

## ABSTRACT

### Local Church Responses to Structural Injustice

R. Holland Coleman

Director: Paul Martens, Ph.D.

This thesis explores the ways that Christians can contend for justice in a globalized world at the same time that they are complicit in structural injustice. This thesis first argues that throughout the Scriptural witness justice is characterized as the individual's care for the neighbor. Next, it demonstrates how structures at the local level mediate relationship between individuals. Third, it argues that the American church in general is ill-equipped to deal with these issues because it has been misshaped by individualism and consumerism, and the practice of material sharing is recommended as a corrective. Finally, this thesis draws upon the work of Wendell Berry and Wes Jackson to argue that an economy of place embodies the biblical concept of justice as care. The argument concludes with a proposal for local church bodies to invest in just structures within their own cities.

APPROVED BY DIRECTOR OF HONORS THESIS:

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Dr. Paul Martens, Department of Religion

APPROVED BY THE HONORS PROGRAM:

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Dr. Elizabeth Corey, Director

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

LOCAL CHURCH RESPONSES TO STRUCTURAL INJUSTICE

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By

R. Holland Coleman

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To my grandparents, Bobbie and Lucien Coleman, two faithful neighbors if ever there were any.

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an exploration of the ways that everyday Christians and local church bodies can and should contend for justice in a globalized and interconnected world, by extricating themselves from structures which make them complicit in injustice. It is born out of contentious and uncertain times. A great deal too many Christians that I know are plagued by a sense of dread and crisis, fueled by the sensationalism of the 24-hour news cycle and the impression that there are big scary things happening in faraway places. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, theologians like Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr could refer to “the social crisis” or “the social problem”—in the singular. Today, one must specify which televised crisis he or she means. It could be any number of ecological crises under the umbrella of “the environment;” it could be the opioid epidemic; it could be the threat of nuclear war; it could be the entrenched tribalism which threatens the stability of our democracy, etc.

It seems to me that the Christians I know who concern themselves with these things tend to think in almost exclusively “big” terms. They see big problems caused by big adversaries, and they instinctively reach for big policy changes or victory in some big culture war. Those who do not think in big terms too often opt out of thinking about these things altogether. They do not see any meaningful action that they can take, and so they forget about these things altogether, focusing on their individual faithfulness. As my community of faith has wrestled with these issues, I have wrestled with this dichotomy. I have long doubted whether these are the only two options available to Christians, but alternatives were a long time coming.

The way out of this dilemma was opened for me by the director of this thesis, Dr. Paul Martens. He introduced me to the concept of structural justice, and in so doing he showed me how to think about big problems in terms of the small things that I and millions of other Christians do every day—things which people often assume are morally neutral. From a structural perspective, the everyday things people do add up to have an impact that is greater than the sum of its parts. The jobs that Christians work, the things they buy, the places they live, and the ways they worship are all relevant in various ways to the daunting problems at hand. They can be complicit in modern-day slavery, the destruction of the world's natural systems, or the erosion of community here at home. This places an enormous burden upon the person in the pew; it also presents him or her with an enormous opportunity. The adoption of a structural perspective can (hopefully) allow Christians to see concrete solutions to these kinds of problems. This includes negative solutions, things that they must try and avoid doing, as well as positive solutions, things that they can do to love their neighbors around the world.

This thesis is a rough attempt to sort out things that local church bodies can do to extricate themselves from complicity in structural injustice. It is necessarily broad in scope, because adopting a structural perspective requires engagement with disciplines outside of theological ethics. However, this thesis is not broad enough in scope to offer an exhaustive account of the ideas and thinkers that it will involve. The ultimate aim is to offer a holistic conceptual clarity that is comprehensive enough to guide further research along these lines. The course of action tentatively proposed to local church bodies is to cultivate just structures within their local communities. I believe that, from a structural

perspective, local churches can love their neighbors and do them justice by loving their neighborhoods.

The first chapter will explore the concept of justice itself, from a biblical perspective. This is done in the hopes that clarity about the concept of justice itself will indicate promising ways of thinking about structural injustice. In this chapter I argue, following Nicholas Wolterstorff, that biblically speaking, justice should not be understood as approximation of some abstract, static state of affairs or order of society. Rather, the biblical conception of justice is of a condition of concrete human relationships. It is the condition in which people commit to loving their neighbors.

In the second chapter, I attempt to answer the question “who then is my neighbor?” from a structural perspective. I argue that the neighbor is anyone with whom one’s life intersects, or whom one impacts by one’s choices. I then give three examples of ways that participation in social structures can connect the lives of people who have never met. Insofar as these structures have unjust effects on these anonymous neighbors, participation in unjust structures can make Christians complicit in injustice. As a result of this, Christians have a moral duty to find ways to minimize their complicity.

