of that segment may not be the only one that is relevant, although I think it is the fundamental one. There can be other possible definitions of the “place,” but it is of the very essence of the Church that it is *for* that place, for that section of the world for which it has been made responsible. And the “for” has to be defined christologically. In other words, the Church is *for* that place in the sense that is determined by the sense in which Christ is *for* the

¹ For a concise history of Birmingham’s development and cultural diversification through the 20th century, see Peter Leather, *A Brief History of Birmingham* (Studley: Brewin Books, 2001); for a more detailed analysis of the decades immediately preceding Newbigin’s arrival to the city in 1974, see Anthony Sutcliffe and Roger Smith, *Birmingham 1939-1970*, vol. 3, *History of Birmingham* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974); complementing those broader studies, Carl Chinn focuses more narrowly on urban renewal schemes and housing in urban core neighborhoods, including Newbigin’s own Winson Green, see Carl Chinn, *Homes for People: Council Housing and Urban Renewal in Birmingham, 1849-1999* (Studley, UK: Brewin Books, 1999); for more popular treatments of Winson Green with photographic evidence of its development, see Peter Drake, ed., *Winson Green and Brookfields*, *Images of England* (Stroud: Tempus, 2003) and Ted Rudge, ed., *Winson Green to Brookfields through Time* (Stroud, England: Amberley, 2009); finally, recent journalism verifies the cultural diversity of urban Birmingham, see Claire Ellicott, “The Cities Where White Children Are in a Minority,” *The Daily Mail Online*, January 25, 2011, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1350087/White-children-Birmingham-minority-year-immigration.html>; and Charles Walford, “Chattering Classes... the British Primary School Where Pupils Speak 31 Different Languages,” *The Daily Mail Online*, June 7, 2012, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2155938/The-primary-school-pupils-speak-31-different-languages--class-just-single-British-pupil.html>.

world. Now, one could go into a whole theology of the atonement if one were to develop this, but obviously Christ on his cross is in one sense totally identified with the world, but in another sense totally separated from the world.²

While Newbigin never developed a full soteriological account of place, he indicated it was not only possible but essential to the church's identity and mission. How did Newbigin arrive at such a forceful articulation of the church's relationship to place?³

The present chapter offers a response to that question by examining the origins and contours of Newbigin's missionary commitment to place within the larger context of his "theological life." This signifies a turn from construction to demonstration. Before starting that work, however, a concise review of the ground covered thus far may prove useful. Chapter 1 introduced the concept of place and its promise as a missionary commitment. Next, chapter 2 described the role of place in church and society through a wide range of lenses before chapter 3 detailed more narrowly its ambiguous history in the church's missionary practice. With an understanding of the promise of place and its attendant problems in late modernity, chapters 4 and 5 then constructed a missiological account of place conversant with the field of geography but grounded in the *missio Dei* to strengthen the church's witness in the religiously plural societies of late modernity.

On that basis, the present chapter tests the adequacy of the preceding account of place in three respects. First, when employed as a lens of examination, does the

² Lesslie Newbigin, *A Word in Season: Perspectives on Christian World Missions*, ed. Eleanor Jackson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 53–54; for revised version of this lecture, see G. S. Ecclestone, ed., "On Being the Church for the World," in *The Parish Church?: Explorations in the Relationship of the Church and the World* (London: Mowbray, 1988), 25–42.

³ Since Newbigin repeated this claim verbatim on other occasions, it invites further scrutiny. See Lesslie Newbigin, "What Is a Local Church Truly United," *The Ecumenical Review* 29, no. 2 (April 1977): 115–28; see also Newbigin's discussion of key characteristics of congregations as "hermeneutic of the gospel", which includes a commitment to place [Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 229].

missiological account of place render a recognizable portrait of Newbiggin's life and thought? That is, does it widen the angle of analysis without distorting the frame of his consistent themes and practices? Does it illumine new aspects of his life and thought? Second, does the account adequately describe Newbiggin's missionary commitment to place? Third, did Newbiggin's missionary commitment to place strengthen the church's witness in late modernity?

With those questions in mind, the case study opens with a critical illustration of the danger of divorcing Newbiggin's thought from the context of his life and ministry. Next, we explore the places that shaped his life through a biographical sketch of Newbiggin as student, missionary and retiree. Third, the argument shifts from chronology to compilation to organize Newbiggin's views on place through the categories of sacred creation, sacred journey, and sacred construction that were developed in chapter 5. Finally, the chapter concludes with a brief assessment along the lines specified above.

The Life and Work of Lesslie Newbiggin

Although Lesslie Newbiggin traveled extensively over a long life, the English Presbyterian minister planted his family in South India for nearly four decades as a Church of Scotland missionary, who became a founding bishop in the ecumenical Church of South India. To put his life in perspective, it may be helpful to begin with the end in mind. When Newbiggin's obituary ran in *The Independent*, his longtime colleague, H. Daniel Beeby, condensed his life into less than seventy words:

James Edward Lesslie Newbiggin, missionary and minister of the church: born Newcastle upon Tyne 8th December 1909; ordained 1936; Bishop in Madura and Ramnad, Church of South India 1947-59; Bishop in Madras 1965-74; CBE 1974; Lecturer in Theology, Selly Oak Colleges,

Birmingham 1974-79; minister, United Reformed Church, Winson Green 1980-88; married 1936 Helen Henderson (one son, three daughters); died London 30th January 1998.⁴

Despite eliding significant details—most notably, Newbigin’s education at Cambridge, initial appointment in Kanchipuram, and interlude between bishoprics as General Secretary of the International Missionary Council—Beeby’s obituary assembled the basic facts of Newbigin’s existence, but it did not capture his identity.

For a sense of Newbigin’s character and impact, one must look instead to Beeby’s funeral address, where he proclaimed:

Lesslie never touched anything that he did not adorn, illuminate and advance. His influence before 1983 was enormous, but with *The Other Side of 1984* and its successors, I believe there was something totally new, long roots but new. A new mission for a new cultural situation. A new analysis, new eyes for us to see with, an old faith renewed and a new and proper confidence born. In a faltering age with hope run low, he swung the lamp of resurrection over increasing gloom.⁵

Newbigin understood himself foremost to be a witness to Jesus Christ—first on the university campus, later in his adopted India, and finally in his native England.⁶ Beeby concluded his remarks with a challenge to take up where Newbigin left off—to develop a

⁴ H. Daniel Beeby, “Obituary; The Right Rev Lesslie Newbigin,” *The Independent*, February 3, 1998, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/obituary-the-right-rev-lesslie-newbigin-1142813.html>; see also H. Daniel Beeby, “Lesslie Newbigin: Biography,” *The Gospel and Our Culture*, accessed December 21, 2012, <http://www.gospel-culture.org.uk/newbio.htm>.

⁵ H. Daniel Beeby, “Lesslie Newbigin Remembered,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 22, no. 2 (April 1998): 52.

⁶ When the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* dedicated its cover to Newbigin’s death, the editors recounted his numerous contributions to the journal, including words from his final submission in April 1997, which express his identity as a witness: “There cannot be any greater task, or any deeper joy, than to tell the world what God has done for us in Jesus Christ and to enable others to know, love, and serve him as Lord and Savior” [“Newbigin, Lesslie, Bp, 1909-1998,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 22, no. 4 (April 1998): 49].

fresh missionary analysis and approach to Western culture, which the veteran missionary increasingly recognized as neo-pagan rather than secular in character. Newbigin himself had issued the same challenge through a steady stream of writings undertaken in retirement, including four book-length treatments of the subject.⁷

With justification, many readers and church leaders have focused, as Beeby suggested, on Newbigin's prodigious contributions from the 1980s onward. As the instigator of the Gospel in Our Culture program, his work laid the foundation for the larger missional church movement that has taken shape since his death. His writings shaped scholarly discussions and denominational initiatives and inspired the production of popular books and conferences dedicated to what others termed the 'missional church'. Nevertheless, ignoring the earlier periods of his life not only risks minimizing the contributions of those seasons, but it also risks a misinterpretation of his later thought and practice. Before sketching a portrait of Newbigin's life, an example of such misinterpretation is useful to underscore the importance of context for interpretation.

Interpreting Newbigin in Context

It is not without irony that Wainwright's comparison of Newbigin to a contemporary "Father of the Church" is cited frequently in discussions of Newbigin, including by some authors unfamiliar with his earlier work, since the patristic comparison proceeds from familiarity with Newbigin's wider ecumenical and episcopal

⁷ In actuality, Newbigin authored roughly a dozen books after his retirement as a bishop in the Church of South India, but four volumes directly addressed the question of a missionary engagement with Western culture: see Lesslie Newbigin, *The Other Side of 1984: Questions for the Churches*, Risk Book Series 18 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983); Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986); Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*; and Lesslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt, and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995).

contributions.⁸ For example, theologian Alan J. Roxburgh, contributor to the influential 1998 book *Missional Church* that introduced Newbigin to a larger popular audience beyond the confines of ecumenism and mission studies, states:

Part of Newbigin's legacy is that his best, most creative work occurred after he was sixty-five. Retirement was the beginning of a new vocation as he sought to understand and engage his own country from the perspective of a cross-cultural missionary. His whole life to that point, it seemed, was preparation for those last twenty-plus years. He wrote his best and most lucid work in those years.⁹

He then devotes two chapters in the same work to correct what he now views as a fundamental misreading of Newbigin. For Roxburgh—someone familiar with Newbigin’s biography and earlier contributions—that misreading centers on a contemporary preoccupation with ecclesiological questions to the detriment of missionary ones about the relationship between gospel and culture.

Roxburgh correctly identifies a dynamic interplay between gospel, church, and culture in Newbigin’s writings, but he fears that the ecclesiological starting point of many enthusiasts of the missional church stalls the conversation in a “Christendom imagination” concerned with “how to make the church more effective in late modern culture.”¹⁰ Roxburgh continues:

This ecclesiocentric obsession means that primarily we mine both Scripture and culture for our own needs. We’re so preoccupied with church questions that neither biblical narratives nor culture can become the places where God addresses us and challenges us to be converted.¹¹

⁸ Geoffrey Wainwright, *Lesslie Newbigin: A Theological Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), v.

⁹ Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 2011), 37.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

Although Newbigin has more sympathy for Christendom than Roxburgh admits, insofar as he identifies Newbigin's primary concern to be the church's faithfulness to the gospel rather than her effectiveness, his analysis holds.¹² But after summarizing three works from Newbigin's retirement period, Roxburgh concludes that "Newbigin was never preoccupied with church questions."¹³ Here Roxburgh overcorrects. Instead of restoring balance to the interplay of gospel, church and culture, he distorts Newbigin's record and errs in the opposite direction by diminishing the significance of the church.

Newbigin's missiological critique of Western culture in his later life rests firmly on the ecumenical and ecclesiological writings of his earlier periods. Groundbreaking ecumenical works of the mid-twentieth century such as *The Reunion of the Church: A Defense of the South India Scheme* (1948, 1960), *That All May Be One: A South India Diary* (1952), *The Household of God* (1953) and numerous articles, lectures and sermons occupy themselves chiefly with what Roxburgh calls "church questions." Moreover, Newbigin composes these works of ecclesiology while concomitantly shaping the wider ecumenical debate on the meaning of the *missio Dei* within the International Missionary

¹² Newbigin credits the biblical story for the transformation of Europe and the creation of the modern world. In his Hickman Lectures at Duke Divinity School in fall 1994, he states, "And why, then, do we speak of Europe as a separate continent? The answer surely is very simple, namely that unlike the rest of Asia, Europe was, for at least a thousand years, trained to find the location of reliable truth in a story--the story told in the Bible" (25-26). The 18th century Enlightenment marked, for Newbigin, an unfortunate return to its classical (and Asian) philosophical roots, which could not have supplied the basis for modern progress. As with any culture, Newbigin recognized elements in Christendom the gospel would affirm and others it would challenge, but his long-term missionary experience in South India made him suspicious of wholesale rejections of Christendom culture. See Lesslie Newbigin, "The Gospel as True," *Trinity Journal for Theology and Ministry*, The Gospel in the Public Square: Hickman Lectures, Duke Divinity School, Fall 1994, IV, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 25-26.

¹³ Roxburgh, *Missional*, 48.

Council (IMC).¹⁴ This juxtaposition is not incidental to Newbigin's theological position but integral to it.

In 1952, Newbigin played the principal role in drafting compromise statements at the contentious IMC meeting in Willingen, Germany. Standing alongside Karl Hartenstein, Georg Vicedom, and Karl Barth, Newbigin endorsed a classical, salvation-historical framework for the *missio Dei* in continuity with Augustine's *De Trinitate*, which distinguished a trinitarian basis, a redemptive focus, and an *ecclesial locus* for the doctrine.¹⁵ This position diverged sharply from the radical wing of the IMC represented by J.C. Hoekendijk, Paul Lehman and others who sought to move the *missio Dei* beyond the ecclesial and doctrinal strictures of the Church to tap into a universal spirit. As historian Timothy Yates reported:

Hans (J.C.) Hoekendijk laid strong emphasis on God's work in the world and gave what some have viewed as quite different and new content to the term *Missio Dei* (mission of God) as used by Karl Hartenstein at Willingen in 1952. Hoekendijk used the term to denote the totality of God's activity, thereby by-passing the church and stressing the God-World movement (as distinct from the God-Church-World movement) towards establishing the kingdom.¹⁶

¹⁴ The International Missionary Council (IMC) was constituted as the continuation committee of World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910 and served as the forerunner for the World Council of Churches (WCC) Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME). Newbigin served as General Secretary of the IMC 1959-1961 and then managed its integration into the WCC in 1961 at which time Newbigin was appointed Associate General Secretary of the WCC over the CWME.

¹⁵ Chapter 4 extends this discussion of the *missio Dei*. See also International Missionary Council, *Missions under the Cross: Addresses Delivered at the Enlarged Meeting of the Committee of the International Missionary Council at Willingen, in Germany, 1952; with Statements Issued by the Meeting.*, ed. Norman Goodall (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1953); Jacques Matthey, ed., "Willingen 1952-Willingen 2002," *International Review of Mission* 92, no. 367 (October 1, 2003): 463-587, doi:10.1111/j.1758-6631.2003.tb00420.x.

¹⁶ Timothy E. Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 196.

Adopting a broadly theocentric focus, proponents of the radical stream dropped the church from their constructions of the *missio Dei*. By the Uppsala Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1968, Newbigin lamented that the *missio Dei* had been “hijacked in the interests of the dominant ideology of the secular.”¹⁷ For Newbigin, ecclesiological questions were intertwined with, if not inseparable from, missiology.

Newbigin identified two basic problems with the radical approach. First, the Bible presented Jesus Christ alone as the way of salvation with the church as its locus.¹⁸ Second, the radical position subordinated sacred accounts of history to secular ones. In so doing, Newbigin believed that its proponents trapped themselves within human history rather than liberating themselves from it. He explained:

Meaningful action in history is possible only when there is some vision of the future goal. But the future is hidden from us—our own personal future and the future of the world. The curtain of death lies across the path. The good news is that Jesus has opened a way through the curtain and has come to lead us on the way which he has opened and which he is, the way which consists in abiding in him, sharing his passion so that we may share his victory over death.¹⁹

For Newbigin, Christ provided the “clue to history” and, therefore, the basis for meaningful action in history.²⁰ As the concrete embodiment of Christ’s story in the world, the church in the power of the Holy Spirit was not ancillary to the *missio Dei*, as the radicals viewed it, but central to it. For Newbigin, an ecclesial locus for the *missio*

¹⁷ Lesslie Newbigin, “Reply to Konrad Raiser,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 18, no. 2 (1994): 52.

¹⁸ Lesslie Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today’s Mission* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 51.

¹⁹ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 114.

²⁰ Newbigin employs the phrase, “Christ, the Clue to History”, as a chapter title. See *ibid.*, 103–15.

Dei was therefore essential to respecting divine freedom, enabling the Church's witness, and broadening the world's perspective.

Therefore, when Roxburgh contends that Newbigin was not overly concerned with the church and, further, that such a focus obscures Newbigin's missiology, one must conclude that it is Roxburgh's reading that is mistaken. Indeed, he protests "that the argument of this book is not antichurch. In fact, my argument is born out of a passionate desire for local churches to embrace the *missio Dei* in their neighborhoods and communities."²¹ Unfortunately Roxburgh's construction of the *missio Dei* situates the church outside of God's mission rather than integral to it. As such, Roxburgh's position more closely resembles Hoekendijk's conception of the *missio Dei* than Newbigin's.

Why does this extended historical sidebar with Roxburgh matter? The discussion underscores an approach to Newbigin modeled foremost in Wainwright's *Lesslie Newbigin: A Theological Life* (2000), which insists on interpreting Newbigin within the larger contexts of his life and thought, especially his earlier periods of service in India and the ecumenical movement. In his preface, Wainwright marvels at "the strength and consistency of [Newbigin's] vision and its practical enactment" across a long lifetime.²² More poignantly, in handwritten correspondence with Newbigin dated 13 January 1998, less than three weeks before Newbigin's death, Wainwright writes:

I find your early material very interesting: you set out positions which have then remained fundamentally consistent throughout your career,

²¹ Roxburgh, *Missional*, 44.

²² Wainwright, *Lesslie Newbigin*, viii.

enriched of course by new things learned, fresh insight developed, and the application to changed circumstances.²³

To interpret Newbigin's missiology apart from the larger contexts of his missionary service, episcopal and ecumenical leadership, and the places that shaped his identity is to risk misinterpreting him and the research program he inspired, as Roxburgh demonstrates.

To avoid such errors and to learn from what McClendon would call the "striking life" of Lesslie Newbigin, let us proceed with a biographical sketch divided into three sequential periods of his life as student, missionary, and retiree. These divisions trace the broad outline of Newbigin's missionary life and provide useful entry points for assessing the influence of place upon his thought later in the chapter. The following reflections draw heavily on Newbigin's autobiography, *Unfinished Agenda*, to highlight Newbigin's direct perceptions of place and are weighted toward the earlier phases of his career in South India, which are less familiar to most readers or, in some cases, are discounted by others, including Roxburgh.²⁴

The Peripatetic Student (1909-1947)

From birth to the end of his first appointment as Church of Scotland missionary in Kanchipuram, a sacred Hindu city in South India, Newbigin's life resembles a peripatetic student moving from one teacher or context to the next. Born in Newcastle upon Tyne,

²³ Geoffrey Wainwright to Lesslie Newbigin, January 13, 1998, DA 29/1/14/11, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham.

²⁴ Lesslie Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda: An Updated Autobiography*, Updated (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1993); with few exceptions, secondary literature addressing Newbigin's early life draws exclusively from his autobiography, so I have chosen to rely directly on it rather than give the false impression of secondary sources, which ultimately trace directly back to the autobiography. In the Newbigin Archives at the University of Birmingham (UK), Newbigin begins his active writing life concurrent with his departure for South India as a Church of Scotland missionary in 1936, which includes correspondence with family.