In the third chapter, I explore the question of whether the American church as a whole is up to this task, and what kind of church *would* be equipped to contend for structural justice. First, I draw upon the ecclesiology of James McClendon Jr. and Stanley Hauerwas to relate the evangelistic task of the church to the Christian obligation to do justice. Next, I argue that insofar as Christians participate in the culture of individualism and consumerism, they are ill-equipped to accomplish either of these tasks. Finally, I

recommend that local churches adopt the practice of koinonia—radical economic sharing—to cultivate the virtues that will be necessary to resist structural injustice. In the fourth and final chapter, I suggest that local church bodies begin to extricate themselves from unjust structures and build new, just structures by investing in their local communities. I draw on the work of Wendell Berry and Wes Jackson to argue that an economy of place is a workable concept that closely embodies the biblical concept of justice as care. It is proposed that this concept can help guide local church bodies as they contend for structural justice, and I conclude the chapter with practical examples of how Christians can invest in caring economies of place.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Justice as Care

This chapter will argue that the biblical witness presents a broad understanding of love and justice in which justice and love are mutually determining norms. Specifically, love of neighbor demands doing justice for that neighbor, and justice requires one to love one's neighbor. It will further suggest, following Nicholas Wolterstorff, that in the context of neighbor love, these two concepts may be jointly referred to as "care" for the neighbor. That is, justice is done when one person cares for another. Rather than offering an abstract theory of justice as an ideal ordering of society, the biblical witness presents justice as a condition of concrete relationships. The implication for the larger discussion of structural justice is this: Christians who would faithfully do justice amid unjust structures must turn their attention to the concrete relationships between individuals which these structures mediate.

#### *Love and Justice*

The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a protracted debate among Christian scholars and theologians regarding the relationship between love and justice. Anders Nygren argued in *Agape and Eros* that justice and agape are incompatible. He argued that because justice requires valuation of deserts, it is incompatible with God's *agape*, which is spontaneous and unconditional.<sup>1</sup> Justice is a recognition of value inherent in the object of justice and is

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<sup>1</sup> Anders Nygren. *Agape and Eros*. Translated by Philip S. Watson. First paperback. The Library of Religion and Culture. New York: Harper & Row, 1961, 77-8.

therefore “motivated.” Where *agape* takes no account of the inherent value of its object, but fills it with value by loving it, and is thus “unmotivated.” Nygren offers as example Jesus’ parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matt 20:1-16). In this parable, the owner of the vineyard contracts several laborers at the beginning of the day. Later in the day he sees men who are in need, and hires them to work the one remaining hour, but pays them a full day’s wage. When the original workers complain about the seeming unfairness of this, the vineyard owner retorts: “Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? . . . Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?” (NRSV). Nygren interprets this parable as an illustration of the way that *agape* makes no reference to merit, worthiness, or justice. Rather, “where spontaneous love and generosity are found, the order of justice is obsolete and invalidated.”<sup>1</sup>

Reinhold Niebuhr later argued that justice is a rough approximation of love’s demands within the present age. Niebuhr maintained that as a practical reality, even Christians can never fully rid themselves of self-interest; even in the most loving of communities, justice is necessary to secure peace in the presence of conflicting claims.<sup>2</sup> Niebuhr further argued that, while historical communities can develop closer approximations of the ideal of love, they can never fully realize its demands—it remains an ideal.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>2</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr. *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr*. Edited by D. B. Robertson. Library of Theological Ethics. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1957, 28.

<sup>3</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr. *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*. Vol. 2. 2 vols. London: Nisbet & Co, 1943, 258-9; <sup>3</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff. *Justice in Love*. Emory University Studies in Law and Religion 21. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011, 68.

In his more recent summary and analysis of the issue, Gene Outka declines to expound his own theory of the relationship between love and justice. Rather, he contributes by helpfully pointing out that many of the difficulties surrounding the question arise from equivocation or a lack of clarity regarding which kind of “justice” is under consideration.<sup>4</sup> He points out that justice can be formulated as “to each according to his deeds” (which Nygren assumes in his argument), or “to each the same thing,” or “to each according to his needs.” Outka suggests that this last conception of justice, the “equalitarian” conception as he puts it, overlaps most with *agape*. Along equalitarian lines, one may justly treat people in two different ways so as to secure equal benefit for each, or one may justly prefer the claimant in greater need.<sup>5</sup> This conception of justice has the added benefit of reflecting the prevalent scriptural emphasis on caring for those most in need.

### *Justice as Care*

Nicholas Wolterstorff has more recently suggested that justice and love of neighbor should be identified.<sup>6</sup> In *Justice in Love*, Wolterstorff explores the implications of *suum ius cuique*—“to each his right”—the general framework which undergirds all Western understandings of justice.<sup>7</sup> Historically, a right is a right *to* something, a piece of land for example. Of course, having a right to something involves a further right to its enjoyment; it makes no sense for someone to have a right to a piece of land without being permitted to step foot upon it, or cultivate it. Furthermore, this person’s right to enjoy the

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<sup>4</sup> Gene Outka. *Agape: An Ethical Analysis*. Yale Publications in Religion 17. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972, 88-92.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 309-12.

<sup>6</sup> Wolterstorff. *Justice in Love*. 75-84.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 85-92.

use of this piece of land places an obligation on all others not to deprive him or her of that right by preventing his or her enjoyment of it. That is to say, a right is a right to be treated in a certain way by others, who are in turn obligated to treat one in this way.