December 8th, 1909, Newbiggin cherished fond memories of childhood in Northumbria within a devout English Presbyterian family. His father was a self-educated man who built a successful shipping company and became active in liberal politics at regional and national levels. Although his father leaned heavily toward a socialist position, Newbiggin observed his consistent religious life:

To the end he never failed to take time for prayer in the morning, humbly kneeling by his bedside before he went out to work. As his papers show, he was always struggling with the question of how to apply his Christian faith to the day-to-day issues of business and politics.²⁵

But Newbiggin notes that in childhood his most significant memories of his father were tied to the created order: “his knowledge of flowers, shells and stones, his love for mountain- and rock-climbing” and, finally, his delight in his children. These all left an impression on the young Newbiggin.²⁶ Likewise, Newbiggin remembered his mother, an internationally-trained pianist who remained nostalgic for her family’s country home in Scotland, as “the most loving and devoted mother that one could wish for.”²⁷

Newbiggin’s early education at a preparatory school did not inspire the same fondness. He recalls intensive lessons in Latin coupled with rote approaches to learning English geography. “I can still recite without thinking the cotton towns of Lancashire, the towns on the Thames from Oxford to Woolwich,” Newbiggin remembered.²⁸ Upon further reflection, however, he revised his judgment, “Perhaps this [geography] was more

²⁵ Ibid., 3.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 3–4.

important than it seems now.”²⁹ The highlights of his early education were experiences in nature. Newbigin reminisced, “There was Swedish drill, which I enjoyed, and of course there were the joys of holidays—more rock-climbing on the Simonsides and exploration of the Cheviots, and longer and more adventurous cycle rides.”³⁰ Newbigin’s lifelong love for the outdoors interspersed his autobiography, but the early passages also hinted at the significance that his early exposure to geography would play later in life.

Citing “the convention of the time,” age 12 marked a transition for Newbigin to boarding school at Leighton Park in Reading, a long journey south from Northumbria. The Quaker ethos of Leighton Park appealed to his father’s pacifist sensibilities and liberal politics, and Newbigin would remain there until university. Despite initial feelings of desolation and loneliness, Newbigin grew to enjoy the freedom to explore the outdoors, engage in political debate and develop hobbies. In the classroom, only geography held his interest. He reflected:

In that rather low period of the school’s history there was one man who was a genius. S.W. Brown taught geography. But for the generations of boys who went through his classes he taught infinitely more. He created a capacity to think, to break out of stereotypes, to explore new ideas and to question old ones. He taught us to read voraciously and to get to the heart of the argument of a big book so that we could expound and defend it in debate. He made learning a thrilling exercise.³¹

At Leighton Park, Newbigin’s natural curiosity about the created world found intellectual expression through rigorous training in geography.

²⁹ Ibid., 4.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 5.

By the time Newbigin graduated Leighton Park, he had shed “the Christian assumptions of my home and childhood.”³² The quietude of Quaker worship, the materialism of his chemistry teacher and his “reading in historical geography (though not from Bill Brown himself)” led him to “a deterministic view of history” in which God was unnecessary.³³ Nevertheless, some questions of faith remained. Intrigued by the title of William James’ *The Will to Believe*, Newbigin studied the essay. While James did not convert him to Christian faith, James did persuade Newbigin that “Christian faith was not irrational.”³⁴ That small step toward Christianity held significance for the next phase of Newbigin’s journey.

In 1928, Newbigin matriculated at Queen’s College, Cambridge. A seven-month internship in his father’s shipping company filled the gap between public school and university where his interest in economics and accounting grew. In his free time, Newbigin “seized every opportunity for a day of fell-walking or rock-climbing,” including a trip to Hamburg for a week in the Harz Mountains and a weekend in the Lake District with his father’s old rock climbing club.³⁵ The combination of Newbigin’s intellectual interest in geography and recreational pursuit of rugged topography would follow him to Cambridge.

Newbigin’s first impressions of university life disappointed him. The countryside of Cambridge was largely flat without good hills to climb, and the two-year Geography course he undertook was not as rigorous as his former studies at Leighton Park. With

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 6.

³⁵ Ibid., 7.

time, however, he discovered a mountaineering club that led him back to the Lake District and even to Austria one holiday; his studies gradually became more interesting; and debates at the Cambridge Union challenged his politics. “If I was not working seriously at geography I was thinking seriously about other things,” Newbigin reflected. That confession included serious conversations with members of the progressive Student Christian Movement (SCM) at Queen’s that welcomed his questions and doubts.³⁶

Moving slowly toward faith, Newbigin committed his first summer to a Quaker service project among miners in Wales. There, amid the despair of the unemployed working class, Newbigin recognized a need that exceeded employment, which he described as the need for hope. One restless night, Newbigin experienced a vision:

It was a vision of the cross, but it was the cross spanning the space between heaven and earth, between ideals and present realities, and with arms that embraced the whole world. I saw it as something which reached down to the most hopeless and sordid of human misery and yet promised life and victory. I was sure that night, in a way I had never before, that this was the clue that I must follow if I were to make any kind of sense of the world. From that moment I would always know how to take bearings when I was lost.³⁷

When Newbigin returned to Cambridge at summer’s end, he threw himself into SCM and his faith grew on a steady diet of Christian disciplines and encounters with ecumenical leaders that came to speak in Cambridge, including John Mott, John Mackay, William Temple, and Jack Winslow, who first introduced Newbigin to India.³⁸ The following summer at the SCM conference at Swanwick, Newbigin sensed a call to ordained

³⁶ Ibid., 10.

³⁷ Ibid., 11–12.

³⁸ Ibid., 13–14.

ministry. In his final year at Queen's, he shifted his focus to economics and began interviewing for university secretariat positions with the SCM.

After commencement, Newbigin relocated to Glasgow from 1931-1933 for an SCM position. In his interview, he met Helen Henderson whom he would marry six years later. The delay in their courtship involved his return to Cambridge for theological studies at Westminster College under the tutelage of John Oman, a longtime family friend. During his studies, Newbigin continued to seek respite outdoors and developed a significant friendship with Archie Craig, the university chaplain in Glasgow, who provided Newbigin with "a theological training which was, I think, more significant than anything before or after."³⁹ Other influences in this formative period included the moral philosopher A. A. Bowman who wielded significant influence over the Glasgow SCM branch and George MacLeod, then a parish priest in Govan and later founder of the Iona Community. These men made lasting impressions on Newbigin's budding faith. At this time, Newbigin and his fiancée also served together as SCM representatives on the Church of Scotland's (COS) missionary selection committee. Together, they discerned a call to missionary service in India.⁴⁰ In the transition from Glasgow to Cambridge, Newbigin once again found himself rock-climbing the Simonside Crags and the Cheviots.⁴¹ His existential and intellectual interests in place remained strong despite his vocational and academic shifts.

³⁹ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 24.

⁴¹ Ibid., 27.

Returning to Cambridge on scholarship, Newbiggin received an exemption from the standard theological course that allowed him great latitude to direct his own studies. In particular, his study of the book of Romans, especially the commentary of James Denney, transitioned Newbiggin from a self-described “typical liberal” to one convinced of “the centrality and objectivity of the atonement accomplished on Calvary.”⁴² The constant flow of leading ecumenical figures through Cambridge allowed Newbiggin to engage in serious conversations about his newfound convictions.⁴³ In 1936, after three short years, the COS commissioned Newbiggin and Henderson for service in the Madras Mission in May. Newbiggin graduated Cambridge and was licensed to preach in June, was ordained in July, married in August, and the couple set sail from Liverpool for Madras in September.⁴⁴

Four weeks later, when the ‘City of Cairo’ docked in Madras, Newbiggin had completed his first book manuscript, *Christian Freedom in the Modern World*, and the peripatetic couple began the most arduous chapter of their education. As they settled in Chingleput, a small town in the countryside of the Tamilnadu region, Newbiggin recorded his first impression of their new homeland:

That first taste of India was so vivid that it could never be forgotten—the soft, cool evening air, the lines of brightly lit stalls as we slipped out of Madras by the trunk road, the glint of light on polished brass water-pots, the graceful movement of women in their beautiful saris, and then the open country with the paddy fields and the big leafy trees fringing the road. On the way we had to stop because of a puncture and there was a chance to stand still in the darkness, smell the strange and delicious scents, listen to the symphony of the cicadas everywhere and watch the slow

⁴² Ibid., 29.

⁴³ Ibid., 29–31.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 35–36.

rhythm of the bullock-carts going by patiently, endlessly, through the night.... We never expected to find such beauty in the country which was to be our home. In the weeks and years following we were to come to love it more and more, very specially in the magic hours of sunrise and sunset when all the colours were at their most delicate.⁴⁵

The exotic beauty of this new place satisfied Newbigin's appetite for the natural world and filled his diary with detailed portraits of the places that would come to define the life of his family.

For the new missionaries, Chingleput was not only a location but a specific locale for language learning, a crucial feature of their new identity. Newbigin reported:

Our main business in Chingleput was to learn Tamil and we soon got into a steady routine of eight hours of hard study each day. It was a struggle, but we made progress and by early March I was able to risk chairing a meeting and giving a very short address. The shattering problem was the vast gulf between the literary Tamil of our teacher and the ordinary language of the street and shop. One had to learn both, and sometimes they seemed different languages.⁴⁶

By late March they relocated to Kodaikanal for a four-month intensive language course followed by exams. At an altitude of 7000 feet above sea level, the Kodai hills were an "enchanted world" that "were to become for us the best-loved part of the earth, next only to Rothbury and the Cheviots," according to Newbigin.⁴⁷ The site of annual respite from the heat for Western missionaries, the Newbigins applied themselves to Tamil studies in anticipation of their first true missionary appointment in Kanchipuram (Kanchi).

A serious bus accident, however, interrupted their move. Newbigin endured a series of nine unsuccessful operations in India to save a crushed leg before the Church of

⁴⁵ Ibid., 38.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 40.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 41.

Scotland mission finally sent his family back to Edinburgh for a bone-graft and convalescence.⁴⁸ Displaced from India for nearly two years, Newbigin continued language study at a distance and served as the Candidates Secretary for the Foreign Mission Committee of the COS. As the prospect of war in Europe approached, the Newbigins welcomed the birth of Margaret in June, and, fully recovered, the family departed for Kanchi on September 15, 1939.⁴⁹

The next seven years marked the family's immersion into ministry and, more significantly, into the Hindu culture of India. While language study continued, Newbigin also absorbed lessons from the structures of Indian society, including the significance of caste, the relationship between the city and outcast villages on its perimeter, the legacy of colonialism, economic privation, and government bureaucracy. Kanchi was, as Newbigin understood, much more than a location or even a locale. The city possessed a powerful sense of place. Its long history of religious practice and scholarship made Kanchi a prominent pilgrimage site. Hundreds of Hindu temples dominated the city's landscape and attracted thousands of pilgrims annually, including even Buddhists whose tradition reported that the Buddha personally won converts there.⁵⁰ Diana Eck, a historian of South Asian religion, listed Kanchi among "seven cities that bestow *moksha*, including Ayodhya, Marthura, Hardvar, Kanchi, Ujjain, and Dvaraka [and Kashi]. These seven are all called *mokshadayaka*, the givers of spiritual freedom."⁵¹ In addition to language

⁴⁸ Ibid., 43.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 42–47.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 48; see also Diana Eck's reflections on Kanchi and Indian culture in Diana L. Eck, *India: A Sacred Geography* (New York: Harmony, 2012).

⁵¹ Eck, *India*, 2; *moksha* is sometimes defined as liberation.

study, Newbigin also undertook the comparative study of Hindu religious texts at the Ramakrishna mission where they read John's Gospel alongside the Svetasvara Upanishad.⁵²

Newbigin approached Hindu culture and the work of Christian witness in Kanchi with the posture of a guest. He observed, "A new missionary has to accept a kind of drastic diminishment. To learn the language and the culture of another people he must again become a child."⁵³ Indeed, Ragavachariar, the Newbigins' Brahmin language tutor, taught them "not only to read and speak Tamil but to see things through the eyes of a Hindu."⁵⁴ On this point, Wainwright commented, "That simple report already makes two vital points in connection with the communication of the Gospel: the sensitivity to the existing language of the hearers and of an empathetic understanding of their worldview."⁵⁵ Newbigin's approach to the Tamil language epitomized his approach to mission. Kanchi and its surrounding villages offered Newbigin fertile ground to experiment with contextualizing the gospel in a manner sensitive to the diversity and history of that place.

Newbigin wrote sparingly during this initial period of culture and language acquisition, but *Unfinished Agenda* recorded several important developments in Kanchi that later shaped Newbigin's commitment to place. First, Newbigin's exposure to the extreme poverty of outlying villages troubled his conscience. While Newbigin witnessed encouraging signs of response to Christ, the conditions and caste-based persecution

⁵² Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda*, 54.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁵⁵ Wainwright, *Lesslie Newbigin*, 78.

tempered his enthusiasm. In a letter to his family in England in late 1939, he illustrated the challenges outcasts faced:

I was told that recently a caste boy fell into the well and was drowning, when one of these outcast Christian boys dived in and rescued him—which was a very plucky thing to do. Thereafter the caste Hindus came down in force and conducted an elaborate series of ceremonies to purify the well from its defilement. I suppose from their own point of view it was the natural thing to do, but it is pretty terrible to be up against that.⁵⁶

Newbigin concluded that “in spite of Gandhi and everything else, the caste spirit is still everywhere dominant in these parts.”⁵⁷ These early experiences underwrote Newbigin’s lasting ministry focus on the villages.

Tensions over caste and rising Indian nationalism within the villages also divided the missionary community. When a majority of Western missionaries ceased village ministry, Newbigin determined to deepen his commitment.⁵⁸ At this time, Newbigin also developed Bible study materials for village Christian leaders who lacked formal education but requested spiritual resources when they were conscripted for military service as the Second World War approached. What Newbigin initially viewed as a problem, he later recognized as an opportunity to disciple new church leaders who then would evangelize their countrymen independent of the mission. Moreover, the publication of *Madurai Moonlight Kummys*, his American colleague Raymond Dudley’s pamphlet of Gospel stories “in a form which could be sung to the dancing of traditional village folk-dances—Kummi and Kolattam,” was one of Newbigin’s first exposures to

⁵⁶ Lesslie Newbigin to Edward Newbigin et al., December 4, 1939, DA 29/1/2/26, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda*, 56–57.

contextualization.⁵⁹ A close identification with Tamil culture and a gradual postcolonial conversion marked this early phase of Newbigin's career.

Newbigin's cultural education at Chingleput and Kanchi prepared Newbigin for the next chapter of service, but it also transformed his family. In addition to their eldest daughter Margaret, this period witnessed the births of Alison (b.1941) and Janet (b.1944) and Helen's pregnancy with John (b.1948). The young couple's decision to pursue missionary service in South India displaced not only them but also their children from their native culture in England. In contrast to Catholic orders, the presence of families on the mission field added a critical element in the interpretation of Protestant missionary lives as well as a new model of Christian mission. On the latter point, Dana L. Robert has documented how "the Christian home" became a central feature of Anglo-American mission efforts in the era immediately prior to the Newbigins' service.⁶⁰ Moreover, a review of Newbigin's correspondence to England during this period corroborates the significance of his family life and its complex interactions with place on a daily basis.

As the peripatetic period of Newbigin's life drew to a close, a new door opened with the 1947 establishment of the Church of South India (CSI), an organic ecumenical union composed of Congregationalists, Methodists, Presbyterians and, sometimes, Anglicans.⁶¹ Newbigin, an English Presbyterian missionary, received an invitation to serve as a bishop in the new Indian ecumenical church. Leaving his family behind on

⁵⁹ Ibid., 64.

⁶⁰ Dana L. Robert, "The 'Christian Home' as a Cornerstone of Anglo-American Missionary Thought and Practice," in *Converting Colonialism: Visions and Realities in Mission History, 1706-1914*, ed. Dana L. Robert (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 134–65.

⁶¹ Over the balance of the 20th century, the participation of Anglicans in the CSI fluctuated due to concerns over apostolic succession and, therefore, the validity of the CSI's eucharistic celebrations.

furlough in Scotland, including an expectant wife and a job offer to serve as secretary of the British Council of Churches, Newbigin returned alone to India for the celebration of the CSI's establishment.

The Ecumenical Missionary (1947-1974)

Following Newbigin's installation as a bishop in the Church of South India, the family relocated from the plains to the large twin cities of Madurai and Ramnad where "a much bigger and even more varied world of natural beauty" awaited them.⁶² Newbigin's initial appraisal of his new assignment once again displayed a keen sensitivity to place:

In the years at Kanchipuram I had learned to love the richly varied beauties of a small patch of the South Indian plain. Now I had the freedom of a much bigger and even more varied world of natural beauty. Some of our congregations were among the toddy-tappers of the coast and after a strenuous day among them I would take my bedding roll down to the shore and go to sleep on the beach with the sound of the surf in my ears and jagged outline of the palm trees etched against the spangled beauty of the night sky. A day or two later I would be in the Palni Hills 7000 feet above sea-level, with the air full of the scent of the eucalyptus trees and the quiet of the forests broken only by the sound of jackals hunting. Between the mountains and the sea were 5000 square miles of country, broken by hills and dotted everywhere by villages each as distinct from the others as the islands of an archipelago, each having its own character, its own tragedies, its own triumphs. And in 700 of them were Christian communities deeply rooted in the life of that rural world. The challenge was to help each one of them to be a living sign and foretaste of the Kingdom. That is how I understood the job of bishop.⁶³

The statement not only expressed Newbigin's well-established love for nature but also employed elements of a missionary description of place. First, he recognized the cultural distinctiveness of the villages from one another and, next, the cultural embeddedness of

⁶² Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda*, 99, 104; Madurai and Ramnad are located in close proximity to the Kodai Hills where foreign missionaries often sought shelter from the intense heat of South India in summer.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 99.

the Christian communities within those places. Third, Newbigin articulated a missionary purpose for those communities to bear witness to the gospel as “a living sign and foretaste of the Kingdom”—language that became a fixture of his later writings. Similar commentary on creation became a consistent feature in Newbigin’s correspondence with individuals and his annual circular letters to supporters.⁶⁴

For the next twelve years, Newbigin pursued this vision of ministry and endured a heavy administrative load, which the structural development of the CSI exacerbated. His prominent position and former SCM connections to ecumenical leaders continued to open doors of opportunity, such as participation in the inaugural assembly of the World Council of Churches where he chaired the resolution drafting committee.⁶⁵ Madurai’s proximity to the Kodai hills made his travel and workload more bearable for him and his family. Newbigin now exercised episcopal jurisdiction over the area, which made for frequent family outings to a place where “even a few days of its beauty were enough to make the world seem bright.”⁶⁶ Madurai was, for Newbigin, a productive place where his family thrived, his leadership grew, and his theological position solidified. According to Wainwright:

These engagements with new challenges were what lent punch and shifting nuances to Newbigin’s thought and writing. The lineaments of this thinking, however, remained constant for sixty years, and as his ideas developed and expanded, the fundamental pattern continued to be readily recognizable.... Christ’s atoning work constituted the center, set within an

⁶⁴ Two possible explanations for the frequency of such comments are, first, the daily negotiation of difference that the voluntary displacement of cross-cultural missionary service demands of Newbigin, such that it is constantly on his mind, and, second, the exotic interest such differences pique in his readers.

⁶⁵ Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda*, 113.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 105.

increasingly explicit trinitarian frame and persistently directed toward the goal of God's reign.⁶⁷

Works from this period such as *A South India Diary* (1951) and *The Household of God* (1953) developed closer connections between matters of mission, ecumenism and trinitarian faith.⁶⁸ They also extended Newbigin's influence far beyond his local diocese and even his ecumenical engagements.

As another furlough approached in 1958, ecumenical leaders pressured Newbigin to serve as the General Secretary of the International Missionary Council (IMC) and oversee its integration into the World Council of Churches (WCC). While a natural extension of his convictions and work to this point, Newbigin struggled with his devotion to his diocese. He confessed, "I did not want to go. I loved the Tamil people and country and had learned *to be at home* in their language and ways of life."⁶⁹ Beyond the missiological significance of his close identification with Tamil culture—what he later described as indwelling a place—the pressing need to create a home in England for their

⁶⁷ Wainwright, *Lesslie Newbigin*, 26.

⁶⁸ Lesslie Newbigin, *That All May Be One: A South India Diary* (New York: Association Press, 1952); Lesslie Newbigin, *Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (London: SCM Press, 1953); Michael Goheen identifies two decisive conceptual shifts in Newbigin's ecclesiology. He locates the first shift between 1939 and 1959 in which Newbigin transitions from a Christendom model to a missionary one. The latter shift moves from a christocentric to a more fully trinitarian ecclesiology from 1959 to 1998. Since ecclesiology emerges as a central element in Newbigin's approach to place, it is important to affirm the shifts Goheen detects but challenge his periodization. Since the publication of Newbigin's sole monograph dedicated to ecclesiology, *The Household of God*, originated as his Kerr Lectures at Trinity College, Glasgow, in November 1952; appeared in print in 1953; and adopted an explicitly trinitarian structure as well as substance, Goheen dates the trinitarian shift nearly a decade late. See Michael W. Goheen, "As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You": J.E. Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology" (Universiteit Utrecht, 2001), <http://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/597>.

⁶⁹ Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda*, 149, emphasis mine; Newbigin here makes a subtle but important claim about the nature of language and the way it creates the worlds we inhabit. As such, language becomes inextricable from culture and the worldview a culture conveys. Along similar lines, George Lindbeck describes a cultural-linguistic approach to Christian doctrine for which Newbigin later expresses sympathy. See George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984); Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 24.

teenage children who were preparing for university meant that Helen would remain in England after the furlough. That prospect made the IMC decision somewhat easier, although Newbigin only accepted the position on the condition that the CSI would grant him a secondment of five years with promise of a diocesan appointment upon his return.

With those arrangements in place, Newbigin assumed leadership of the IMC from its offices in London from 1959-1961, and following integration he relocated to the WCC offices in Geneva from 1962-1965. The work proved as much theological as logistical, since Newbigin found himself constantly making the theological case for integration and unity. But the personal demands of travel and bureaucracy were taxing. For example, from September 14th until November 14th in 1960, Newbigin detailed his travels across Sub-Saharan Africa in eight installments of a confidential diary for his IMC/WCC staff.⁷⁰ The next year, a month-long visit to churches in South America between July and August 1961 produced similar reports.⁷¹ The secretariat of the IMC was a cosmopolitan

⁷⁰ Lesslie Newbigin, "Africa Travel Diary - Sections I and II" (Diary, Accra, Ghana, September 22, 1960), DA 29/1/8/78, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham; Lesslie Newbigin, "Africa Travel Diary - Section III" (Diary, Douala, Cameroon, September 30, 1960), DA 29/1/8/79, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham; Lesslie Newbigin, "Africa Travel Diary - Section IV" (Diary, Douala, Cameroon, October 11, 1960), DA 29/1/8/80, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham; Lesslie Newbigin, "Africa Travel Diary - Section V" (Diary, Johannesburg, South Africa, October 15, 1960), DA 29/1/8/81, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham; Lesslie Newbigin, "Africa Travel Diary - Section VI" (Diary, Johannesburg, South Africa, October 22, 1960), DA 29/1/8/82, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham; Lesslie Newbigin, "Africa Travel Diary - Section VII" (Diary, November 2, 1960), DA 29/1/8/83, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham; See Lesslie Newbigin, "Africa Travel Diary - Section VIII" (Diary, Merangu, Tanzania, November 14, 1960), DA 29/1/8/83, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham.

⁷¹ Lesslie Newbigin, "Travel Diary - Newsletter No. 1" (Diary, Sao Paulo, Brazil, July 28, 1961), DA 29/1/8/122, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham; Lesslie Newbigin, "Travel Diary - Newsletter No. 2" (Diary, Santiago, Chile, July 26, 1961), DA 29/1/8/126, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham; Lesslie Newbigin, "Travel Diary - Newsletter No. 3" (Diary, Lima, Peru, 1961), DA 29/1/8/129, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham; Lesslie Newbigin, "Travel Diary - Newsletter No. 4" (Diary, Mexico City, Mexico, August 14, 1961), DA 29/1/8/130, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library,

existence quite different from the pastoral ministry that grounded Newbigin's life in the villages of his former diocese and marked an acute period of displacement for Newbigin.

Compounding those challenges were the voices of radical theology gaining ground within the WCC. Figures such as J.C. "Hans" Hoekendijk called for a desacralization of the Church as the only hope for renewal.⁷² God no longer was to be found in movements for unity and mission but in the domain of the secular.⁷³ Newbigin, of course, had opposed Hoekendijk and others peddling a desacralized version of the *missio Dei* a decade earlier at the 1952 meeting of the IMC in Willingen, Germany, but a theological tide was turning in the WCC. Even the SCM embraced the dominant secularism of the day, and, in Newbigin's judgment, ceded its influence as a source of ecumenical renewal for the remainder of his life.⁷⁴ In response, Newbigin grew convinced of the need to develop a more adequately grounded missiology. He concluded:

Only a fully Trinitarian doctrine would be adequate, setting the work of Christ in the Church in the context of the over-ruling providence of the Father in all the life of the world and the sovereign freedom of the Spirit who is the Lord and not the auxiliary of the Church.⁷⁵

In 1963, this conviction drove Newbigin to author a paper later published as *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission*, but at the time even the WCC's Division of World Mission and Evangelism, which he led, would not endorse it. The popular reception of

University of Birmingham; Lesslie Newbigin, "Travel Diary - Newsletter No. 5" (Diary, August 1961), DA 29/1/8/131, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham.

⁷² Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda*, 165; see also Johannes C. Hoekendijk, *The Church Inside Out* (Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 1966).

⁷³ Wainwright noted that, for a brief period, even Newbigin "flirted" with the secular zeitgeist [Wainwright, *Lesslie Newbigin*, 341–53].

⁷⁴ Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda*, 165.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 187.

Newbigin's missiology would wait nearly two decades until he developed his trinitarian arguments more fully in *The Open Secret* (1978).⁷⁶

Despite these struggles, Newbigin accepted a two-year extension on his WCC contract to advance the IMC's integration into the WCC. The untimely death of Bishop David Chellappa, however, created a vacancy over the see of Madras.⁷⁷ The CSI recalled Newbigin to India for one of its most important leadership roles. While the public circular announcing his departure extolled the WCC in Geneva as a "wonderful place to live and work"⁷⁸, Newbigin's private correspondence to his daughter Margaret and her husband David Beetham acknowledged his and Helen's dissatisfaction with his post:

We have given a good deal more thought during the past week to the call from Madras, and last night we had a long talk with D.T. Niles, who I am trying to persuade to come and take my place here if I go. The result of all this is that we are feeling led to the conviction that this is a call from the Church which we ought not refuse. To refuse it would clearly mean severing connection with CSI. I accepted the WCC post on secondment of CSI, and it would be inconsistent, to put it no more strongly, to refuse a call to come back. The call from Madras seems to be strong and insistent. All the Indians whom I have consulted urge that we should go. Many people whose judgment I trust have said the same. And Mummie and I agree that it would not be good to spend the last 10 years of my full-time working life in this Geneva work.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission*; Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, Revised (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995).

⁷⁷ Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda*, 202.

⁷⁸ Lesslie Newbigin, Letter, (September 1965), DA 29/1/9/2, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham.

⁷⁹ Lesslie Newbigin to Margaret Beetham and David Beetham, January 31, 1965, DA 29/1/9/79, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham.

Although his WCC experience would redefine his episcopal ministry,⁸⁰ the Newbigins missed their close connection to Tamil culture and the stable pattern of a local diocesan ministry.

From 1965-1974, Newbiggin served as the Bishop of Madras, a metropolis of nearly 3,000,000 persons with a thousand churches and more than 100 presbyters.⁸¹ The prominence of the city in national life and the public nature of its bishopric accorded well with the evolution in Newbiggin's perspective after several years immersed in the social concerns of the WCC.

Newbiggin's installation sermon expressed a strong conviction for Christ's lordship over all things and its implications for the church in society. Preaching from Ephesians 4:11-12, Newbiggin proclaimed:

The Church is the Church *for* the nation—not withdrawing into the sheltered existence of a minority community, but playing its full part in every aspect of national life, in its mental and spiritual wrestlings as well as its labours of social and economic developments, its politics, its art and music and drama—because all these things belong to Christ and because the Church has been set in the nation as the sign and instrument of Christ's plan for its perfecting.⁸²

While the eschatological imagery of “sign and instrument” was already a part of Newbiggin's vernacular, the emphasis on the Church's missionary orientation *for* this place broke new ground: the church was God's instrument for the transformation of particular places. Perhaps even more important than the substance of his sermon was the form it took. Newbiggin bucked the venerable English-language tradition of worship at St.

⁸⁰ Newbiggin, September 1965.

⁸¹ Newbiggin, *Unfinished Agenda*, 202.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 203.

George's Cathedral and preached in Tamil.⁸³ Postcolonial in form, the substance of his sermon indicated the focus of Newbigin's public ministry—one that demanded proclamation of the gospel alongside its demonstration in society.

Over the next decade, Newbigin plunged the diocese into work that conjoined evangelism and social concern in the slums of the city and severely deprived villages. Community service centers, education, medical care, ecumenical land trusts, industrial mission, tenement residents associations, and cyclone relief became tangible expressions of the churches' love of neighbor.⁸⁴ Newbigin also invested significant energy into the spiritual formation of presbyters, as evidenced in the collection of monthly addresses later published as *The Good Shepherd* (1977).⁸⁵ The second phase of Newbigin's career expressed a missionary commitment to place through the development of more robust trinitarian understanding of ecclesiology and mission, which translated into a deeper integration of evangelism and social action on the local level.

⁸³ Ibid., 203; Newbigin will develop this language of the "Church for this place" with different nuances in different contexts. For local ecumenical union, see Newbigin, "What Is a Local Church Truly United"; and for the missionary orientation of a local parish, see Newbigin, *A Word in Season*, 48–65.

⁸⁴ For documentation of these varied ministries, see Lesslie Newbigin, Pastoral Letter, (December 1, 1967), DA 29/1/10/126, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham; Staff Reporter, "Modern, Healthy Abode for Slum Dwellers," *The Mail*, February 17, 1972, DA 29/1/10/49, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham; Staff Reporter, "New Tenements for Slum Dwellers," *The Mail*, February 18, 1972, DA 29/1/10/48, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham; Rama Arangannal, "Inauguration of New Tenements at Nochi Nagar on 17.2.72 - Some Facts and Figures" n.d., DA 29/1/10/50, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham; "Works in Progress in Slum Clearance Board," n.d., DA 29/1/10/51, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham; Lesslie Newbigin, "Cyclone Relief & Reconstruction - An Interim Report" (Madras, India, December 31, 1966), DA 29/1/10/142, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham; Lesslie Newbigin, "Report on Cyclone Relief: 1955-1956" (Church of South India, Diocese of Madura and Ramnad, 1956), Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham.

⁸⁵ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Good Shepherd: Meditations on Christian Ministry in Today's World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977).

During this intense period public ministry, the Newbigins expressed their continuing appreciation for the natural world through consistent family retreats to Chingleput every 3-4 months and longer vacations every few years, including three trips to the Swiss Alps and one to Darjeeling for “some of the greatest mountain scenery in the world.”⁸⁶ As Newbigin approached the stipulated retirement age of 65 years for CSI bishops, they prepared to relocate to England permanently. In March 1974, they set off from Madras for England with “two suitcases and a rucksack.”⁸⁷ Consistent with their ecumenical and international career, the Newbigins traveled overland by local transit and relied on the hospitality of local Christians for accommodations, fellowship, and worship.

The Reluctant Retiree (1974-1998)

While Newbigin stepped down as bishop, his agenda for the next 24 years ensured a very active form of retirement. Shortly after their arrival in England, the couple relocated to Birmingham where Newbigin assumed a lectureship in theology at the Selly Oak Colleges, a federated theological school affiliated with the University of Birmingham. For the next five years, Newbigin developed his trinitarian theology of mission, which he had introduced unsuccessfully at the WCC, into a larger constructive account of Christian mission followed by a few chapters of polemics. Published as *The Open Secret* (1978; 1995), the book became a staple in courses on Christian mission. While Newbigin had pursued writing projects from the start of his missionary service, Selly Oak marked a turning point.

⁸⁶ Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda*, 224.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 226.

Freed from administrative burdens, Newbiggin devoted himself to a fresh exploration of the relationship between the gospel and Western culture.⁸⁸ Recalling Beeby's eulogy, Newbiggin described his reentry into British society as jarring. An empirical and ideological pluralism had replaced the prominent Christian influences of his childhood in England. Newbiggin recognized the philosophical assumptions of this new British culture from four decades of immersion in Hindu culture. Unfortunately, Newbiggin also recognized that Western churches lacked the conceptual, cultural, and theological resources necessary to respond to this challenge. *The Other Side of 1984* and later writings attempted to sound an alarm and to equip the church with the missiological resources it needed to respond.

In Birmingham, Newbiggin identified a new ecclesial home in the United Reformed Church (URC) and within three years was elected Moderator of their General Assembly, 1977-1978. When Newbiggin retired again—this time from teaching at Selly Oak and his leadership role in the URC—he accepted appointment as a mission pastor of a struggling congregation in the urban core of Birmingham, which was populated by immigrants and anchored by a sprawling prison complex.⁸⁹ The Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas targeted communities like Winson

⁸⁸ Major publications followed, see Lesslie Newbiggin, *The Light Has Come: An Exposition of the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987); Newbiggin, *The Other Side of 1984*; Newbiggin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*; Newbiggin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*; Lesslie Newbiggin, *Truth to Tell: The Gospel and Public Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991); Newbiggin, *A Word in Season*; Newbiggin, *Proper Confidence*; Lesslie Newbiggin, *Truth and Authority in Modernity*, Christian Mission and Modern Culture (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996); Lesslie Newbiggin, Lamin Sanneh, and Jenny Taylor, *Faith and Power: Christianity and Islam in "Secular" Britain* (London: SPCK, 1998); Lesslie Newbiggin, *A Walk through the Bible* (London: SPCK, 1999); Lesslie Newbiggin, *Faith in a Changing World*, ed. Paul Weston (London: St. Paul's Theological Centre, 2012). Although not all of these publications address place directly, all do contribute to Newbiggin's research agenda on the gospel and Western culture, which constitutes Newbiggin's overarching response in part to the loss of place in modernity.

⁸⁹ Newbiggin, *A Word in Season*, 49.

Green in their landmark study *Faith in the City* (1985).⁹⁰ Newbigin's disappointment with the theological framework of that report motivated his involvement in associated efforts in Birmingham.⁹¹

In this period, Newbigin's language about congregations takes what Casey would call "a spatial turn."⁹² In an ecumenical gathering in London, cited at the outset of this chapter, Newbigin led a seminar on the recovery of the parish principle, which he first learned at the Glasgow SCM from George MacLeod.⁹³ Newbigin observed:

The relation between the Church in a "place" and the secular reality of that "place" is intrinsic, not extrinsic. It's not just that it happens to be located in that spot on the map. It is the Church of God for that place, and that is because the Church does not exist for itself but for God and for the world that Jesus came to save.⁹⁴

For Newbigin, the church's location offered a clue to understanding her missionary vocation in the world—literally, the place the triune God has sent her (John 20:19-23). In that lecture and elsewhere, Newbigin began to draw together the threads of a missiological account of place.

From 1980-1988, the culturally-diverse, post-industrial urban community of Winson Green supplied Newbigin's missionary context and shaped his theological imagination. He drew daily on his pastoral roots in Kanchi, Madurai, and Madras to

⁹⁰ Commission for Urban Priority Areas, *Faith in the City* (London: Hymns Ancient & Modern Ltd, 1985).

⁹¹ Participants in Birmingham published a volume applying the results of the Archbishop's Report to their local context. Newbigin served as the principal author of the commission tasked with developing the document's theological framework. See Richard O'Brien, ed., *Faith in the City of Birmingham* (Birmingham: Send The Light, 1988), 111–29.

⁹² Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 2nd ed. (Indiana University Press, 2009), xxi.

⁹³ Newbigin, *A Word in Season*, 49.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

minister among the Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh populations of Winson Green.⁹⁵ Instead of lush villages, a Victorian-era prison and rows of tract homes furnished by the industrial revolution dominated the landscape. Behind the cultural diversity in the neighborhood, however, Newbigin discerned parallels between the working class context of Winson Green and the Welsh miners he encountered during his university days.

The church in Winson Green had not had a full-time minister for 40 years. The URC recommended its closure, but the challenge attracted Newbigin.⁹⁶ The community included a large South Asian population (though predominantly North Indian Punjabis rather than South Indian Tamils), which was familiar to him. Through ties in India, he recruited the Rev. Hakim Singh Rahi and his family to join him from India. With Rahi's facility with the Punjabi language and Sikh literature, they gained greater access to the community and credibility.⁹⁷

Together, Newbigin and Rahi pursued an ecumenical, evangelical and social ministry amid the religious pluralism of Winson Green. They labored to unite a group of struggling churches in the community through a Local Ecumenical Partnership, which led to the eventual union of Winson Green URC and Bishop Latimer Church of England, but the effort fell short of their aspirations to unite all of the struggling neighborhood

⁹⁵ Ibid., 49; shortly after his arrival at Winson Green URC, a police officer commented to him that the neighborhood was "all OHMS." Confused, Newbigin asked what the phrase meant, and the officer replied, "Only Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs" (49).

⁹⁶ Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda*, 235.

⁹⁷ The Rev. Rahi frequented Sikh poetry circles and also authored an English-language guide to the Granth, the primary sacred text for the Sikh community. See Hakim Singh Rahi, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Discovered* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1999).

congregations.⁹⁸ They engaged the Sikh community through poetry readings and discussion groups. The resurrection of a Boy's Brigade troupe attracted some young families, as did the spectacle of public baptisms in the Edgbaston Reservoir. On Saturdays, they ministered to the queue of visitors waiting to see loved ones in the prison. Most effective, however, was the resumption of a regular schedule of pastoral visitation in the neighborhood, which closely resembled the village ministry Newbigin practiced for three decades in South India.