The complementarity of rights and obligations is widely agreed upon. The difficulty lies in accounting for which particular rights people, in general and as individuals, actually have. Wolterstorff suggests that the notion of human worth grounds particular rights:

One person has the worth of one who has written a superb novel, another has the worth of one who has courageously devoted herself to combating poverty, another has the worth of one who has won the 100 meter dash in the Olympics, and so forth. On the other hand, certain ways of treating a human being bear the significance of befitting or not befitting the worth of that human being. Should the organizers of the Olympics refuse to give the gold medal to the person who won the 100 meter dash, they would not be treating him as befits his worth. They would not be showing him due respect for his worth.<sup>8</sup>

Justice, then, involves people being treated in such a way that shows due respect for their worth. There is still some way to go here, as in this discussion Wolterstorff does not explain how worth should be ascertained, or how to ascertain which actions honor that worth. How will the balance hang when the claims of a rich, good-looking, genius conflict with the claims of a poor, ugly, invalid? Of course, hard cases make bad law, and the notion of worth is still an altogether promising addition to the understanding of *summus cuique*. Parents have a different sort of worth than teachers, and bad parents have a worth that is *prima facie* different than good parents, etc. These different worths can help one to discern how each of these deserves to be treated, even if the details are not all worked out and the difficulties are not all addressed here. Wolterstorff goes on to use this notion of worth to suggest a version of justice *as* love. In short, if loving someone is promoting the good of that person for its own sake, then of course “love for another seeks

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 89.

to secure that she be treated justly by oneself and others—that her rights be honored, that she be treated in a way that befits her worth.”<sup>9</sup>

Wolterstorff summarizes this form of love which includes justice as “care,” which seeks to promote the flourishing of the beloved as well as her just treatment.<sup>10</sup> The connection of love and justice in the form of care is apparent in the everyday example of a mother’s love for her child. If she fails to care for the child’s physical and emotional welfare, she is not only unloving, but unjust; she is not giving her child its due. On the other hand, if, say, the child is being given bad grades by a biased teacher, and the mother willfully turns a blind eye, she is not only unjust but unloving. If she is not committed to the just treatment of her child within the practice of education, this is a serious failure in her overall care for the child. The remainder of this chapter will attempt to illustrate how this view of love and justice combined as care for the neighbor is predominant in scripture, and will briefly explore the implications for Christians who would do justice in this complicated world.

### *The Concept in Narrative Context*

To put biblical ideas of justice in perspective, it is helpful to place them in narrative context.<sup>11</sup> For this reason, the argument will briefly revisit the overarching

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 93.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>11</sup> Here I am following the work of MacIntyre, McClendon, and Hauerwas, who emphasize the ways that humans think in narrative terms and understand concepts within narratives. Cf. Stanley Hauerwas. *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*. London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986, 9-35; Alasdair MacIntyre. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. Third. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007, 216-17; James McClendon. *Ethics: Systematic Theology*. Second. Vol. 1. 3 vols. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012, 327-51.

narrative of God's people as presented in Scripture.<sup>12</sup> Scot McKnight offers two narrative readings of the multivocal biblical witness, which he calls "C-F-R-C" and "A-B-A".<sup>13</sup> C-F-R-C stands for "Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation," which runs something like this: God created a perfect world (C), but sin and death entered the world through Adam's disobedience (F). God, in God's perfection, could not abide the presence of sin, and thus could not let fallen humankind into heaven, no matter how much He loved them. God solved this problem by sending God's son Jesus to die on the cross to take the whole world's punishment in its stead (R). As a result, anyone who trusts in Him will be redeemed from their sin and escape God's judgment, and one day He will remake a perfect world where all of God's redeemed will dwell (C). When asked to give a summary of the gospel, this is the story that American Christians, particularly evangelicals, tell.<sup>14</sup>

Christians who are only familiar with the C-F-R-C narrative run into some trouble making sense of things like neighbor-love, justice, and their connection, because the entire narrative begins and ends with individuals' relationship with God. Regardless of how seriously one would like to take these "horizontal" relationships, when situated

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<sup>12</sup> The unity of Scripture is contested on various grounds. Throughout this thesis I assume that the Christian Scriptures, as interpreted and passed down by the Christian community, offer a multivocal, yet consistent record of the story of God's dealings with God's people.

<sup>13</sup> Scot McKnight. *Kingdom Conspiracy: Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2014, 24-35.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Ray Comfort. "One minute Gospel: Ray Comfort." *Stone the Preacher*. Aug 26, 2012. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ats1\\_9DeMbg&list=PLzXpKEDZiPsHtg1Sdps-jVdGfnXHY358R&index=19](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ats1_9DeMbg&list=PLzXpKEDZiPsHtg1Sdps-jVdGfnXHY358R&index=19). Ken Ham. "One Minute Gospel: Ken Ham." *Stone the Preacher*. Jul 5, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pu9AQKhymjI&index=20&list=PLzXpKEDZiPsHtg1Sdps-jVdGfnXHY358R>. Lecrae. "Lecrae Raps the Gospel in One Minute." *Desiring God*. Feb 13, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xt9VA3Cxdf0&list=PLzXpKEDZiPsHtg1Sdps-jVdGfnXHY358R&index=18>.

solely within the C-F-R-C narrative, interpersonal relationships are more or less instrumental to maintaining good standing in one's relationship with God. One individual loves other individuals because she is commanded to, and any failure to do so constitutes a "sin" which does not benefit one of God's individual redeemed.

McKnight proposes the A-B-A' narrative as another reading which is a necessary counterbalance to C-F-R-C. A-B-A' stands for "Plan A, Plan B, Plan A modified." This narrative runs as follows. God's plan A, which does not change after the Fall, is to rule the Creation through God's people. Before the Fall, God plans to do this through Adam and Eve, but after the Fall, God plans to do this through the people of Israel. In both cases, God plans to rule Creation through God's people, as the one and only King. When Israel desires to usurp God's rule, and demands a human king like the other nations, God graciously accommodates God's people by granting them a human king who will mediate God's rule of the people, while God remains sovereign over the larger creation. This is Plan B. However, God's people proves unfaithful. They cannot rule themselves righteously or justly, nor can they honor their covenant with God, and they ultimately incur the exile. After the exile, God's redemption takes the form of a modified Plan A: God becomes human so that God's people can have a human king, while God is now the only king over God's people. God now rules the people through the New David, King Jesus.<sup>15</sup>

When C-F-R-C and A-B-A' are read in conjunction, it is much easier to understand the role of "horizontal" relationships in the Gospel. On this reading, Creation is the creation of a world of harmony between Creator and creature. God walked with

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<sup>15</sup> McKnight, *Kingdom Conspiracy*, 34-5.

Adam in the Garden as with a friend, and Adam named the animals as a father would his children. The only thing not good in this perfect world is that Adam is alone, at least until God gives him Eve. The perfectly ordered world is a relational, loving world. On this reading, the Fall is the breakdown of community, between God and humankind as well as between the members of humankind and each other. In asking, “am I my brother’s keeper?” Cain gives voice to the Fall. A fallen world is one in which a man has no care for his own brother. On this reading, Redemption is the redemption of God’s people *into* a community of reconciliation. The Hebrews are not only delivered out of Egypt but into the land promised to them. They are given the Law to preserve community between God and Israel and among the people of Israel; the institution of the system of atonement is a gracious provision for inevitable failures and unfaithfulness on Israel’s part. God’s work of redemption continues even after Israel becomes so egregiously unfaithful to the covenant that they incur the exile. To redeem the people once and for all, God puts on flesh to walk among God’s people, teaches them how to live as the chosen nation, and ultimately gives up God’s own life to establish a new covenant and a new community where right relationship can be restored. Finally, on this reading Consummation is the consummation of community between Creator and creature. Beginning with the resurrection of Jesus, a new heaven and a new earth are ultimately created, and harmony is restored.

The combination of love and justice as care for the neighbor is at home in this composite narrative. Not only are individuals required by God to care for each other, but this caring, harmonious community is the very thing they were created for. The caring life of a people is what individuals are redeemed into, with the result that failure to

participate in this community of care is (at best) a failure to enjoy the abundant life that was promised, and (at worst) disobedience to God's calling. Having revisited the overarching narrative, it is now possible to review the biblical witness.

### *The Old Testament Witness*

From the beginning of Israel's life, justice was grounded in, and an instance of, love. This is most readily apparent in the Holiness Code, beginning in Leviticus 19. A few particular commandments recommend themselves. First, there is the command "Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against members of your community, but love your neighbor as yourself; I am Yahweh" (Lev 19:18). This commandment is the last in the series of commands that end in "I am Yahweh," and appears to serve as a summary of what precedes it. It is clear that love and justice are connected, because love is made a legal obligation; failure to love the neighbor is therefore unjust in the sense that it is illegal. Attention to the previous commandments in this series will show that the love commanded is care. First, the Israelites are commanded not to harvest to the edge of their fields, or to pick up what has fallen; these must be left for the poor and the foreigner (19:9-10). Significantly, the property rights of the people are limited by the needs of the neighbor. At first glance it appears that the owner of a field can justly do what he wishes with it, but if justice is an instance of care for the neighbor, then justice demands that the owner refrain from exercising his rights over the land to such an extent that there is nothing left for the needy. Later, the Israelites are forbidden to oppress or rob the neighbor, to withhold wages, or to "curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind" (19:13). Literal or not, the commandments not to curse the deaf or trip the blind serve as an illustration of the overall command not to oppress the neighbor. Oppression

here seems to involve taking advantage of or not respecting those over whom one has power, e.g. one's employees, or the physically handicapped, over whom almost anyone has power over. These things are clearly unloving, but they are unjust as well, it seems, because borrowing from Wolterstorff again, these ways of treating people do not fit their worth. Workers who have fulfilled their end of an agreement are worthy of their wages, and the physically handicapped are still worthy of respect as members of the covenant community. Compare this with the commandment to love the foreigner: "When a foreigner lives with you in your land, you must not oppress him. You must regard the foreigner who lives with you as the native-born among you. You are to love him as yourself, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt; I am Yahweh your God" (19:33-34). The thought seems to be that even aliens have their own worth—after all, God saw fit to redeem the children of Abraham when they were foreigners without a land—and have certain rights against mistreatment. Although it is not made explicit, the Holiness Code calls the Israelites to care for their neighbors, in part by honoring their rights and treating them in ways that befit their worth; this care is both love and justice.