By 1988, Newbigin retired for the third time and relocated to a flat in London. Theological students from King's College, London, would read daily to him, as his eyesight began to fail. Nevertheless, Newbigin continued to encourage the Gospel in Our Culture movement through writings and occasional lectures from memory. During this season, Newbigin forged a relationship with Holy Trinity Brompton, the flagship parish of charismatic renewal in the Anglican Communion. Nearly 50 years earlier, Newbigin had included Pentecostals in his ecclesiology, *The Household of God* (1953), long before they participated in ecumenical events or Newbigin himself had had much exposure to them.⁹⁹ Toward the end of his life, Newbigin discovered friendships in unlikely places as churches recognized his prescient analysis of their missionary situation. On January 30th, 1998, Newbigin died in London.

In sum, the places Newbigin served as a missionary shaped his life and thought indelibly. Every day involved negotiations with cultural and linguistic differences most

⁹⁸ For a study of the formation of this Local Ecumenical Partnership, see Whittle, Paul R., "Migration and Partnership: Towards an Anglican-United Reformed Church Local Ecumenical Partnership for Winson Green" (Master of Ministry and Theology, University of Sheffield, 2000).

⁹⁹ Newbigin, *Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church*, 87–110.

Christians never experience. Likewise, his diocesan ministry in the CSI required regular travel to remote villages inaccessible by modern forms of transit. By necessity, Newbigin and his family lived life much closer to nature and Tamil culture than ministerial colleagues in his native England could understand. Language translation, contextualization, evangelism, and interfaith engagement were daily realities rather than theories in the theological textbooks, which in turn informed his reading of Christian Scripture. The voluntary displacement of missionary service afforded Newbigin the opportunity to indwell another place fully and thereby gain critical perspective on his own culture, which laid the foundation for his research agenda in retirement. That said, the continuation of missiological debates in India over vernacular proclamation, English-language education, civilization as mission, and postcolonial governance from the 19th century into the early 20th century attested that not every missionary adopted Newbigin's approach to cultural immersion patterned on the Incarnation.¹⁰⁰ But Newbigin did. Thus, his life presented an exemplary lived theology of Christian witness and a missionary performance of place. With a better understanding of the impact of those places upon him, let us now turn more directly to Newbigin's thought.

Constructive Compilation

Lesslie Newbigin never wrote a systematic theology. Even though, Wainwright observed, he consistently offered fresh insights into themes he developed for more than

¹⁰⁰ For various treatments of this theme, see Dana L. Robert, ed., *Converting Colonialism: Visions and Realities in Mission History, 1706-1914*, Studies in the History of Christian Missions (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

fifty years.¹⁰¹ He drew multiple languages, religious traditions, and academic disciplines into conversation with Scripture to promote the renewal of Christian mission in diverse contexts. But he never offered a systematic exposition of his beliefs. Newbigin's vocation as an ecumenical mission leader lent itself instead to a more occasional style of writing. On a short stack of papers in his archives in Birmingham, Newbigin scrawled, "My nearest approach to a 'Dogmatics?'" The 800-word essays appeared as a series of eleven monthly articles in the URC's journal *Reform* in 1990. While Wainwright examined the "comprehensive structure, the topical sequence, and the internal cohesion that characterize this miniature summa,"¹⁰² our present concern is to acknowledge only that Newbigin neither constructed a systematic theology nor, as noted earlier, developed a full soteriological account of place. Thus, any examination of Newbigin's theology of place requires a constructive effort. The compilation that follows is an attempt to organize Newbigin's thought into the categories developed in the previous chapter—sacred creation, sacred journey, and sacred construction. The aim is to present a faithful account of Newbigin's missionary approach to place.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Wainwright, *Lesslie Newbigin*, 326.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*; in a chapter assessing Newbigin as "The Scriptural Teacher", Wainwright summarizes the articles, which address the following doctrines in sequence: Scripture; the Trinity; Providence; Atonement, including Incarnation and Redemption; Pneumatology; Ecclesiology; Sacraments; Worship and Prayer; Eschatology; Salvation and the Religions; and Mission (326-329). The themes of the essays are consistent with Newbigin's larger body of writings; however, the language assumes a playful tone and popular audience. For instance, the original title of the May 1990 installment on the manuscript in the archives was "Holy Spirit: Pledge of Glory", while the print version, which admittedly may have reflected the editor's preference but drew nonetheless on one of Newbigin's illustrations, became "Holy Spirit: The Believers Strike Oil."

¹⁰³ The compilation offers a representative sample of Newbigin's comments related to place with special reference to points of intersection between them. Rather than an exhaustive catalogue of his thoughts, the goal of the compilation is to present an accurate summary of Newbigin's account of place consistent with the constructive purpose of the larger study.

Sacred Creation

Consistent with the account of sacred creation in chapter 5, let us explore Newbigin's missionary commitment to place through the categories of divine love, Christian doctrine, belonging, awe, and story. Beginning with divine love, Newbigin perceived a "wise and loving purpose" in creation. In a sermon on at the Glasgow University Chapel in the fall of 1988, Newbigin restated the lectionary text from Colossians 1:15-18 in condensed form:

In Christ all things were created in heaven and on earth...
All things were created in him and for him...
He is before all things and in him all things cohere...
He is the head of the body, the church...
He is the first-born from the dead, that in everything He might be pre-eminent.¹⁰⁴

On the basis of those Pauline affirmations that likened creation to Christology, Newbigin then expounded on the love implicit in the first article of the Apostles' Creed:

I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth. This vast universe, in which our planet is but a speck, exists because the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ willed that it should exist.... It exists and continues to exist because a wise and loving will so determined and so determines; yet it is also corrupted by that which is the enemy of love and wisdom, full of darkness and decay and death; no peace; and yet again the same wise and loving will has acted and is acting to redeem it from corruption and to restore its perfection; and the author both of creation and of new creation has made himself known to us in the person of the man Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁵

Creation found its origin, sustenance, and end in divine love made visible in Jesus Christ.

But that divine love also made a demand. In his most sustained reflection on the doctrine of creation in *Faith in a Changing World* (2012), Newbigin argued not only that

¹⁰⁴ Lesslie Newbigin, "Ninth Sunder Before Christmas" (Sermon, Glasgow University Chapel, October 23, 1988), 1, DA 29/4/2/29, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

a loving Creator gifted humanity the earth as a home, but in return the Creator also charged human beings with a “responsibility... to cherish the creation.”¹⁰⁶ This responsibility envisioned a circle of love that bound creation, humanity, and God together. An example of such a beloved community was Newbigin’s deep concern for village ministry in South India that he often expressed in letters to his family. After detailing the extreme deprivation in the hills surrounding Nagari in a letter to his family dated December 4, 1939, Newbigin wrote, “These villages where the Church has been established for some time are showing a different kind of life, and beginning to be able to improve the material level of life in little ways. I was tremendously encouraged by it all.”¹⁰⁷ As the letter continued, Newbigin credited the gospel as the source of the transformation.

Unfortunately, Newbigin also acknowledged the human failure to uphold the responsibility to cherish creation. In his sermon in Glasgow, he admonished:

We live in a society which has, for many centuries, treated the world of nature as if it was, exactly, a piece of unclaimed property which we were free to use as we wished; a society which thought that the natural world was imbued with no purpose apart from any purposes that we might care to put it to. Scripture tells us that we have been called to a wise husbandry of nature, but we have been rapists. We have turned fertile valleys into dust-bowls, devastated the forests which keep the atmosphere life-giving, poured our toxic wastes into the oceans, and so filled the upper atmosphere with poison that the whole balance of the world’s climate is threatened. We have called this enterprise development, and some of us have been eager to extend its operations to the whole world.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Newbigin, *Faith in a Changing World*, 104–5.

¹⁰⁷ Newbigin to Newbigin et al., December 4, 1939.

¹⁰⁸ Newbigin, “Ninth Sunder Before Christmas,” 2.

Such practices, Newbigin concluded, would leave the world uninhabitable. Nevertheless, he reminded the congregation that this need not be the case. “We know,” he assured listeners, “that in many cultures a man will not cut down a tree before asking its pardon. Maybe it was not one wise and loving God who was worshipped as creator, but there was an awareness that nature is not simply at our disposal.”¹⁰⁹

The second approach to sacred creation was the formal development of Christian doctrine. Such work, however, seldom occupied Newbigin’s writings. Goheen stated:

Nowhere in Newbigin’s writings do we find a sustained discussion of God’s creational and providential work and its importance for mission. Newbigin’s Christocentric orientation does not allow a full doctrine of creation to emerge and play an important role in providing the setting for the mission of Jesus and the church.¹¹⁰

When Goheen rendered that judgment in 2001, it was accurate in two ways. First, Newbigin had not published an extended account of creation at that time.¹¹¹ He did not even devote one of his short essays in *Reform* exclusively to creation, even though the doctrine emerged in his respective discussions of providence and mission.¹¹² Next, Goheen criticized Newbigin’s christocentrism as an impediment to the development of a robust doctrine of creation. Insofar as Goheen was making an empirical judgment—namely, that Newbigin devoted so much attention to Christology that he neglected creation in his writings—then again his judgment holds.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Goheen, “‘As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You’: J.E. Lesslie Newbigin’s Missionary Ecclesiology,” 421.

¹¹¹ For a posthumous publication where Newbigin did address the doctrine of creation, see Newbigin, *Faith in a Changing World*.

¹¹² Wainwright, *Lesslie Newbigin*, 327, 329.

But Goheen's criticism failed on other counts. In the same discussion, Goheen cited scholars who criticized Newbigin from what Goheen deemed "an inadequate doctrine of the Trinity that is not Christocentric."¹¹³ Still, Goheen persisted:

It remains true that Newbigin does not work out his insights on the activity of the Father and the Spirit in the world with enough detail to enable us to "speak more specifically of the way in which the Triune God is present and active in history" (Hoedemaker 1979:456).

One suspects that Goheen did not have access to Newbigin's 1941 Bangalore Lectures, another posthumous publication released in 2003 that explored "the purposes of God in human history."¹¹⁴ While those lectures did not address the doctrine of creation, they did address divine action in history through Providence and Eschatology. But here again, as with his dating of Newbigin's trinitarian turn in ecclesiology, Goheen failed to account for *The Household of God* (1953) where Newbigin advanced a trinitarian ecclesiology devoted in equal measure to each member of the Godhead, which he correlated with a different branch of the church in the world.¹¹⁵

Next, Newbigin directly addressed the gaps Goheen cited in a series of lectures at Holy Trinity Brompton in 1994-1995. The lectures, however, did not appear in published form until after Newbigin's death, so again we may assume Goheen lacked access to these sources.¹¹⁶ In that work, Newbigin devoted an entire lecture to the doctrine of creation where he contrasted the biblical story with competing worldviews and drew

¹¹³ Goheen, "As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You": J.E. Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology," 160.

¹¹⁴ Lesslie Newbigin, *Signs amid the Rubble: The Purposes of God in Human History*, ed. Geoffrey Wainwright (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).

¹¹⁵ Goheen, "As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You": J.E. Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology."

¹¹⁶ Newbigin, *Faith in a Changing World*, 103-17.

explicit connections between creation and the Incarnation, which factored prominently in Newbigin's view of atonement.¹¹⁷ A reading of the early chapters of Genesis formed the center of his argument. In the creation accounts, Newbigin discerned five provisions: (1) the provision of purpose through differentiation of created things, (2) the provision of freedom through differentiation of Creator and creation, (3) the provision of the world as home for God's human family, (4) the provision of humanity for creation's care, and (5) the provision of goodness within creation.¹¹⁸ This reading of Genesis allowed Newbigin to distinguish the biblical story from rival narratives and also supply a plausibility structure for central Christian claims. Returning to his Glasgow sermon, Newbigin stated:

To put it in its smallest possible compass: I can believe that this world is the work of a wise and loving creator because the Lord has been crucified and because the crucified is risen and reigns....I cannot believe Genesis 1 without the resurrection of Jesus. Equally I cannot understand the resurrection without reference to the creation. The resurrection of Jesus cannot be fitted into the old creation. It cannot be fitted into any way of understanding things except one of which it is the starting point. Any attempt to understand the resurrection in the terms of the old creation fails.¹¹⁹

Despite the limited attention Newbigin gave to formal doctrinal development, he thought carefully about the broader theological implications of the biblical story of creation.

Third, Goheen's criticism applied standards foreign to Newbigin's approach in two respects. Although the previous paragraph offers evidence of his theological rigor, Newbigin was not a systematic theologian. To expect him therefore to construct a

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 106-110; 111-114.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 104-5.

¹¹⁹ Newbigin, "Ninth Sunday Before Christmas," 4-5.

discrete “full doctrine” and trace its implications was to subject Newbigin’s approach to alien standards and then judge him unfairly. In this manner, Goheen reversed the approach of the present study, which aims to judge the adequacy of its categories against the faithful witness of Newbigin’s life. Likewise, Goheen’s overly narrow definition of doctrine excluded many of Newbigin’s writings that support a broader construal of creation.

For example, Newbigin’s autobiography and his annual circular letters from South India offered extensive commentary on geography and flora and fauna.¹²⁰ Newbigin’s delight in creation—evidenced in awe, gratitude, and praise to God—was a pervasive feature of his writings. Even Goheen himself admitted, “It must be stated that an implicit understanding of creation and humanity’s role in its development underlies so much of his writing.”¹²¹ If, following McClendon, one considered Newbigin’s life as a text, then his practices, informal letters, and autobiographical materials revealed a deep appreciation for creation that informed other areas of this thought, even though they did not yield a formal doctrine per se.

¹²⁰ For examples of Newbigin’s circular letters, see Lesslie Newbigin, Pastoral Letter, (November 1, 1949), DA 29/2/1/79, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham; Lesslie Newbigin, Pastoral Letter, (October 1955), DA 29/1/7/7, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham; Lesslie Newbigin, Pastoral Letter, (October 1956), DA 29/1/7/14, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham; Lesslie Newbigin, Pastoral Letter, (November 19, 1960), DA 29/1/2/89, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham; Lesslie Newbigin, Pastoral Letter, (November 1962), DA 29/1/9/150, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham; Lesslie Newbigin, Pastoral Letter, (November 1963), DA 29/1/9/126, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham; Lesslie Newbigin, Pastoral Letter, (December 5, 1964), DA 29/1/9/86, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham; Newbigin, December 1, 1967; Lesslie Newbigin, Pastoral Letter, (October 23, 1969), DA 29/1/10/79, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham.

¹²¹ Goheen, “‘As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You’: J.E. Lesslie Newbigin’s Missionary Ecclesiology,” 350.

Two doctrines that intersected with creation occasionally in Newbigin's writings were eschatology and soteriology. Since eschatology figures prominently in the discussion of sacred journey, let us focus on salvation now. In a discussion of the proper means to communicate the gospel in *The Household of God* (1953), Newbigin described the corporate and cosmic nature of Christian salvation, which extended to creation. He reasoned:

But a salvation whose very essence is that it is corporate and cosmic, the restoration of the broken harmony between all men and between man and God and man and nature, must be communicated in a different way. It must be communicated in a very different way. It must be communicated in and by the actual development of a community which embodies—if only in foretaste—the restored harmony of which it speaks. A gospel of reconciliation can only be communicated by a reconciled fellowship. And at the heart of such a community must be the actual historical and geographical centre from which it starts and grows.¹²²

The geographical reference reflected both the cosmic and corporate emphases within Newbigin's position and, consistent with a work of ecclesiology, emphasized the significance of the community of faith. Three years later, Newbigin echoed this claim in *Sin and Salvation* (1956), a catechetical guide originally published in Tamil for village instructors. He explained:

But this new creation involves not only our souls and bodies; it also involves the whole created world. None of it is mere scaffolding to be thrown away when the building is complete. He made it all in love, and He loves it all. Therefore the completion of His purpose means not only the resurrection, but also a new heaven and a new earth.¹²³

¹²² Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of Church* (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009), 141.

¹²³ Lesslie Newbigin, *Sin and Salvation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009), 123.

Alongside the interconnectedness of all creation, Newbigin injected the role of divine love and its capacity to take redemptive action without remainder.¹²⁴

The third and fourth approaches to sacred creation overlapped significantly for Newbigin. A sense of belonging and awe became prominent themes in *Unfinished Agenda*. His detailed descriptions of lush scenery and rugged topography conveyed Newbigin's deep connection with the natural world. The beauty and splendor of those places inspired a reverence that gave way naturally to praise.

But, for Newbigin, the proper context for praise was the community of faith. In the eighth installment of his *Reform* essays, Newbigin described worship as “the most obvious public thing that the Church does.”¹²⁵ When Newbigin enumerated the key features of “the congregation as hermeneutic of the gospel,” his first characteristic was “a community of praise.”¹²⁶ In Newbigin's view, praise provided an antidote to the suspicion and ingratitude of modernity by cultivating reverence and thanksgiving, respectively. “A Christian congregation is thus a body of people with gratitude to spare, a gratitude that can spill over into care for the neighbor,” he concluded.¹²⁷ The wedding of awe and belonging, therefore, directly strengthened the church's witness among her neighbors.

Finally, a concern for story characterized the fifth approach to sacred creation. A prominent theme in his writings, Newbigin approached story from multiple perspectives. On his first missionary journey from Liverpool to Madras in 1936, Newbigin completed

¹²⁴ See also Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 179.

¹²⁵ Cited in Wainwright, *Lesslie Newbigin*, 328.

¹²⁶ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 227.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 228.

the manuscript for *Christian Freedom in the Modern World* (1937), in which he criticized Marxist and Nazi models of progress that were being debated in the SCM. In those positions, Newbigin detected the loss of an ordered and purposeful universe that the biblical narrative traditionally supplied .

Four years later, his 1941 Bangalore Lectures on “The Kingdom of God and Idea of Progress” at United Theological College extended his critique by “attempting to disentangle and criticize from a Christian point of view one of the seminal ideas of European civilization, the idea of progress,” which “raises for Christianity in a very acute form the question of God’s purpose for history as a whole.”¹²⁸ Newbigin’s early concerns set a long-term trajectory for his writings. Fifty years later, concerns over teleology, history, and eschatology still occupied Newbigin’s criticism of post-Enlightenment Western culture in *Foolishness to the Greeks* (1986).¹²⁹

The debate over philosophy of history held particular bearing on place, because it represented a choice between competing cultural systems. Newbigin argued that the idea of progress required a linear view of history, which comported with the biblical vision. Hindu and Greco-Roman cultures, by contrast, adopted cyclical views of history, which appeared to Newbigin to be “an attempt to do away with history” in the biblical sense.¹³⁰ In his second Bangalore Lecture, Newbigin applied that analysis of history and progress to competing Christian views, which he ultimately rejected due to their romantic or

¹²⁸ Newbigin, *Signs amid the Rubble*, 4–5.

¹²⁹ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 1–20, 65–94.

¹³⁰ Newbigin, *Signs amid the Rubble*, 8.

rationalist tendencies.¹³¹ Newbigin concluded the lecture by summarizing four features of New Testament eschatology, all of which proceeded from a linear view of history and held place-related implications for plausibility structures, the truthfulness of Christian doctrine, and the relationship of church and society in late modernity.¹³²

In some sense, Newbigin's entire career revolved around a deceptively simple question: What story should we live by? Newbigin often recounted an anecdote about a learned Hindu friend who once told him:

I can't understand why you missionaries present the Bible to us in India as a book of religion. It is not a book of religion—and anyway we have plenty of books of religion in India. We don't need any more! I find in your Bible a unique interpretation of universal history, the history of the whole human race. And therefore a unique interpretation of the human person as a responsible actor in history. That is unique. There is nothing else in the whole religious literature of the world to put alongside it.¹³³

Newbigin understood that such an understanding of Scripture required a tangible, purposeful, and linear account of history.

Newbigin developed a similar line of thought in a sermon at St. Paul's Cathedral in London in 1978. He instructed the congregation:

The Bible, in other words... is an outline of the history of the world... It is not at all to be compared with the other great sacred scriptures of the world—with the Upanishads or the Gita or the Holy Granth or the Kor'an. It is not a book about the soul of man. It is an interpretation of world history from its beginning to its end.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Ibid., 19–28.

¹³² Ibid., 28–29; the four features of New Testament eschatology Newbigin identified were cosmic renewal, judgment, death-and-resurrection and hope.

¹³³ Newbigin, *A Walk through the Bible*, 4.

¹³⁴ Lesslie Newbigin, "Septuagesima" (Sermon, St. Paul's Cathedral, London, UK, January 22, 1978), 1, DA 29/4/1/32, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham; also preached at Winson Green URC on 28 September 1980.

The challenge with such history, Newbigin concluded, was that all histories are selective accounts written with the end in view. It cannot be otherwise. Without that perspective, the author cannot know what pieces of information are most important to the story. But no one has seen the end of world history, so how can the Bible do what it purports to do?

Newbigin answered:

The Bible is a history of the world written from the point of view of the fact that the point of the story has been disclosed, that the secret has been uncovered, that the one who is in charge has made the secret known. The secret is very simple. It is the purpose that all mankind, all the nations and peoples, should become one family under the blessing of God the Father of all. From the very beginning of the story points that way.... And the climax is this....in the cross of Calvary God challenges all the powers of evil, takes their whole onslaught upon himself, meets them and masters them, conquers all the powers of sin and death, and sets history on a new course towards a new creation in which all darkness is banished. Here is the place where—according to the faith of the Bible—the point of the whole story has been disclosed.¹³⁵

Standing between creation and consummation, the cross of Christ disclosed God's purposes in history.

Newbigin anticipated that some might question how an event so far in the past could bear impact upon contemporary life. "Quite simply," he replied, "through the community which he created, prepared, and sent out to be the bearers of his secret through the history of all nations."¹³⁶ A decade later, Newbigin reconfirmed this message in the context of sacred creation:

The Church [is] the company of people chosen and called to be the bearers of the secret of the new creation through the continuing life of the old creation. That is our high calling as members of the Church. It requires of us not only to profess in words our faith that this world is the

¹³⁵ Ibid., 2, 3.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 4.

creation of a wise and loving God, but also—and especially at this time—to challenge the reigning assumption of our contemporary society that the world of nature is simply a piece of real estate for us to exploit as we wish. And that will certainly call for a stance, a style of life, and a political commitment which will run counter to the ruling tides in the world of politics, economics and personal lifestyle.¹³⁷

The church has been entrusted with a story she must indwell to share, which also carried implications to care for creation rather than exploit it. The church's vocation "to be the place where God is made known in history," Newbigin cautioned, "is to be chosen for suffering."¹³⁸ In sum, Newbigin's writings displayed conscientious concern and critical reflection across the five constitutive elements of sacred creation: divine love, Christian doctrine, belonging, awe, and story. Let us now consider Newbigin's commitment to place as a sacred journey.

Sacred Journey

The second approach to place in trinitarian perspective is sacred journey, which consists in three movements of Incarnation, pilgrimage, and mission. These headings provide a useful structure for organizing Newbigin's thoughts around a missionary commitment to place, as well as a gentle reminder of the journey of all creation toward an ultimate home in the triune God. The first model of sacred journey is the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. While a *sui generis* event in the life of God and creation, the Incarnation nevertheless may offer insights into a missionary commitment to place, since Jesus serves as the paradigmatic witness to the love of God, who journeys sacrificially for the sake of others. Wainwright summarizes Newbigin's theological position in this way:

¹³⁷ Newbigin, "Ninth Sunday Before Christmas," 5.

¹³⁸ Newbigin, *A Walk through the Bible*, 6.

“Christ’s atoning work constituted the center, set within an increasingly explicit trinitarian frame and persistently directed toward the goal of God’s reign.”¹³⁹ Insofar as the atonement occupies a central role in Newbigin’s thought, then his comments at the outset of this chapter on the soteriological significance of a commitment to place only gain currency.

Later in his career, Newbigin describes Christ as “the clue to history,” but in his early work he insists that the journey of the Incarnation expresses foremost the love of the triune God directed toward redemptive ends. His catechesis manual for believers in Tamil villages explains:

We must expect that the nature of God will be greater than our minds can grasp. But we have to try to understand what God has revealed to us. He has revealed his nature to us as perfect love. In His being there is the complete fullness of love. This being so, we must say that God is personal but that He is not a person. For a single person cannot possess the fullness of love. Love in its fullness only exists where there is a giving and receiving in of love, where love is mutual. If God were a single person, He could not know the perfection of love because there is no one who can give Him perfect love in return for His love. But what is revealed to us through Christ is a God in whom there is both giving and receiving of love, love in mutuality and in perfection. The Father loves the Son, and Son loves the Father, and they are bound together in the same Holy Spirit. Of course this is more than our minds can grasp. There is one God, but He is not one Person; he is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is an ocean of love and joy beyond anything that we can conceive and beyond anything that could exist in one person. Out of that fullness the Son has come forth into the world to win our salvation.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ A brief review of Newbigin’s work across time confirms Wainwright’s judgment [Wainwright, *Lesslie Newbigin*, 26]; in Newbigin’s early Tamil catechism, he devotes twice as much space to the chapter on “the Work of the Savior” than any other [Newbigin, *Sin and Salvation*, 56–91]; a decade later, Newbigin published his 1966 Lyman Beecher Lectures at Yale and reaffirmed a classical Christology amid discussions of religious pluralism [Lesslie Newbigin, *The Finality of Christ* (London: SCM, 1969)]; in the late 1970s, Newbigin states, “In the New Testament we are dealing not just with the proclamation of the kingdom but also with the presence of the kingdom [Jesus of Nazareth]” [Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 40]; and, another decade later, Newbigin assures readers that you cannot fit Jesus into the “reigning plausibility structures” of the day [Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 10–11]. Wainwright’s analysis holds.

¹⁴⁰ Newbigin, *Sin and Salvation*, 57–58.

For the love of the world (John 3:16), Jesus undertakes a sacred journey to secure redemption, which leads him directly to the cross. “The heart of the matter,” Newbigin concludes, “is His death.” How, one may ask, does this relate to place?

For Newbigin, the incarnation and crucifixion of Christ are inextricable steps in a sacred journey that unites the universal and particular dimensions of divine purpose toward redemptive ends: “Jesus Christ, the God-Man, eternal and yet part of history, is the Omega; it is in his coming in the flesh, as a man of a certain place and time, that the ultimate issues are posed for men.”¹⁴¹ In Newbigin’s view, to set one dimension against the other is to misunderstand both.¹⁴² He observes, “The story which the Bible tells is tied to particular times, places, languages and cultures. If it were not, it would be no part of human history. It is told as the clue to the entire story—human and cosmic, from creation to the end of time.”¹⁴³ Times and places matter, because they create space for identification and thereby reconciliation. When Newbigin resumes his catechesis lesson, he insists:

Of course the cross must not be isolated from the whole work of Christ. Without His incarnation there could be no cross and no salvation. Without His resurrection the cross would not be known to us as victory but as defeat. Without His ascension to the Father and the gift of the Spirit, we who live at other times and places could have no share in Christ. All these things are parts of the one complete work of Christ for the salvation of the whole world. But the centre and focus of that work is the cross.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today’s Mission*, 53.

¹⁴² Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 167.

¹⁴³ Lesslie Newbigin, “Discussion Paper on Authority” (The Gospel and Our Culture, Birmingham, UK, 1989), 4, <http://newbiginresources.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/89dpa.pdf>.

¹⁴⁴ Newbigin, *Sin and Salvation*, 61.

In Christ, God acts directly and definitively in the world, which underscores the significance of the previous section's discussion of history.

For Newbigin, these were not theoretical matters but eminently practical ones. Newbigin had witnessed firsthand the deprivations of modern existence first among working class Welsh miners, next among European cosmopolitans and, finally, among lower-caste Hindus whose path toward industrialization threatened them with the same emancipated autonomous individualism the miners and imperialists suffered. Newbigin laments:

Western European civilization has witnessed a sort of atomizing process, in which the individual is more and more set free from his natural setting in family and neighbourhood, and becomes a sort of replaceable unit in the social machine. His nearest neighbours may not even know his name. He is free to move from place to place, from job to job, from acquaintance to acquaintance, and –if he has attained a high degree of emancipation— from wife to wife. He is in every context a more and more anonymous and replaceable part, the perfect incarnation of the rationalist conception of man.¹⁴⁵

In the face of physical and spiritual displacement in modernity, the church, “the family of God on earth,” offers a home for displaced peoples.¹⁴⁶ Newbigin's own mystical vision of the cross “with arms that embraced the whole world... which reached down to the most hopeless and sordid of human misery and yet promised life and victory” confirmed it.¹⁴⁷ In the Incarnation, God undertakes a costly journey to secure the place of our redemption in the specific times and places we inhabit.

¹⁴⁵ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of Church* (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009), 13.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda*, 11.

The second movement of sacred journey is pilgrimage. If the Incarnation represents God's journey toward us, then pilgrimage describes our journey toward God. In a sermon preached three times during his own transition from Selly Oak to Winson Green, Newbigin emphasizes the journeys of Jesus. He states:

When Jesus was taking leave of his disciples to go—alone—to the Cross, he told them that he was going to open a way, to prepare a place, and that he would come again and receive them to himself. He did come again, risen victorious over death, but he showed them that this coming was not yet the end of the story. It was to make them witnesses of his victory over sin and death, so that the whole world would have the chance to hear and believe. “This good news,” he said, “is to be declared to all the nations, and then the end will come.” So we speak of a three-fold coming of Jesus: his coming as the incarnate son at Bethlehem; his coming to his disciples as the risen Lord; and his coming at the end to consummate the healing of all things so that all may be made one in him. It is because Jesus has conquered sin and death that we, living in this world of sin and death, can live in the sure expectation of something radically new.¹⁴⁸

While Newbigin offers multiple assurances—victory over sin and death, the trustworthiness of Jesus, a place prepared for us, and the hope of consummation—he also reminds the congregation that life with God involves movement in multiple directions. This obtains not only for Jesus but also for his disciples, whom he invites to deny themselves, take up their crosses, and follow him (Matthew 16:24-25, Mark 8:34-35, Luke 9:23-24). The inward journey toward God constitutes a spiritual pilgrimage between creation and consummation.

Before discussing the strong eschatological implications that occupy many

¹⁴⁸ Lesslie Newbigin, “Rom 13:12” (Sermon, Weoley Hill, Birmingham, UK, December 16, 1979), 2, DA 29/4/1/41, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham; marginalia in Newbigin's handwriting indicate he preached this sermon at Winson Green URC, Birmingham, on 23 December 1979 and again on 6 December 1981 in Livingston, New Jersey.

of Newbigin's writings, several other factors also shape pilgrimage in mission perspective. In a sermon at Selly Oak addressing Numbers 9 and Hebrews 11, Newbigin alternates between the two lectionary passages to describe life as a pilgrimage:

The life of faith is the life of a nomad, not of a settled citizen.... He is always being told to move on—not, however, shoved from behind, but drawn forward by the vision of the city of which he is a citizen—the city whose builder and maker is God.... There are times when the pillar of cloud and fire rests. We are in camp. God is with us and we are well pleased to be where we are. It seems that we have arrived and can settle down. But, no; smoke moves on. We are not consulted; we are commanded. We must take down those tents which we had begun to furnish rather nicely, and become pilgrims again.¹⁴⁹

Three observations follow from Newbigin's description of pilgrimage. First, a certain restlessness and indeterminacy characterizes the pilgrim way of life. Second, the chief aim of pilgrimage is not arrival at a location but dwelling in God's presence. Third, that condition being met, then all other concerns subordinate—"and we are well pleased to be where we are." From a missionary perspective, a pilgrim pledges obedience to the will of God over a quest for personal fulfillment.

Newbigin registers concerns, however, with other approaches to pilgrimage. In *Proper Confidence*, he warns readers of two dangers that confront travelers navigating late modernity: a closed mind and "the mind opened at both ends."¹⁵⁰ Newbigin notes that our habits form us. If Christ is the compass to

¹⁴⁹ Lesslie Newbigin, "Num 9:15-23; Heb 11:8-16, 32-12:2" (Sermon, Selly Oak, January 26, 1979), 1, DA 29/4/2/34, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham.

¹⁵⁰ Newbigin, *Proper Confidence*, 91.

whom we always turn, then we may become “confident explorers” on the journey.¹⁵¹ By contrast, the failure to attend to Christ in Scripture will produce travelers with endlessly open minds “prepared to entertain anything but having a firm hold of nothing.”¹⁵² Such people consign themselves to “clueless wandering which sometimes takes to itself the name of pilgrimage.”¹⁵³ But a true pilgrim is not a tourist.

For Newbiggin, a pilgrim is “one who turns his back on some familiar things and sets his face in the direction of the desired goal. The Christian is called to be a pilgrim, a learner to the end of her days. But she knows the Way.”¹⁵⁴ Newbiggin’s Selly Oak sermon reinforces this point: “Missionaries have always been—or were supposed to be—pilgrims. Like Abraham, they left their comfortable quarters and moved out.”¹⁵⁵ Thus, a missionary understanding of pilgrimage involves two movements: a turning away from self and a turning toward God and God’s world.

Such a view of pilgrimage makes both critical and constructive contributions to the present discussion of place. As criticism, it challenges popular conceptions of pilgrimage that pursue self-fulfillment or escapism and thus fail, respectively, to turn either away from self or toward God and God’s world. Newbiggin’s remarks on Romans 8:19-21 prove relevant here:

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid., 92.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Newbiggin, “Num 9:15-23; Heb 11:8-16, 32-12:2,” 1.

The Bible is distinguished from the sacred books of the great world religions in that it is not offering a hope of escape out of this world into some kind of private immortality in another world; it offers, on the contrary, a vision of the completion of God's work in creation and history as a whole: not of our escaping out of the world, but of God returning to complete his work with the world.¹⁵⁶

Pilgrimage should drive human beings deeper into the presence of God, their neighbors, and creation.

Next, as construction, a missionary model of pilgrimage contributes openness to encounters similar to the Celtic practice of *peregrinatio* discussed in chapter 3, which entailed ministry to strangers along the pilgrim way. Given advances in travel and communications, such openness is increasingly essential in the world. Newbigin comments:

It is only in our day that the means of travel and communications have been such as to break down for ordinary men the barriers that separate the world religions.... There is [also] the ceaselessly growing flood of tourists which spreads over every accessible bit of the earth's surface, bringing ordinary men and women of every land into direct contact with each other, not to mention the movements of migrants, refugees and people forced by pressure of population to seek work in other lands.¹⁵⁷

Human migrations always entail risk for the Christian pilgrim in Newbigin's judgment, because one meets "the other" at the foot of the Cross, leaving both parties exposed to the fresh work of the Holy Spirit. Newbigin cites Peter's conversion at the hands of Cornelius in Acts 10 as corroboration.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Lesslie Newbigin, "Rom 8:19-21" (Sermon, Aston Church, Birmingham, UK, October 10, 1976), 1, DA 29/4/2/16, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham.

¹⁵⁷ Lesslie Newbigin, "The Mission of the Triune God" (Geneva, Switzerland: Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, World Council of Churches, 1962), 3–4, <http://newbiginresources.org/1962-the-mission-of-the-triune-god/62mtg/>.

¹⁵⁸ Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 181–82.

Finally, Newbigin's well-documented eschatological concerns find a natural home in the category of pilgrimage. Remembering Wainwright's claim that the Kingdom of God lends Newbigin's thought "its teleological direction," it is important to note that Newbigin's reading of Scripture is the source of his interest in the Kingdom.¹⁵⁹ While Newbigin cites specific passages for support, the greater influence on his eschatology is the grand sweep of the biblical narrative from God's creation of all things to their final consummation.¹⁶⁰

Newbigin's reading of the Bible tracks closely with the anecdote about his learned Hindu friend who marveled both at the Bible's unique account of world history and the stunning failure of Christian missionaries in India to present it as such.¹⁶¹ In chapter 2, we noted that Richard Bauckham characterized Newbigin's approach as a "non-totalizing" reading of the biblical metanarrative, which moves from the particular to the universal, after a fashion (following Lyotard) that largely shields the Bible from the postmodern critique leveled against all modern

¹⁵⁹ Wainwright, *Lesslie Newbigin*, 330; Newbigin, *Signs amid the Rubble*, 26–50.

¹⁶⁰ For primary and secondary sources addressing the development of Newbigin's eschatology over time, see Newbigin, *Signs amid the Rubble*, 3–55; Newbigin, *Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church*, 111–34; Newbigin, *Sin and Salvation*, 115–25; Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*; Jürgen Schuster, "The Significance of the Kingdom of God in Its Eschatological Tension for the Theology of Mission of Lesslie Newbigin" (Ph.D., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2006), <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/dissertations/docview/304938569/abstract/53E398C294A74A74PQ/1>; Paul Weston, in *Theology in Missionary Perspective: Lesslie Newbigin's Legacy*, ed. Mark T. B. Laing and Paul Weston (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 70–87; Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen, *The Distinctive Identity of the Church: A Constructive Study of the Post-Christendom Theologies of Lesslie Newbigin and John Howard Yoder* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 54–61; Thomas E. Long, "Eschatological Dimensions of Church and Kingdom in Lesslie Newbigin, John Zizioulas, Jürgen Moltmann, and Hans Kung" (Duke University, 1990).

¹⁶¹ Newbigin, *A Walk through the Bible*.

metanarratives.¹⁶² Unfortunately, Christian collusion with other metanarratives in modernity may prevent a fair hearing for such arguments. But what do metanarratives have to do with pilgrimage and place?