The connection of love and justice is also evident in Old Testament descriptions of kingship, particularly where the phrase "to do justice and righteousness" appears. This phrase, "which usually describes the governing activity of kings, has to do with the restoration and preservation of social justice, in a positive and active sense, and not merely with personal piety or the avoidance of evil deeds."<sup>16</sup> The righteous king is one

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<sup>16</sup> Mark A. Seifrid "Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism." In *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, edited by D. A. Carson, Mark A. Seifrid, and Peter T. O'Brien, 1:415–42. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe 140. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001, 427.

who imitates the Divine King, and establishes right relationship among the people.<sup>17</sup> This ideal is most clearly expressed in descriptions of the coming Messianic king.<sup>18</sup> In Isaiah's prophecy, for example, the coming King's justice does not only involve striking down the wicked, but restoring loving relationship. Strife will cease between God's people, and there will be peace between Ephraim and Judah (Isa 11:11-13).

The Prophets are particularly helpful in illustrating the biblical connection between love and justice. The Prophets recalled the purpose of Abraham's election, "that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice" (Gen 18:19), and they "saw the fulfillment of this goal as the basis of the nation's existence."<sup>19</sup> This is illustrated by Isaiah's parable of the Vineyard. Isaiah describes Israel as God's vineyard, planted to bear the good fruit of justice and righteousness, but instead the vineyard has yielded the fruit of bloodshed and the cry of the oppressed (Isa 5:7). In particular, Isaiah addresses those Israelites who consolidate their wealth at the expense of others, adding "field to field until there is room for no one but you;" although they are "heroes at drinking wine and valiant at mixing drink, [they] acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of their rights!"<sup>20</sup> The sins which Isaiah condemns are not only neglecting God and God's commandments, but perpetrating injustice by showing disregard for the neighbor's needs and rights. Ezekiel offers another helpful example of the connection between righteousness, justice, and neighbor-love. He says: "If a man is righteous and does what is lawful and right. . .

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 425 – 7. Cf. Ps 85:9-13, 89:14, 97:1-2.

<sup>18</sup> Ps 72:1-3, 85:9-13; Jer 23:5, 23:15-16; Isa 11:1-9.

<sup>19</sup> Moshe Weinfeld. *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East*. Second. Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2000, 7.

<sup>20</sup> Isaiah 5:8-23.

does not defile his neighbor's wife. . . does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, does not take advance or accrued interest. . . such a one is righteous; he shall surely live, says the LORD God" (Ezekiel 18:5-6). This passage is significant because refraining from actively oppressing and defrauding the neighbors is insufficient for true righteousness: "The ideal of *performing justice and righteousness* is not confined to abstention from evil; it consists primarily in doing good: giving bread to the hungry and clothing to the naked."<sup>21</sup> Here, justice and love are combined as care for the neighbor. Finally, the biblical relationship of love to justice is thrown into sharp relief where Isaiah condemns unjust laws themselves. Isaiah condemns "[those] who make iniquitous decrees, who write oppressive statutes, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right. . ." (Isaiah 10:1-2). These are laws which subvert justice by subverting the cause of the poor. It is significant here that "subverting justice here does not refer to abusing the judicial system *per se*, but rather to the enactment of unjust laws."<sup>22</sup> In many systems, it would be impossible for a law to deprive someone of their right, because the laws of the community are what delineate the particular rights of individuals. In order for the laws themselves to be unjust, they must be subject to evaluation against some outside norm. It is clear that, considering the above examples, Isaiah considers these laws unjust because they are unloving. They are established for reasons other than care. However, it must be born in mind that the prophets were not interested in a political *theory*:

the social criticism of the prophets is not structural criticism; they condemn the moral choices of individuals, states and classes, but have nothing to say about. . .

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<sup>21</sup> Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel*, 18.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

the powers of the state or the class structure. To put it more sharply, the prophets do not condemn the existence of poverty and wealth side by side: they condemn the way in which wealth is extracted from those who are already poor. . . We simply have the announcement of divine judgment on injustice—that is, inhuman, unneighbourly conduct. . . The morality in question relates to the effects of social practices on individual victims, who are always in the forefront of the prophetic denunciations. . .<sup>23</sup>

That is, the prophets do not have in mind some abstract scheme of a loving legal order, viewed from some Rawlsian “initial position.” Rather, the Prophets condemn the concrete people, who, in passing these laws, are uncaring toward their concrete neighbors.

An interesting consequent of the Old Testament view of justice as care is that the establishment of justice is not merely the duty of the state, nor can it be achieved merely by legal means. It is incumbent upon the whole people of Israel:

Just as the ruler performs justice and righteousness towards his people, thereby freeing it from enslavement to man or to the state, so, according to the Israelite perception, the individual must do justice and righteousness to his neighbor and release him from his enslavement and anguish. ‘Justice and righteousness’ in the individual realm incorporates the duties between man and his neighbor, over which the monarch and the state generally have no control.<sup>24</sup>

The king and the powerful classes simply have a greater capacity to do harm or good to their neighbors, and this is why they draw the ire of the prophets. In summary then, in the Old Testament, justice is a particular condition of a relationship between concrete persons. It is present where members of God’s people give one another the care and respect that is due them. The Law and the Prophets take social realities such as slavery and poverty as given, and do not require the top-down abolishment of these or

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<sup>23</sup> Walter J. Houston. *Contending for Justice: Ideologies and Theologies of Social Justice in the Old Testament*. Library of Hebrew Bible / Old Testament Studies 428. London: T&T Clark, 2006, 96-7.