The present discussion is relevant to a missiological account of place for several reasons. First, pilgrimage as a practice invites participants to enact a story that, as we learned in chapter 2, (re)forms their identity through a subtle interplay of place, memory, and purpose. Next, for Christians, the Bible's story of a common journey toward an ultimate dwelling place in the triune God orders the pilgrim's practice. Third, Newbigin perceives in that story an intrinsic connection between the nature of the salvation in which the church participates and her hope for its final consummation that commissions her witness in the present age to the places the Father sends her in the power of the Holy Spirit. In the *Household of God*, Newbigin draws these strands together:

But a salvation whose very essence is that it is corporate and cosmic, the restoration of the broken harmony between all men and between man and God and man and nature, must be communicated in a different way. It must be communicated in and by the actual development of a community which embodies—if only in foretaste—the restored harmony of which it speaks. A gospel of reconciliation can only be communicated by a reconciled fellowship. And at the heart of such a community must be the actual historical and geographical centre from which it starts and grows. In other words it will be communicated by the way of election, beginning from one visible centre and spreading always according to the law that each one is chosen in order to be the means of bringing the message of salvation to the next.... Thus

¹⁶² Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Cumbria, UK: Paternoster, 2003), 89, see also pp. 83-94. Bauckham makes a compelling argument by distinguishing modern metanarratives from the cacophonous biblical one, but the collusion of Christians with some modern metanarratives makes the church look guilty by association, and therefore Bauckham's arguments may not receive the hearing they deserve.

from whichever angle we look at the salvation which Christ has won for us, we see that its implicate is the world mission. The final consummation of God's purpose awaits the fulfilment of the world mission, and this is not because of any defect in God's power or grace, but because this belongs to the character of the salvation He has purposed for us.¹⁶³

In the words of Richard Gillard's hymn, this biblical vision casts us as "trav'lers on a journey, fellow pilgrims on the road" walking toward the place Christ has promised to prepare for us (John 14:2-4).¹⁶⁴ Fourth, Christ's promise "that I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (John 14:3) involves the pledge of the Holy Spirit, which the Father and the Son bestow the church as "the earnest of our full sharing in the love of God with all the saints—of our being perfected into one in the Father and the Son."¹⁶⁵ Last, the discussion is relevant because Newbigin's emphasis on the local embodiment of the church's witness coincides with the contemporary revival of place detailed in chapter 2.

The third and final movement of sacred journey is mission. In some respects, it is hard to know where to begin or, rather, end on this account, since Newbigin understands the church's charter in this age expressly to be mission—to publish the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ to the world. Consequently, a missionary dimension pervades every aspect of the church's existence. To extend the logic cited earlier, if the Incarnation represents God's journey toward us and

¹⁶³ Newbigin, *The Household of God*, 2009, 141–42.

¹⁶⁴ Richard Gillard, "The Servant Song," in *The Baptist Hymnal*, ed. Wesley L. Forbis (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1991), 613.

¹⁶⁵ Newbigin, *The Household of God*, 2009, 131; Newbigin refers here to the Greek term in the New Testament 'arrabon', which is a down payment. He cites this concept frequently as a concrete ground for Christian hope.

pilgrimage our journey toward God, then mission is our journey toward the world.

But Newbigin issues blunt warnings at this very point:

It is too easy for us to use the biblical word ‘world’ as a mere abstract noun without really thinking of the concrete reality which the word denotes; to speak of the judgment of the world, the redemption of the world, the end of the world, without accepting *the hard geographical meaning* of the word. In this we depart altogether from the New Testament, where the names of actual countries and the details of actual journey and the hopes and hazards of actual missionary adventure are all the time inextricably intertwined with theology. If, as theologians, we talk about the world, without meaning India, China, Africa, Russia, South America, as well as our own people, without meaning this actual globe and the nations which people it, we are talking unbiblical nonsense.¹⁶⁶

In contrast to the inward focus of pilgrimage, mission looks unapologetically outward, even when welcoming people into the church.

Newbigin identifies five key elements of mission as sacred journey. First, mission originates in the triune God, a point discussed in chapter 4 with support from Newbigin. Second, God enlists the church in mission. Preaching from John 20:20, Newbigin expresses the relationship between the triune God and the church in mission:

“As the Father sent me, I send you.” That is the beginning, the commission, the mandate of the Church. The Church is the body chosen by the Lord and launched into the public life of the world to continue what he came to do, until it is done. And what is it that he came to do? ... It was to announce and to embody the presence of the kingdom of God.¹⁶⁷

Newbigin further delineates the church’s role in *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*:

The Church is not so much the agent of the mission as the locus of the mission. It is God who acts in the power of his Spirit, doing mighty

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 135; emphasis mine.

¹⁶⁷ Lesslie Newbigin, “2 Cor 4 and Jn 20:20” (Sermon, Induction of Andrew Francis, Leeds, West Yorkshire, UK, 8/7/22), DA 29/4/1/29, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham.

works, creating signs of a new age, working secretly in the hearts of men and women to draw them to Christ. When they are so drawn, they become part of the community which claims no masterful control of history, but continues to bear witness to the real meaning and goal of history by a life which—in Paul’s words—by “always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus” becomes the place where the risen life of Jesus is made available for others (2 Cor 4:10).¹⁶⁸

Recalling Agnew’s three-part definition of ‘place’, Newbigin here describes the church as the *locale* where people are reconciled to God.

Third, the previous passages not only emphasize the divine initiative in mission but also the divine election of the church in mission—“the body chosen by the Lord.” For Newbigin, election is central to the logic of mission, but it is election to service rather than salvation.¹⁶⁹ Such a view protects mission against the subtle idolatry of human activism or claims to achievement in the mission field, epitomized by “any talk of ‘winning India for Christ’” in the face of overwhelming demand for evangelists but a limited supply.¹⁷⁰ Newbigin confesses, “I was compelled to ask myself whether it was really true that the Church’s obedience to the Great Commission is intended to be contingent upon the accident of a budgetary surplus.”¹⁷¹ Coupled with his study of Israel’s corporate priesthood among the nations, Newbigin reinterprets the commissions of the New Testament not as dominical commands to be obeyed but as divine promises to be fulfilled. In Acts 1:8, for example, Jesus declares, “And you will be my witnesses in

¹⁶⁸ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 119.

¹⁶⁹ The doctrine of election appears frequently in Newbigin’s writings through his reading of Scripture and wrestlings with the relationship between the universal and particular. Although Reformed, Newbigin’s interpretation of election parts company with many other interpreters of the Reformed tradition. For two of his most sustained discussions of election, see Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 68–77; Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 80–88.

¹⁷⁰ Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today’s Mission*, 75.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Newbigin reads this as a promise more dependent on the faithfulness of Jesus than of his church.

The fourth element of mission is the sacred journey from mission to church. While the language recalls mid-19th to mid-20th century debates among Western mission boards, the challenge persists. The key to evangelizing India, Newbigin recognizes, is not a budget surplus among foreign missionaries but a thriving Christian community in India filled with “ordinary lads from village congregations” who “become active witnesses and evangelists among their comrades.”¹⁷² Adopting the voice of Roland Allen, an Anglican missionary to China at the turn of the 20th century and a fierce advocate for the indigenous church, Newbigin perceives the need for the Indian church (and other churches in the Global South) to journey from dependence on Western churches to dependence on the Holy Spirit.¹⁷³

The final element of mission as sacred journey reverses the previous one: Western Christians must journey from institutional churches that depend on cultural and political establishment to a missionary movement sent and empowered by the triune God to advance the gospel in their own religiously plural societies where Enlightenment-based plausibility structures hold sway. “The Western world,” Newbigin states soberly, “has had to be recognized once again as a mission field.”¹⁷⁴ To become faithful witnesses, the Western church must learn to receive the gospel from the churches they once founded on the mission field. This reciprocity not only comports with Newbigin’s view of election,

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 75–81.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 12.

especially his reading of Romans 9-11 referenced above, but it also follows what Dana Robert and other scholars describe as “the southward shift of global Christianity.”¹⁷⁵ At the rededication of an old missionary guest house at Selly Oak as a newly appointed “overseas guest house” on January 26, 1979, Newbigin acknowledges:

The world mission of the Church is no longer primarily conducted from a base in the Western world. It is the shared mission of a global family which must learn so to live and speak and act of that it is seen as the first-fruit and sign of a new common humanity in which all the nations share.¹⁷⁶

Out of this recognition, in retirement Newbigin pursued a research program that reflects a fresh expression of his longtime missionary commitment to place—namely, a commitment to engage his own native culture with the good news of Jesus Christ. In sum, Incarnation, pilgrimage, and mission express the sacred journey at the heart of a missionary commitment to place.

Sacred Construction

Sacred construction names the third component of a missionary theology of place. As a broad set of practices, sacred construction involves making culture, building community and performing liturgy. Newbigin engaged in all three activities. For example, his work in the villages to contextualize the gospel and equip indigenous

¹⁷⁵ Dana L. Robert, “Shifting Southward: Global Christianity since 1945,” in *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 117–34; see also, Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996); Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002); Lamin O. Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Lamin O. Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity?: The Gospel beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003); Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone, Christian Doctrine in Global Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003); Philip Jenkins, *The next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹⁷⁶ Newbigin, “Num 9:15-23; Heb 11:8-16, 32-12:2,” 2.

leaders to build churches, community organizations, and even sanitation systems reflected such construction. But Newbigin also applied his talents to the work of sacred construction by drafting liturgies for the CSI and ecumenical statements in the WCC. His insistence that local congregations take responsibility “for this place”—namely, the local community to which God had sent them—injected a missionary dimension into discussions of ecclesiology and a corrective to models of mission that capitulated to the forces of modernity. Let us now examine how Newbigin’s efforts in making culture, building community and performing liturgy advanced a missionary commitment to place.

In Newbigin’s writings, the church’s vocation of culture-making takes many expressions. Narrowing one’s focus on place, however, draws attention to three elements in particular: the public nature of the gospel, a special concern for the margins of society and the biblical concern for cultivation. First, the public nature of the gospel names a cluster of significant themes for Newbigin that pervades many aspects of his missionary thought and practice. In *Foolishness to the Greeks* (1986), Newbigin supplies needed context for this claim by defining ‘culture’. He states:

By the word *culture* we have to understand the sum total of ways of living developed by a group of human beings and handed on from generation to generation. Central to culture is language. The language of a people provides the means by which they express their way of perceiving things and of coping with them. Around that center one would have to group their visual and musical arts, their technologies, their law, and their social and political organization. And one must also include in culture, and as fundamental to any culture, a set of beliefs, experiences, and practices that seek to grasp and express the ultimate nature of things, that which gives shape and meaning to life, that which claims final loyalty. I am speaking, obviously, about religion. Religion—including the Christian religion—is thus part of culture.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 3.

The concept of culture, for Newbigin, is all-encompassing, such that it often functions as the defining plausibility structure for a population by supplying not only a mental framework for interpreting the world but also the practices for inhabiting it.

Since culture also entails language, it serves as the medium through which the Christian message finds expression, even when that message challenges the medium through which it is being translated. On that basis, Andrew Walls argues that the gospel is both “prisoner” and “liberator” of culture.¹⁷⁸ Consequently the gospel will affirm any elements in culture that have submitted to God’s reign and critique or call to repentance those that have yet to do so. All cultures thus require conversion, which is not to be confused with reduction, addition, or replacement of the culture. Rather, explains Walls, “Conversion is the turning, the re-orientation, of every aspect of humanity—culture-specific humanity—to God.”¹⁷⁹ Newbigin’s life and work endorse such a conception of culture and conversion.

Having defined culture as the larger context, before we can discuss the public character of the Christian message, we still must define what constitutes that message?

Newbigin responds:

In speaking of “the gospel,” I am, of course, referring to the announcement that in the series of events that have their center in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ something has happened that alters the total human situation and must therefore call into question every human culture.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 7–8.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁸⁰ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 3–4.

The gospel, Newbigin clarifies, is not synonymous with the Christian religion, which he includes within his definition of culture; rather, the gospel refers specifically to publicly accessible facts of Jesus' existence and the Christian claim, by faith, that God has acted decisively in and through those historical events to redeem the world.

In his final decade, the public nature of the gospel occupied Newbigin's thoughts increasingly. He published one book with the subtitle "The Gospel and Public Truth,"¹⁸¹ delivered numerous lectures exploring the theme, including one of his last in the United States a few months before his death;¹⁸² and published posthumously one article entitled "The Gospel as True," which originated as his first Hickman Lecture at Duke University in 1994.¹⁸³

In that lecture, Newbigin makes a case for the gospel as being factually true. He opens with an anecdote from Karl Barth who once imagined a person hearing the gospel preached for the first time. Upon hearing Christian message, Barth surmised that the person would not ask, "Is it traditional? Is it radical? Is it innovative? ... He would ask, "Is it true?"¹⁸⁴ For Newbigin, the question of the gospel's veracity is the most important question not only for the Christian tradition but for the wider culture. And he contends that the gospel is true in the most basic sense. He states:

The gospel is a factual statement, in the original sense of the word: "fact," namely *factum*, something which has been done, and having been done, it

¹⁸¹ Lesslie Newbigin, *Truth to Tell: The Gospel as Public Truth* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991).

¹⁸² Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel as Public Truth*, CD (Beeson Divinity School, Samford University, Birmingham, Alabama, 1997).

¹⁸³ Newbigin, "The Gospel as True." Concern over the public nature of the Christian message was not a late development in Newbigin's thinking; however, it did become a more prominent theme later in his career, due to his retirement to a culture increasingly skeptical of Christian truth claims.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

cannot be undone. The gospel is the story of God’s mighty acts in creation, in redemption, and in consummation.¹⁸⁵

On that basis, Newbigin proceeds to offer a concise genealogy of knowledge within the Western tradition, beginning with Augustine who centered the tradition on the biblical story. From Aquinas forward the sources of knowledge divided between faith and reason, and under Descartes even greater shifts occurred. Doubt replaced faith as the starting point for enquiry, and rational certainty became the standard criterion for knowledge.¹⁸⁶

Drawing on Michael Polanyi’s philosophy of personal knowledge, Newbigin challenges the supposed objectivity of Cartesian logic and argues that all knowledge, even empirical science, involves a subjective element that requires risk—which is to say, faith, because all knowledge proceeds on the basis of other claims that one cannot prove to a certainty.¹⁸⁷ According to Polanyi, to claim any knowledge requires a person to “indwell” a tradition of knowing and accept many of its premises without question.¹⁸⁸

The Christian church, Newbigin suggests, offers such a tradition. He explains:

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 28–29, 30; in his discussion of the Enlightenment missionary paradigm, David J. Bosch offers a complementary discussion of the seven features of Enlightenment thought that subordinate classical Christian truth claims to a hostile plausibility structure: (1) the subordination of revelation to reason, (2) adoption of a subject-object scheme, (3) elimination of purpose, (4) adoption of progress, (5) division of facts and values, (6) assumption that all problems had solutions, and (7) human beings are emancipated autonomous individuals [David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series, no. 16 (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1991), 262–67].

¹⁸⁷ Newbigin, “The Gospel as True,” 32–33; criticism of the Enlightenment tradition figures prominently in Newbigin’s writings from the early 1980s forward. For Newbigin’s first sustained critique of Western culture, see Newbigin, *The Other Side of 1984*.

¹⁸⁸ Newbigin, “The Gospel as True,” 32; in other writings where Newbigin develops a similar argument, he adds Alasdair MacIntyre’s work alongside Polanyi. See Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988); Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

The Church embodies that tradition which takes as its *datum*, as its starting point, in faith, that in Jesus Christ, Almighty God was present, to bear and bear away the sin of the world, and which uses the concepts, the models, the language of the Bible to develop this tradition.¹⁸⁹

Even though a church exists within a larger culture, it nevertheless may function in some respects as an alternative plausibility structure—a minority report—that bears patient witness to the truth of the gospel even when the larger surrounding culture rejects it. But if that be the case, then the church must do more than merely publish this message in the marketplace as one among many other options; rather, Newbigin insists, it must indwell God’s story in such a way as to convince people who encounter it for the first time that it must be true.¹⁹⁰

Several points follow from this discussion of the public nature of the gospel. First and foremost, God entrusts the church with the good news of the world’s redemption in Christ. Whatever form(s) of culture-making the church pursues, she should remain the herald of good news. Even when speaking truth to power—perhaps by modeling a different way of life—that form of life nevertheless should communicate the love of God for that place and contribute to its flourishing. Such witness requires constant negotiation between gospel and culture, because, as Newbigin acknowledges, “Cultures are never monochrome and static; they are always complex and changing.”¹⁹¹ Therefore, the church should contribute to the larger culture for the good of the community, the advance of the gospel and the glory of the triune God who sent her to that place as a witness.

¹⁸⁹ Newbigin, “The Gospel as True,” 34.

¹⁹⁰ Newbigin, “Discussion Paper on Authority,” 4; in other words, the gospel’s authority derives in part from its embodiment in a living community. The next section on Christian community-building will develop this theme further, most notably through Newbigin’s description of the congregation as the “hermeneutic of the gospel.”

¹⁹¹ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 144.

Next, the enculturated nature of the gospel message, which we receive through a divine act of translation—“the Word made flesh” (John 1:14)—requires full immersion in the language and habits of the culture it addresses. The Newbigins immersed themselves in language study for eight hours a day in Chingleput until they had internalized the categories, structures, and idiom of Tamil language and culture and found themselves culturally and linguistically at home.¹⁹² Such learning, for the missionary, is more than mere skill acquisition; it represents a deep identification with and humble participation in a new culture that closely resembles its own form of conversion. Thus, Newbigin explains:

True contextualization happens when there is a community which lives faithfully by the gospel and *in that same costly identification with people* in their real situations as we see in the earthly ministry of Jesus. When these conditions are met, the sovereign Spirit of God does his own surprising work.¹⁹³

A missionary commitment to place requires costly identification patterned on the Incarnation of God in Christ.

Third, culture-making is a public activity for the church, because the church itself is a public assembly in the midst of the local community. In an essay on the parish church, Newbigin notes that the Hellenistic world offered early Christians many religious terms from which to choose a label for themselves. Critics such as Celsus often applied those terms to Christians derisively, but the church steadfastly insisted on a single moniker. Newbigin explains:

¹⁹² Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda*, 44.

¹⁹³ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 154; emphasis mine.

They chose the word *ekklesia*, which is the secular word for the assembly to which every citizen is summoned and expected to attend, in which the business of the city is dealt with. Paul always uses the word, all the New Testament writers use the term *ekklesia Theou*, the assembly of God—the assembly, in other words, to which all are summoned without exception. And it is summoned not by the town clerk but by God—not by Peter, not by Apollos, not by Paul, but by God.¹⁹⁴

Early Christians understood that the gospel stakes public claims and that the church's ministry consists in inviting the larger public to participate in God's reconciliation of all things in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. In view of such commitments, Newbigin offers one possible definition of the church as the "provisional incorporation of humankind into Jesus Christ."¹⁹⁵ Such a definition harmonizes Newbigin's eschatological concerns with his missionary ones. He concludes:

I do not think that the geographical parish can ever become irrelevant or marginal. There is a sense in which the primary sense of neighbourhood must remain primary, because it is here that men and women relate to each other simply as human beings and not in respect of their functions in society.¹⁹⁶

A missionary commitment to place seeks to bear public witness to the good news of Jesus Christ in the heart of the community where people live their everyday lives. However, that clear affirmation also carries an implicit caution. Decades of village ministry among outcastes in South India had taught Newbigin that an exclusive focus on the heart of the community often can obscure its margins.

The second concern of culture making from a missionary perspective of place is that the church as disciples of Jesus should seek out the place(s) where Jesus is. That is,

¹⁹⁴ Newbigin, *A Word in Season*, 52–53.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 53; the definition is provisional in both a quantitative and qualitative sense: not everyone is incorporated and some who are incorporated have room to grow.