<sup>24</sup> Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel*, 17. Cf. Seifrid, “Righteousness Language,” 427; Houston, *Contending for Justice*, 82.

establishment of a utopian social system. Rather, their demand is the loving treatment of the neighbor in the midst of historical circumstances. The union of love and justice in the form of care is also visible in the pages of the New Testament, and this is where the present study now turns.

### *The New Testament Witness*

A brief review of relevant New Testament texts will show the continuing identification of justice, love, and care for the neighbor in the New Testament. The Parable of the Good Samaritan will serve as a good starting point.<sup>25</sup> In this familiar story, a man is robbed and left for dead on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho. Both a priest and a Levite pass the man by. However, a Samaritan comes along who takes pity on the man, treats his wounds, and puts him up in a local inn, promising to pay any extra charges when he returns. This parable clearly reflects a view of love as concrete care. Love is characterized here by the Samaritan's deeds, particularly by his willingness to enter into community with this wounded stranger: "Jesus emphasizes that the Samaritan picks up the Jew into his own arms, puts him on his own donkey and brings him into the community of the inn and the care of the innkeeper. More than that, he arranges community for him on into the future, paying for three weeks' care and saying he would return to pay what else remains."<sup>26</sup> However, the parable is not only about love, but also justice, and the scope of neighborly duties. The parable is clearly about justice because it is a midrash on Leviticus 19:18, the linchpin of Israel's understanding of justice in human

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<sup>25</sup> Lk 10:25-37.

<sup>26</sup> David P. Gushee and Glen H. Stassen. *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Second. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016, 337.

relationships.<sup>27</sup> The parable is also about the scope of neighborly obligations; it is an answer to the question “who is my neighbor?” and will be critical when the question is picked up in Chapter Two. Jesus offers his answer by asking his questioner which of the characters was a neighbor to the wounded man (Lk 10:36). Jesus is not implying that some people really are neighbors while others really are not. Rather, in asking this question, Jesus makes the point that the priest and the Levite were neighbors to this man, but failed to act like accordingly. The failure of the priest and the Levite to care for the wounded man is such a simultaneous failure of love and justice that they are no neighbors at all!

The biblical connection between love and justice is also visible in Paul’s letters. First, it appears in 1 Corinthians where Paul rebukes the church at Corinth for abusing the Lord’s supper. Throughout the letter, Paul is concerned with the influence of pagan culture on the Corinthian church. It is apparent in the introduction that the Corinthian Christians have adopted a status-conscious mindset which has resulted in the fragmentation of the community into factions who claim to follow some leader on the basis of his rhetorical ability.<sup>28</sup> Later in the letter, it appears that these foreign values have led to a division between rich and poor members of the church, which is reflected in their practice of the Lord’s Supper, which Paul addresses in 11:17-22. At the time of Paul’s writing, this rite was an actual meal taken together by the community, an exercise of solidarity as members of the new covenant. However, the Corinthian Christians had been misled by pagan culture, which required distinction and status to be recognized at the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 338.

<sup>28</sup> Richard B. Hays, “The Conversion of the Imagination: Scripture and Eschatology in 1 Corinthians.” *New Testament Studies* 45 (1999): 391–412, 402.

table. . . the more privileged members [of the church expected] to receive more and better food than others.”<sup>29</sup> And it appears that they did, with the rich members of the community bringing their own food and drink to the meal, while leaving the poor members to provide their own meager portions. Paul condemns this practice, and rebukes the Christian who overindulges while the brothers and sisters go hungry (11:21). Furthermore, Paul says that to observe the covenant meal in this way is not to observe the Lord’s Supper at all, for it humiliates the poor among them (11:20-22) and contradicts the values of the kingdom proclaimed by Christ.<sup>30</sup> This passage not only illustrates the Corinthians’ failure of love in letting their brothers and sisters go hungry. It also reveals a concern for justice in the sense of each being treated in a way that befits his or her worth, as Wolterstorff would put it. Paul does not use the language of justice in this passage, but the thought is related. This kind of behavior does not befit the rich Corinthians as Christians, and this kind of treatment does not fit the poor Corinthians’ worth as Christians, or as equal members of the new covenant community.

This connection is also visible in Paul’s letter to Philemon. In Paul’s shortest letter, he writes to a fellow Christian, Philemon, on behalf of Philemon’s runaway slave, Onesimus, who is also a Christian. Paul asks Philemon to welcome Onesimus back into the household, not as a slave, but as a “beloved brother” (verse 16). Here, as in the above passage, justice language is absent. However, the letter still demonstrates the relationship of love to justice. In particular, it is significant that Paul does not offer any warrant for Onesimus’ emancipation other than the fact that he is now a brother. Paul seems to

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<sup>29</sup> Richard B. Hays. *First Corinthians*. Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997, 194.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*; Bauckham, *James*, 137.

assume that slavery is simply incompatible with brotherhood, since he does not argue this point. If justice is honoring a person's worth and treating him in a way which befits his worth, then it is not just for Philemon to treat Onesimus, who is now a brother, like a slave.

The continued identification of love and justice in the New Testament is most explicit in James' letter to the Jewish believers in the diaspora. James' notorious discussion of faith and obedience begins with a condemnation of partiality toward the rich, which apparently had become a problem in some Jewish Christian communities (Jas 2:1-11). James offers the example of a rich man being given a place of honor in the Christians' assembly, while a poor man must stand along the wall or find a place on the floor. In doing this, they dishonor the poor man, failing to honor his equal worth as a member of the community, and in so doing they run afoul of the "royal law," the command to love one's neighbor as oneself. This commandment is the "royal law" in that it is the summary of the law as interpreted by Jesus, and this is the law of the Kingdom which he proclaimed (the commandment to love God is not mentioned here because it is assumed).<sup>31</sup> Therefore, when the Jewish Christian communities addressed by James show partiality to the rich among them and dishonor the poor, they not only run afoul of the specific commandment against partiality (Deut 16:19). They fail to love their neighbor, which is the heart or whole of the Law, and are therefore just as guilty as if they had committed adultery or murder (2:8-11). In other words, in this failure of love, they are as unjust as adulterers or murderers. Furthermore, when James famously declares that "faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead," it is in the context of a faith which permits one to

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<sup>31</sup> Bauckham, *James*, 142-3.

see a hungry, naked brother or sister and say “keep warm and eat your fill” without actually ministering to their needs (2:14-17). In general, then, it is clear that James envisions the kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus as one in which the poor are neither neglected nor disdained in favor of the rich and powerful. Rather, God’s people are those who care for one another, and seek the just treatment of their neighbors. Citizens of this kingdom are expected to carry out this vision of justice.<sup>32</sup>

In conclusion, while most generally agree that justice consists in giving each his or her due, problems arise when people are pressed to determine exactly what is due. The distinctive answer offered by the Christian Scriptures is that each person is due the caring love of his or her neighbors. This love will not only seek the flourishing of the neighbor, but will also try to secure just treatment of the neighbor—that is, treatment which befits the neighbor’s worth. This distinctive vision of justice has important implications for Christians who would see justice done in today’s complicated, connected world. The modern mind is tempted to conceive of justice as an idealized state of affairs or its approximation in practice. The abstract ideal may be Marxist, Utilitarian, Libertarian, or anything in between. What they all have in common is that they are achieved by public policy; indeed, only the power of the state is sufficient to order large societies properly. However, when justice demands concrete care between persons, then the power of the state is no longer of primary concern. Public policy can certainly prove to be an obstacle to loving the neighbor, and individuals in power might be themselves guilty of injustice for knowingly enacting an un-loving law. However, if justice demands care, then state

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<sup>32</sup> Joel Weaver. “The Heart of the Law: Love Your Neighbor (Jas 2:8-13).” *Review and Expositor* 108 (Summer 2011): 445–51, 449; Bauckham, *James*, 143.

intervention (while often necessary) is not sufficient to secure justice because the state cannot provide the care which is only manifest in relationships between persons.

When faced with the daunting challenge posed by structural justice, Christians who would see justice done cannot only concern themselves with the policies of impersonal bodies such as states or corporations or shift the moral burden onto these bodies. While it might be necessary to change public or private policy, the biblical standard of justice as care is one that these policies alone cannot meet. Rather, in all this, it is necessary to attend to the concrete relationships between the people—perpetrators, participants, and victims—involved. The next chapter of this inquiry will deal with these relationships and explore the ways that social structures can mediate relationships between concrete neighbors who may never meet face to face.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Suburban Structural Injustice

The previous chapter argued that the biblical ideal of justice is a condition of concrete relationships—rather than an abstract order of society—in which one person cares for another. That is, each member seeks the well-being of the others and sees to it that they are treated as befits their worth. The next question to ask is: who then is my neighbor? This chapter answers the question by arguing that the neighbor is anyone whom one’s life and choices affect. The argument will explore the ways that social structures, at the local level, can connect Christians to their neighbors and establish an obligation of neighborly conduct toward them. It will follow an ordinary suburban Christian on a trip to the grocery store and examine three structures which she will encounter along the way: suburban sprawl, big-box chain stores, and industrial agriculture.

#### *Structural Justice*

For the present purpose, “social structure” will henceforth refer to any pattern of social interaction that is both constrained by the actions of individuals and constrains these actions in turn. While this concept is broad, one unifying assumption persists:

Individual choices are shaped and circumscribed by the social environment, because social groups, although constituted by the social activities of individuals, are not a direct result of the wishes and intentions of the individual members. The notion of social structure implies, in other words, that human beings are not completely free and autonomous in their choices and actions but are instead

constrained by the social world they inhabit and the social relations they form with one another.<sup>1</sup>

Along these lines, markets are examples of social structures. Individuals are constrained in what they buy, sell, or trade by what they think “the market” will do, and what the market “does” is simultaneously determined by what individuals buy, sell, and trade.