¹⁹⁶ Lesslie Newbigin, *Sign of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 64.

the church should pattern her ministry on the ministry of Jesus. Likewise, the author of Hebrews exhorts early Christians to “go to him [Jesus] outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come” (Hebrews 13:13-14). In a worship service installing a new urban minister in Leeds, Newbigin offers a similar encouragement:

Perhaps it is in our inner cities today that we are rediscovering this basic Christian experience. The struggling churches in the inner cities do not need to be pitied or patronized. They are to be congratulated because they are at the places where the wrongs of our society bear down hardest. In their weakness they know the power of God. In their wounds they find the secret of resurrection.... I hope your exploring will lead you to discover this secret which belongs not to the rich and successful but to those who bear about in the body the dying of Jesus. It is the secret of life through death. It is something the churches of the inner city must learn to share with the richer churches of the suburbs.¹⁹⁷

Offered in 1987, Newbigin speaks these words from the context of his own contemporary experience of urban pastoral ministry at Winson Green URC in Birmingham.

The third feature of culture-making in Newbigin’s life and thought that reflects his commitment to place is the biblical call to cultivation. While Newbigin did on occasion cite the cultural mandate in Genesis, including our stewardship of creation, more frequently he spoke of the Christian responsibility to contribute to culture. A few months after the aforementioned installation service, Newbigin addressed the City Temple in a different context with a similar charge. He states:

The Bible, in contrast to the religious books of the East, does not talk of our escaping out of this world into another; it talks of Jesus coming back to this world to reign. It talks of the Holy City not remaining in heaven, but coming down out of heaven to earth. The Gospel does not call us to turn our backs on this world in all its sorrow, pain and guilt; it calls us to

¹⁹⁷ Newbigin, “2 Cor 4 and Jn 20:20,” 3.

follow Jesus in bearing the sin of the world, in accepting its sorrow, pain and guilt as ours.¹⁹⁸

Newbigin clarifies that he is not suggesting the church replace the gospel with a political program, only that the gospel leads Christians into a deeper engagement with the world rather than an escape from it. He concludes:

But that does not mean that we can escape from politics, for politics is simply—for a Christian—the art of learning how to do God’s will in the life of the city. We cannot escape this responsibility. We cannot—if we are Christians—give up hope for this world and concentrate on preparing for another. That is the Hindu and the Buddhist way, but it is not what the Bible teaches.¹⁹⁹

In Newbigin’s perspective, anything less than a robust commitment to place represents a fundamental misreading of the scriptural vision.

Three further comments are necessary on cultivation. First, the broader biblical vision celebrates human contributions within the context of God’s fulfillment of the Kingdom. Preaching from Romans 8:19-21, Newbigin claims:

The Bible shows us God calling man to be his co-worker in replenishing the earth and making it fruitful, in turning it from chaos to order, from desert to a garden. And its final vision is the vision of a city in which all the nations of the earth will bring their treasure. The story of civilization, of the making of the true city, is the story of man according to the Bible. For centuries the Church, unable to break out of the ancient pagan view of man, taught that man’s future was a return to the garden—to paradise. That is exactly what the Bible denies; the way back to paradise is barred. Man is called to go not back to the garden, but on to the city. And therefore all man’s works of civilization—of science and art and technology—are part of his work with and for God. They are expressions of the hope of which Paul speaks in this text, a hope for the completion of God’s whole work.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Lesslie Newbigin, Manuscript (December 10, 1978), DA 29/4/1/25, Special Collections, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Newbigin, “Rom 8:19-21,” 3.

Second, the church need not fear that such contributions diminish God, because apart from God, human sin would distort those contributions irreparably.

Finally, Newbigin elaborates that the Christian hope of resurrection extends not only to our bodies but also to our works of cultural cultivation. Newbigin concludes, “What is entrusted to him is not lost, but will have its place in the new creation. Much will be burned away, but what is truly offered to God will be raised up to share in the glory of the City.”²⁰¹ In God’s economy, no good work is lost. At Holy Trinity Brompton, Newbigin describes such work as “acted prayers for the kingdom.”²⁰² A missionary commitment to place and the biblical tradition, more broadly, welcome the work of making culture as a faithful response to the gifts of God given for the sake of the world.

The second approach to sacred construction is building Christian community, in which Newbigin’s contributions fall largely in three areas: the pledge of the Holy Spirit, the congregation as hermeneutic, and the church for this place. The emphasis on the congregational and local character of these contributions and explicit language addressing place draw the clearest lines of support for the significance of a missionary theology of place in Newbigin’s writings. First, we consider the pledge of the Holy Spirit. The most frequently cited metaphor in Newbigin’s writings refers to the Father’s promise of the Spirit to the church. Newbigin explains that the Greek New Testament term *arrabon* was a word scribbled by shopkeepers on bills of sale to indicate if a customer had placed

²⁰¹ Ibid., 4; Newbigin makes this claim in many places across his career. For a few examples, see Newbigin, *Sin and Salvation*, 123; Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 179; Newbigin, *Faith in a Changing World*, 154.

²⁰² Newbigin, *Faith in a Changing World*, 154.

earnest money or a down payment on their order.²⁰³ The Holy Spirit is the earnest of the kingdom of God, a tangible first installment of greater gifts to come.²⁰⁴ In a chapter of *The Household of God* (1953) devoted to eschatology, Newbigin enlists the metaphor to express the church's proleptic participation in the divine life:

I have tried to show that our incorporation in Christ is to be understood in terms of the eschatological tension of faith and hope, both finding their ultimate meaning in love. By faith we accept Christ's dying and rising on our behalf, and ourselves become partakers in it; living still in the flesh, yet we are sharers in His life by faith. In hope we press forward to the full revelation of that victorious life of Christ, which is now hidden. But while faith and hope are thus the marks of the new life in this age, its abiding inner reality is love—a love which is a sharing in the very life of the triune God. The love which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, creating and sustaining faith and hope in us, is but the earnest of our full sharing in the love of God with all the saints—of our being perfected into one in the Father and the Son. But it is a *real earnest*. There is an actual sphere of redemption, of which the historical centre is Jesus Christ incarnate, crucified, risen and ascended. For at the centre the word of salvation goes out to all the earth, the nations are baptized, the Lord's table is spread, a real community is built up—all by the living sovereign working of the Holy Spirit. It is here in this visible community, that God is savingly at work reconciling the world to Himself, precisely because the salvation which He purposes is not merely private and spiritual but corporate and cosmic.²⁰⁵

Following Wainwright's analysis, the passage employs Newbigin's core convictions—an atoning center, trinitarian frame and eschatological orientation—in service of a missionary commitment to place grounded in the local church.

Newbigin's other common expression of the pledge of the Spirit shares the eschatological orientation of *arrabon* but attends more narrowly to the work of the Holy

²⁰³ Newbigin, *A Word in Season*, 60.

²⁰⁴ For examples, see Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission*, 53–54; Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 180; Newbigin, *A Word in Season*, 60, 65; Newbigin, *The Good Shepherd*, 87–88; Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 120.

²⁰⁵ Newbigin, *The Household of God*, 2009, 131; emphasis original.

Spirit in and through the local congregation, which he describes as the “sign, instrument and foretaste” of the kingdom. More than a rhetorical flourish, however, the phrase carries specific meaning for Newbigin. In *The Good Shepherd* (1977), which originated as a series of monthly addresses to the CSI presbyters in the See of Madras between 1970 and 1972, Newbigin offers a concise exposition of the phrase at stage early enough in its development that he uses ‘first-fruit’ interchangeably with ‘foretaste’. Newbigin reflects:

The Church—and therefore every congregation of the Church—is intended by God to be the first-fruit and sign and instrument of his new creation. Each word in that definition is important. The Church is *a first-fruit*. It is not an end in itself. Mere church growth is not the same as the coming of God’s reign. But neither is the Church merely instrument, an organisation for getting God’s will done. It is something different from both of these: it is a first-fruit, what St. Paul calls *arrabon*. It is the place where there is really fellowship with God through Jesus Christ here and now, but only as a foretaste of the much fuller and greater reality which God intends. And therefore the Church is *a sign* of this new reality. A sign does not point to itself; it points beyond itself to something else. The Church cannot say: here is the Kingdom of God. But existence of the Church, its fellowship and its works of love, can be a sign which cause men to look up and believe that the reign of God is a reality. And therefore the Church can be *an instrument* (not the only instrument) of God’s reign. It can be a means through which God’s will is done in the world and his reign becomes effective.²⁰⁶

Shortly hereafter, Newbigin solidifies his terms and consistently speaks of the church as “sign, instrument and foretaste” of the Kingdom of God. In 1981, Newbigin publishes a book entitled *Sign of the Kingdom*, and later in the same decade, he employs the phrase as the organizing framework for the theological section of *Faith In The City of Birmingham* (1988), for which he served as editor and principle author.

²⁰⁶ Newbigin, *The Good Shepherd*, 87–88.

The second aspect of Christian community building that demonstrates Newbigin's missionary commitment to place is the idea of the "congregation as hermeneutic" of the gospel. He dedicates a well-known chapter in *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (1989) to the concept,²⁰⁷ but he also uses the phrase and the congregational framework he develops there in other publications.²⁰⁸ Perhaps the earliest appearance of the idea takes shape nearly 30 years prior in *Sin and Salvation* (1956). In a chapter entitled, "How Salvation Becomes Ours," Newbigin presents the local congregation as the embodiment of the gospel and the enactment of salvation in a tangible though partial form.²⁰⁹

In its mature form, Newbigin's discussion of the "congregation as the hermeneutic of the gospel" contends that the most important interpretation of the gospel is not a logical proof or a polished argument but the gospel's demonstration in the lives of a transformed community who live what they believe. "Jesus," Newbigin observes, "did not write a book but formed a community."²¹⁰ That community will be characterized by six crucial features: praise, truth, place, common priesthood, responsibility and hope. A year earlier, Newbigin contributed a similar though much expanded list of characteristics for churches that serve as an "authentic sign of the kingdom" in *Faith in the City in Birmingham* (1988).²¹¹

Here again, Newbigin's eschatological orientation ties the concept of the congregation as hermeneutic very closely to the expression "sign, instrument and

²⁰⁷ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 222–34.

²⁰⁸ For an example, Newbigin borrows and expands the list of congregational characteristics he develops under the "congregation as hermeneutic" and then places it under the heading of "sign, instrument and foretaste" in the following work: see O'Brien, *Faith in the City of Birmingham*, 118–24.

²⁰⁹ Newbigin, *Sin and Salvation*, 92–114.

²¹⁰ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 227.

²¹¹ O'Brien, *Faith in the City of Birmingham*, 119–29.

foretaste” of the Kingdom of God. In *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today’s Mission* (1963), Newbigin defines the church as “the outward form of the continuous work of the Spirit in re-enacting Christ’s coming among men.”²¹² The salvation we see enacted through those six characteristics in the local congregation stands in a direct line of continuity with the salvation that one day will be revealed in full when the “kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). Thus, the church lives in prolepsis between creation and consummation.

The third aspect of building Christian community that advances Newbigin’s missionary commitment to place is that place appears among his six essential characteristics of the “congregation as hermeneutic of the gospel.” Newbigin explains:

It will be a community that does not live for itself but is deeply involved in the concerns of its neighborhood. It will be the church for the specific place where it lives, not the church for those who wish to be members of it—or, rather, it will be for them insofar as they are willing to be *for* the wider community.²¹³

Notice five distinct features in that brief description. A congregational commitment to place: (1) prioritizes service over self-fulfillment, (2) takes responsibility for the community, (3) identifies with its immediate neighborhood, (4) welcomes anyone who shares its mission, and (5) positions itself publicly as a community *for* others.

Next, Newbigin describes the nature of the *ekklesia Theou* in the New Testament, whose sole references are to God and place (e.g., the church of God in Corinth).

Newbigin’s construction suggests that a congregational commitment to place is synonymous with a missionary commitment to place. He explains, “It is the Church of

²¹² Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today’s Mission*, 53.

²¹³ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 229; emphasis original.

God *for that place*, and that is because the Church does not exist for itself but for God and for the world that Jesus came to save.”²¹⁴ Concerned that denominational agencies inadvertently disrupt the missionary relationship between church and place, Newbigin concludes his discussion of the church’s responsibility for the immediate community with a call for the restoration of evangelism and social concern at the local congregational level where “the good news overflows in good action.”²¹⁵ Theologian Stanley Hauerwas confirms this impulse, “According to Yoder, locality and place are the forms of communal life necessary to express the particularity of Jesus through the visibility of the church.”²¹⁶ A missionary commitment to place, then, works to restore relationship between the church and the neighborhood where God has sent her to bring good news and thereby build community.

While the missionary commitment to place Newbigin articulated in the mid to late 1980s resonated with his missionary praxis in South India and later in Winson Green, where and when did Newbigin develop these ideas over time? Two major articles on ecumenical debates in the 1970s draw Newbigin into unexpected discussions of place. But before considering those arguments, roughly five years earlier, Newbigin devotes a monthly address to CSI presbyters to the parish.²¹⁷ In “The Role of the Parish in Society,” Newbigin tests early versions of the ideas that take shape in his later attempts. He discusses the historical and secular origins of the parish concept, *arrabon*, and the

²¹⁴ Newbigin, *A Word in Season*, 53; emphasis original.

²¹⁵ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 229.

²¹⁶ Hauerwas, Stanley. "The Place of the Church and the Agony of Anglicanism." *Religion and Ethics* (27 Sept 2012).

²¹⁷ Newbigin, *The Good Shepherd*, 85–90.

church as first-fruit, sign and instrument, but two other contributions distinguish this piece from others. First, he presses the notion of the church's identification with the world:

If the Church is to be in and for the world, it must be in and for these particular segments of the world. It must be the Church in and for this village, this factory, this suburb. In other words, the structures of the Church must be organically related to the structures of the secular world. That is the enduring theological justification for the idea of the parish. There is no meaning in speaking of the Church as first-fruit, sign and instrument of God's reign in the world if this does not apply specifically to *this* bit of the world where the Church is set.²¹⁸

Newbigin's argument here possesses a sharper edge than his efforts a decade later. This likely reflects his leadership role at the time in major secular projects to address systemic injustice through public infrastructure in the villages and slums surrounding Madras. The second distinguishing feature is what may constitute his first attempt to list characteristics of congregations that reflect the reign of God, which include servant, witness and priesthood.²¹⁹

In "All in One Place or All of One Sort?" (1976), Newbigin states, "The Church in the New Testament is always the Church of a place. It is the place where the given structure of human neighborhood is re-created as brotherhood."²²⁰ While such a description is prone to abuse at points, Newbigin wrestles with how to balance the radical openness of the church with her radical centeredness in Jesus Christ. He states:

The crucial question is this: can there be a manifestation of the life of the Church in each place which is—on the one hand—so open, so free, so welcoming of variety and even contradiction, that men and women of

²¹⁸ Ibid., 88; emphasis original.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 89.

²²⁰ Lesslie Newbigin, "All in One Place or All of One Sort," *Mid-Stream* 15, no. 4 (October 1976): 339.

every kind can be at home in it: and—on the other hand—so deeply rooted in the saving work of Christ crucified and risen that its members can accept one another, forgive one another, love one another, belong to one another? Can there be a visible and recognizable and therefore local expression of the fact that what God has done in Jesus Christ is nothing less than the destruction of all the powers that separate men from God and from one another, or must this be only a truth that remains in the mind, above involvement in space and time?²²¹

For Newbigin, the connections between church, place, and unity raise the most basic theological questions that determine whether our lives (and communities) center truly on Jesus Christ or idols of our own making.

In another article, “What is a local church truly united?” (1977), Newbigin endeavors to answer that very question in light of statements from the WCC consultation in Salamanca in 1973. In what Wainwright describes as a “densely argued and passionately expressed text,”²²² Newbigin makes a case for ecclesial unity of a sort that few still seek today. The disunity of the church, for Newbigin, not only undermines her witness in the world (John 17) but in effect denies the unity of the Godhead on which the church’s unity is patterned. For Newbigin, the quest for unity is a non-negotiable, constitutive core practice of the church that stands at the heart of sacred construction.

Newbigin’s discussion of locality begins with the question, “What is a local church?” He replies:

This apparently simple question raises, in fact, the profoundest issues concerning the nature of the Church. The adjective "local" refers to the "place" where the Church is. But this "place" is part of the secular world, part of the world of nature and of culture. What is the relation of the Church to this "place?" It is an intrinsic, not an extrinsic relation. The "place" is not just the latitude and longitude of the spot where this church happens to be; it is not external or accidental to the being

²²¹ Ibid., 340–41.

²²² Wainwright, *Lesslie Newbigin*, 117.

of the Church. The "place" of the Church is not thus its situation on the surface of the globe, but its place in the fabric of human society. The Church cannot be described apart from its place. *The Church is wrongly described unless it is described as the Church for that place, and the meaning of the preposition "for" is determined christologically; that is to say, it is determined by what Jesus Christ has done, is doing and will do with and for the world as its author, redeemer and consummator.* The Church in each place is the Church for that place, in the sense in which Christ is for mankind and for the world. Just as Christ is not understood unless He is understood as the Word by whom all things came to be, for whom they are, and in whom they are to be consummated, and as the Last Adam in whom alone mankind's destiny lies; so also the Church in any place is not rightly understood unless it is understood as sign, first-fruit and instrument of God's purpose in Christ for that place. *And in this sentence the word "place" must mean the whole secular reality of the place including its physical, social, cultural and political aspects.*²²³

This explanation resonates with the language from Newbigin's 1985 seminar at the Centre for the Exploration of Social Concerns, but he extends it in different directions.²²⁴

Place, for Newbigin, is multivalent, referring both to the local physical coordinates a congregation occupies but also the ways in which it extends into the secular world, whether nature, culture, or its place within "the fabric of human society." Thus, Newbigin juxtaposes geographic, sociological, and even christological understandings of place in the passage. In the latter case, the church follows a christological pattern *for that place*, which is understood through Christ's actions in the past, present, and future as "author, redeemer and consummator." Thus, the church must identify with place as Christ identifies with the world in his sacred journey in the Incarnation, but Newbigin

²²³ Newbigin, "What Is a Local Church Truly United," 117–18; emphasis mine.

²²⁴ For Newbigin's contribution, see Newbigin, "On Being the Church for the World"; for other papers from the seminar, see Giles S. Ecclestone, ed., *The Parish Church?: Explorations in the Relationship of the Church and the World* (London and Oxford: Mowbray, 1988).

also suggests that the church in some real sense must embody God's salvation for that place as a "sign, first-fruit and instrument of God's purpose in Christ for that place."²²⁵

Next, Newbigin asks, 'What does "place" mean?' Again, his reply echoes his training at Leighton Park and Cambridge in geography. He states:

The answer to this question must necessarily be complex, for, except in very simple rural societies, most human beings live at the same time in several "places." That is to say, each person (especially in a "modern" type of society) participates at the same time in a variety of different kinds of secular realities, each of which has to be taken seriously. There is the actual geographical place of his residence. There is the world of work in industry or a profession, the world of kinship and a shared language, the world of shared political or ideological commitment and many others. In a very simple rural society, these different worlds largely coalesce. In a "modern" urban society they pull the same person in several different directions and involve him in different secular commitments. If the Church is to be a sign, foretaste and instrument of God's purpose to consummate all things in Christ, how can it be actually related to all these different worlds at the same time?²²⁶

Newbigin recognizes overlapping meanings of place, including geographic residence, profession, kinship, language, political and ideological communities, and various power relations. Thus, Newbigin sounds similar to Massey or McClintock Fulkerson naming the complex dynamics that constitute place in modernity. Only in rural communities do the different layers "coalesce" naturally, according to Newbigin. But one suspects that even that qualification is contingent upon the particular rural community in question. In sum, Newbigin's concern for congregational community-building clearly advances a

²²⁵ Ibid., 117.

²²⁶ Ibid., 119.

missionary commitment to place. Having considered culture and community, let us conclude our study of Newbigin on liturgy.

The third approach to sacred construction consistent with a missionary commitment to place focuses on performing liturgy. Absent this safeguard, the distinctively Christian character of the church in a place may be lost under the secular pressure of culture-making or the activism of community-building. Thus, the performance of liturgy preserves the missionary dimension of a commitment to place. Three aspects of Newbigin's thought and practice commend attention in this section: indwelling the Christian story, rehearsing Christian practices, and celebrating sacramental presence.

In our previous discussions of sacred creation and the public nature of the gospel, the significance of the Christian story emerged as a theme. Walter Brueggemann constructs a definition of evangelism along similar lines, stating, "Evangelism is inviting people into these [biblical] stories as the definitional story of our life, and thereby authorizing people to give up, abandon, and renounce other stories that have shaped their lives in false or distorting ways."²²⁷ As a missionary, Newbigin thought daily about ways to invite others to participate in the life of Christ and to adopt the gospel story as their own story. Indwelling, as Polanyi suggests, is the path to knowledge but it also requires faith. Thus, it will be subject, in Tanner's words, to "the ambiguities, inconsistencies, and open-endedness of Christian practice." But these are, she reminds us, "the very things that establish an essential place for theological reflection in everyday Christian

²²⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 10.

lives.”²²⁸ Newbigin concurs. In a discussion of missionary methods that arrives at the language of indwelling, he endorses the minimalist approach of Roland Allen who equipped new Christians with the Bible, the sacraments and the apostolic ministry, and then entrusted the rest to the Holy Spirit in contrast to other models that employ strict indoctrination or charitable needs-provision on secular terms.

But Newbigin recognizes the vital need for formation. In *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, he acknowledges that “by attending to what God has done in the story of Israel and supremely in the story of Jesus Christ, [the Church] must continue by indwelling that story so that it is our story, the way we understand the real story.”²²⁹ Formed by the gospel, the church then finds new resources to respond to the surrounding community on the basis of the gospel. In an instructive *Discussion Paper on Authority*, Newbigin describes in detail the process of indwelling the Christian story and its connection to constitutive church practices, including evangelism:

Tradition is a living reality insofar as those who are committed to Jesus meet together to remember and re-tell the mighty acts of God, to re-live the biblical story and the words and deeds of Jesus, and to offer their praise and prayer to the Father through him. It is in the Church's liturgy that the biblical story becomes a living tradition, remembered again and again and—in the preaching of the Word—re-interpreted and applied to contemporary situations so that the written word of scripture becomes the living word of God for today. Out of such liturgy there arises action in the life of the world which faithfully embodies the understanding of God's purpose for the world which is revealed in the biblical narrative. And through the words and deeds of the members of the believing community there come occasions when the Holy Spirit bears witness in the heart and conscience of a man or woman that the secret of life is to be found in the company of Jesus. No other kind of authority is involved or can be invoked. It is always a mysterious matter, but it is the way in which the

²²⁸ Kathryn Tanner, in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass and Miroslav Volf (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 232.

²²⁹ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 151.

authority of Jesus is exercised, and men and women—whether in Indian cities and villages or in an English city, come to live by a story different from the one that operates in society. There can be no ultimate authority except the authority of the Spirit of God speaking in the heart and conscience of a man or woman. But the presence of that Holy Spirit is promised to the community that "indwells" the story of which the incarnation, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus is the central key.²³⁰

Newbigin describes a dynamic circle of interaction through which the community indwells the story of Jesus and the Holy Spirit indwells the community, such that the world draws near and ultimately is drawn into the circle to repeat the performance again. Newbigin's account of indwelling not only affirms the centrality of practices to the church's common life, but he underscores the pledge of the Holy Spirit in her midst.

Closely related to the liturgical practice of indwelling the story are other common practices of the church's life together. They represent, as it were, liturgical performance in a broad sense. In his catechetical work for Tamil villagers, *Sin and Salvation* (1956), Newbigin responds to the question of how one may participate in the salvation that Jesus offers. He identifies "four visible marks [that] are four links by which the continuing fellowship is bound to Christ and His work, continually renewed and re-directed by Him."²³¹ Those marks include devoting themselves to: (1) the apostles' teaching, (2) the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist, (3) fellowship and forgiveness, and (4) prayer.²³² But, as Newbigin acknowledged, even the dynamic circle of indwelling apart from the quickening of the Holy Spirit brings death not life. The church and her practices remains a gift from the Holy Spirit who has been pledged by the Father through the Son to sustain

²³⁰ Newbigin, "Discussion Paper on Authority," 9.

²³¹ Newbigin, *Sin and Salvation*, 96.

²³² *Ibid.*, 94–95.

and sanctify the church in the performance of the gospel story for the sake of the world. Such practices are corporate, local and open to the world. Thus, such practices may contribute substantially to a missionary commitment to place.²³³

The third approach to sacred construction in service of a missionary commitment to place is the celebration of the sacramental presence of the body of Christ in the world. *The Household of God* (1953), Newbigin's ecclesiology, adopts a trinitarian framework and associates one broad ecclesial tradition of the church with each member of the Godhead. Roman Catholicism is the "congregation of the faithful" associated with the Father; Protestantism is the "body of Christ" associated with the Son; and Pentecostalism forms the "community of the Holy Spirit" associated with the Paraclete. Newbigin also adds chapters on eschatology and mission, but Newbigin's primary claim is that the church subsists in all three paradigms and should, in keeping with the trinitarian pattern, share her gifts in unity with one another, since that is her destiny.

For many Christians raised in the Free Church tradition, the language of the body of Christ and its sacramental presence in the world never found its way into the pulpit, a Bible study, or a prayer meeting. Such mystical language was foreign to our tradition or suspicious on other grounds. Yet, for all of the ambiguity that surrounds such language, a

²³³ This discussion of practices, however, does invite at least one criticism. While the potential to develop such common practices in more radical forms exists, regrettably Newbigin does not lead us to entertain models. The rich common life of intentional communities and the New Monasticism cited early in this study remind the church that more radical versions of community sometimes may yield more powerful witnesses to the transforming grace of the gospel of Jesus Christ. For example, peacemaking and a common purse and table offer different forms of life and hospitality that bear witness to Christ's victory over the powers, principalities and plausibility structures of this world. The legacy of E. Stanley Jones, an American Methodist missionary, who served prominently in India a few decades ahead of Newbigin, and experimented with radical forms of community, would have remained strong in Newbigin's early years. This however is a minor concern, since Newbigin himself lived a life of hospitality, generosity and frugality and did so very quietly.

mystical unifying presence holds great appeal in a disenchanted, displaced technocracy whose plausibility structures by definition preclude divine mystery. In his introduction to the *Household of God*, Newbigin acknowledges that Western society and its exports have reduced human beings to “anonymous, identical, replaceable units” who “long for some sort of real community, for men cannot be human without it. It is especially natural that Christians should reach out after that part of Christian doctrine which speaks of the true, God-given community, the Church of Jesus Christ.”²³⁴ In his High Priestly Prayer in John’s Gospel, Jesus prays to his Father that his followers “may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17: 21-22). There is, Jesus indicates, a close relationship between ecumenical unity and evangelical advance. A celebration of the unity of the body of Christ and its presence in the world for the transformation of the world strengthens a missionary commitment to place, because it invites the Holy Spirit to work freely in and through the church in ways the church heretofore has quenched the Spirit. Making culture, building community, and performing liturgy offer three complementary approaches to sacred construction that marked Lesslie Newbigin’s ministry and expressed faithfully his missionary commitment to place.

Assessment

The introduction of this chapter posed three questions of assessment, which examine the adequacy of the theological construction at the heart of this study. Chapter 4 supplied a framework based on an interpretation of the *missio Dei*, and chapter 5

²³⁴ Newbigin, *The Household of God*, 2009, 12.

developed a missiological account of place consistent with that frame. The present chapter, in turn, shifted largely from a constructive mode of reflection to a descriptive one in order to demonstrate the significance of a missionary theology of place for the church's witness in late modernity. I divided this task into two steps: (1) a biographical sketch of Lesslie Newbigin, and (2) a compilation of his thoughts on place. The latter step employed the missiological account from chapter 5 to organize Newbigin's inchoate thoughts on place into a more coherent position consistent with the understanding of the *missio Dei* for which Newbigin advocated in the mid-twentieth century. Let us turn now to those questions.

First, does the missiological account of place render a recognizable portrait of Newbigin's life and thought? We recall Geoffrey Wainwright's comments on the consistency of Newbigin's thought over time, as well as his assessment of Newbigin's chief themes: "Christ's atoning work constituted the center, set within an increasingly explicit trinitarian frame and persistently directed toward the goal of God's reign."²³⁵ On this count, the compilation offers a useful organizing structure. Atonement, Trinity, and Eschatology figure prominently in Newbigin's emerging missiological account of place but also offer continuity with familiar interpretations of Newbigin's thought. One may ask, however, if it would have been more useful to adopt Wainwright's triad of key themes as the organizing frame instead of the account from chapter 5 that centered on creation, journey, and construction. While the adopted method has strengths, using Newbigin's own frame might make for easier comparisons and questions across his work.

²³⁵ Wainwright, *Lesslie Newbigin*, 26.

Second, does the account adequately describe Newbigin's missionary commitment to place? The compilation documents place as a consistent concern in Newbigin's thought, even when it took inconsistent forms. His missionary commitment to place is better understood perhaps through its embodiment under the broad categories of sacred creation, sacred journey, and sacred construction, rather than the detailed analysis of his views on their smaller constitutive parts, which chapter 5 conducted. For example, when one thinks of sacred creation, Newbigin's close identification with Tamil culture, passion for village ministry, and lifelong pursuit of recreation in nature come to mind. Likewise, with sacred journey, Newbigin's pursuit of a missionary vocation in India and Winson Green and, conversely, his restlessness at the International Missionary Council in Geneva, suggest a deep existential connection with place. Finally, Newbigin's concern for sacred construction found expression fundamentally through an enduring commitment to the worship and witness of the local church. Whether in the establishment of the CSI, the reestablishment of ministry in Winson Green, or the development of a research agenda to promote a fresh missionary encounter between the gospel and Western culture, place occupied a central role in Newbigin's life and thought and often took the form of sacred construction.

Despite the value of the account, three challenges emerged in the development of the compilation. First, Newbigin's approach to place did not fit the sub-categories of Sacred Creation as readily as the other two areas. This may indicate the need for the additional sub-categories (e.g., attention, awe, conservation, or stewardship). Or, by contrast, it may indicate that the sub-categories employed were overly confining. If so,

then one corrective would be to employ only the largest categories to allow for greater interpretive freedom, along the lines of the previous paragraph. Second, Newbigin wrote prolifically for over six decades, which poses difficult choices for interpreters and often contributes to studies that catalogue his thoughts rather than interpreting or engaging them constructively. Third, some of Newbigin's contributions were easy to overlook, because they do not appear in a more systematic form and therefore are more prone to be lost amid the volume of his writings.

That said, the compilation also included some pleasant surprises. First, Newbigin had thought more carefully and systematically about the doctrine of Creation than I anticipated in light of secondary sources. Those contributions were easy to overlook, however, because they did not appear in a systematic form. Next, the categories of sacred creation, journey and construction often overlapped. Consistent with Newbigin's larger trinitarian commitments, the overlap in his commitments to place reflect in part the unity of the Godhead and the diversity of the divine missions. Moreover, for Newbigin, Christology, ecclesiology, and geography did not collapse into one another, but their interplay did reveal the close relationship between the redemptive focus and ecclesial locus of trinitarian faith.

Finally, did Newbigin's missionary commitment to place strengthen the church's witness in late modernity? My research leads to an answer in the affirmative. Newbigin's commitment to place strengthened the church's witness in late modernity. Recognizing that Western churches lacked the conceptual, cultural, and theological resources necessary to respond to the challenge of the Enlightenment, Newbigin offered a

stream of writings, beginning with *The Other Side of 1984* and continuing with posthumous publications, to sound an alarm and to equip the church with the missiological resources it needed to respond. Although heretofore overlooked, a missiological commitment to place is one of those vital resources. Indeed, a commitment to place is arguably the genesis of Newbigin's entire research program on the gospel and Western culture. It was Newbigin's identity and training as a missionary that made him especially sensitive to contextual concerns when he returned to England in 1974. Thus, his interest in place was not tangential to his literary contributions in retirement; rather, it was the central driving force. As chapter 2 documented, the concept of place is not limited to coordinates on a map. Western pluralist cultures became the place to which the triune God sent Newbigin to bear witness to the good news of Jesus Christ. While Newbigin would not likely endorse everything his writings have inspired, several of the most significant movements for the renewal of the church in late Western culture find their origins in his work. And the church's witness is better and stronger for having learned from Lesslie Newbigin's long missionary life.

Conclusion: The Difference Place Makes

I want to think of the Church as a sign, instrument, and foretaste of God's reign for that place and that segment of the total fabric of humanity for which it is responsible—a sign, instrument, and foretaste for that place with its particular character.²³⁶

— Bp. Lesslie Newbigin

²³⁶ Newbigin, *A Word in Season*, 60.

The introduction began with a question: what difference does a commitment to place make for the church's witness? In response, I have argued that a missionary commitment to place strengthens the church's witness by correcting modern distortions of Christian mission and by forming a critical element in the church's response to Western culture. The study made that case in three broad steps: description, construction, and demonstration. Building on the introductory discussion of place, in the second and third chapters we described the state of place in the late modern church and world. Chapter 2 explored the theological significance of place by asking the basic question: why does place matter to theology? The response marshaled a wide range of sources from Scripture, theology, literature, sociology, history, and philosophy to demonstrate that place functions as an essential element in the formation of human identity and ecclesial practice. The chapter also documented three forces that erode a commitment to place in late modernity and suggested that a Christian missionary approach offers a more effective response than other religious and secular approaches

Chapter 3 considered place more narrowly as a missionary problem. It asked how the relationship between the church's missionary practice and place has evolved over time. By adopting David Bosch's periodization of Christian mission, the chapter offered a critical survey of mission paradigms across time. The historical review indicated that constructions of witness in late modernity tended to marginalize a commitment to place while paradoxically planting seeds of resistance to such distortions of the Christian message. The chapter concluded with reflections on the persistent yet ambiguous role of place in Christian mission.

In response to the descriptive work of the first section, the second section of the study offered a constructive theological account of place in missionary perspective. Chapters 4 and 5 developed the conceptual resources necessary for the church to recover a commitment to place that is constitutive of her mission rather than in opposition to it. Thus, chapter 4 developed a framework for the church's commitment to place based on the *missio Dei* that featured a trinitarian basis, redemptive focus and ecclesial locus. Within that larger framework, chapter 5 then developed a trinitarian account of place as *sacred creation*, *sacred journey*, and *sacred construction*. Consistent with Langmead's view of the integrative task of missiology, this approach synthesized sacred and secular sources by discerning a missionary dimension within them. In combination, these two chapters formed a missionary theology of place capable of strengthening the church's witness in late modernity by providing practical theological resources to resist the forces of displacement in Western culture. To be clear, section 2 does not supply techniques, but rather a trinitarian framework for cultivating a deeper commitment to place and constructing more durable practices of mission and placemaking.

Given the methodological focus on practice, the study invited one further step. The argument culminated in section 3 with an extended case study to demonstrate the potential of a missionary commitment to place to strengthen the church's witness in the context of a singular missionary life. While the preceding chapters reflected the influence of Lesslie Newbigin, chapter 6 concentrated on the development of his own missionary commitment to place and the way in which he performed that commitment at

specific times and places.²³⁷ After a short illustration of the interpretive problem of separating Newbigin's thought from his life, the chapter adopted the biographical approach to theology that McClendon, Wainwright, and Tanner commend. The case began with a three-part biographical sketch of Newbigin's life as a student, missionary, and retiree. We explored how Newbigin negotiated place in each phase of life. Next, the chapter distilled Newbigin's writings on place into the categories of sacred creation, sacred journey, and sacred construction. This constructive compilation of Newbigin's commitment to place tested the adequacy of both the theological account of place developed in chapters 4 and 5 and Newbigin's own performance of place in the context of its modern devaluation. In sum, the study built a cumulative case for a missionary commitment to place through description, construction, and demonstration to bolster the church's witness to the triune God and to highlight a vital yet neglected strand of Newbigin's thought as a theologian of place.

²³⁷ In *The Drama of Doctrine*, Kevin J. Vanhoozer develops an account of the performative character of doctrine that reworks George Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic description of doctrine with which Newbigin expressed strong affinity. Vanhoozer writes, "to locate divine authority in the canon is by no means to relegate the church or church tradition to a position of unimportance. On the contrary, the canonical script calls for ecclesial performance, and for handing on good performance practice from one generation to the next" (151-152). This statement confirms Newbigin's view that the greatest test of right belief was its ecclesial embodiment or, in Vanhoozer's terms, performance. Such an account resonates strongly with the orientation toward praxis within both missiology and contemporary practical theology. Later, Vanhoozer adopts the place-related metaphor of cartography: "Learning how to read, and to follow, the canonical maps through life toward the promised land: this is the picture of theology as a type of knowledge (*scientia*) and wisdom (*sapientia*) that the present approach seeks to develop. The map is a compelling metaphor for a postfoundationalist account of knowledge" (295-296). Vanhoozer opens that section on fiduciary frameworks by citing Newbigin. See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

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Biography

D. Steven Porter was born in Joplin, MO, on November 20, 1972. In 1995, he earned a Bachelor of Arts with honors in History from William Jewell College in Liberty, MO, and served as class orator. As an undergraduate, he was also a visiting student at Regent's Park College, University of Oxford (1993-1994). Steven received the Master of Divinity in 1998 from the Candler School of Theology, Emory University, in Atlanta, GA, where he received a full-tuition fellowship (1995-1998) and the Charles Owen Smith Award. Upon graduation, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship commissioned him for field service in Miami, Florida, where he served as executive director of Touching Miami With Love, Inc., and was ordained by the Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church. In 2005, he served as missionary-in-residence at William Jewell College before undertaking studies at the Boston University School of Theology, where he received Doctor of Theology and Center for Practical Theology fellowships (2006-2007). In 2007, he received a Duke Evangelism Fellowship (2007-2011) with generous support from the United Methodist Foundation for Evangelism to study at Duke University Divinity School. In 2017, he completed the Doctorate of Theology. At Duke, Steven participated in a Lexington Faculty Seminar (2008) and received a Henry Luce Foundation Research Grant to study at the Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies in Yogyakarta, Indonesia (2010). Following a lectureship in mission at Truett Seminary, Baylor University, in Waco, TX (2011-2014), he was appointed Coordinator of Global Missions for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. A member of the International Association of Mission Studies, he resides in Decatur, GA, with his wife Jodi and two children.