Along these lines social structures have important implications for the Christian who would practice justice, because social structures mediate relationship between individuals who may never meet, and allow these individuals to greatly affect each other’s lives, for good or ill. In this way social structures complicate the question of “who is my neighbor?”

In the Old Testament, the term “neighbor” appears at first glance to apply to members of one’s own ingroup. However, the boundaries of the ingroup shift with one’s frame of reference: For all Israel, foreigners were outgroup; for Galileans, the people of Judea and Perea as well as Samaria were outgroup; for the people of Nazareth, other villages and towns were outgroup.”<sup>2</sup> The definition of the ingroup is so flexible that even strangers, aliens resident within Israel, have a right to the same treatment as native Israelites (Ex 22:21, Lev 19:34, Deut 10:19). It is thus more appropriate to define neighbors as “persons who live in proximity and interact in terms of their mutual attachments and entitlements.”<sup>3</sup>

The pattern continues in the New Testament, and the command is universalized by Jesus’ injunction to love even one’s enemy (Matt 5:43). In the parable of the Good

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<sup>1</sup> “Social Structure.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Encyclopaedia Britannica, inc., June 8, 2015. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-structure/Structure-and-social-organization>.

<sup>2</sup> Malina, Bruce. “NEIGHBOR.” *New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2009, 252.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Samaritan, the Samaritan is the victim's neighbor—despite ethnic hostilities—simply because the two cross paths. He is a *good* neighbor because he attends to the needs of his fellow man. James' epistle and Paul's epistle to the Christians in Rome both reflect similar outlooks. James argues that whoever comes into the Christians' assembly, whether rich or poor, deserves the same neighborly conduct; Paul commands the Roman Christians to love their neighbors of various ethnicities in a bustling metropolitan context.<sup>4</sup> Cynthia Moe-Lobeda sums up: "neighbor-love, as seen in Jesus' life and teaching, pertains to whomever one's life in some way impacts or whose life impacts one's own."<sup>5</sup> The scriptural witness does not present an obligation to neighbor that is so universalized as to become utterly abstract. Rather, in the Old and New Testaments it is clear that Christians are to love their actual neighbors, the people with whom they really interact. This obligation is complicated by the fact that people can make decisions without knowing what effects these will have upon their neighbors, particularly when these choices are made within the constraints of larger structures. In order to explore the ways that the Christian's participation in social structures can make the Christian complicit in injustice, the argument now turns to examine three common structures in which an ordinary suburban Christian will participate during a routine trip to the grocery store.

### *Suburban Sprawl*

As soon as the suburban Christian leaves her subdivision on the way to the store, she will encounter suburban sprawl. The terms "urban sprawl" and "suburban sprawl" are

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<sup>4</sup> Powery, Emerson. "Under the Gaze of the Empire: Who Is My Neighbor?" *Interpretation* 62, no. 2 (April 2008): 134–44, 140-1.

<sup>5</sup> Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, 177. Italics removed.

often used interchangeably. Henceforth, “urban sprawl” will refer to the process by which cities grow beyond their initial boundaries. This process is as old as cities themselves, and has always followed innovations in transportation. For example, Blaise Pascal enabled Parisians to sprawl out to the edges of the city when he invented the horse-drawn omnibus in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup> “Suburban sprawl” will refer henceforth to a dispersed urban landscape, also called “edge cities,” which is characterized by automobile dependency, disproportionately low population density, and the presence of residential and business centers well outside the bounds of older urban centers, which has come to characterize American metropolitan areas since the 1950s<sup>7</sup>. Many often assume that this insular geography, dominated by big-box shopping centers separated by seas of parking, is the inevitable product of economic development. The average person, while he or she might regret the fact that he or she cannot run the most basic of errands without driving, supposes that this is simply the price of living the American dream. However, this common form of urban geography is the result of individual choices, market forces, and public policy; in this sense the physical structure of the suburban sprawl is itself a social structure.

Urban sprawl is largely the result of specific public policy choices, themselves influenced by corporate special interests, which in turn are influenced by consumer preferences. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century this process was driven by rapid economic growth, which was followed by increasing consumer demand for a suburban lifestyle which offered the

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<sup>6</sup> Edward Glaeser. *Triumph of the City: How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier, and Happier*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2011, 169.

<sup>7</sup> Bowen, William M., and Deborah Kimble. “Edge Cities in Context.” In *Beyond Edge Cities*, 3–21. Contemporary Urban Affairs 2. New York: Garland Publishing, 1997.

convenience of city life but without the high cost.<sup>8</sup> The process began to accelerate in the 1920s when the automobile exploded in popularity.<sup>9</sup> When increasingly-common car traffic began to pose a danger to pedestrians and other forms of traffic on city streets, the public pushed for regulation of car traffic, only to be met with defeat at the hands of the automobile industry:

The industry and its auto club supporters pressed their agenda in newspapers and city halls. They hired their own engineers to propose designs for city streets that served the needs of motorists first. They stacked the national transportation-safety conferences staged by U.S. commerce secretary Herbert Hoover in the 1920s, creating model traffic regulations that forced pedestrians and transit users into regimented corners of the street such as crosswalks and streetcar boarding areas. When the regulations were published in 1928, they were adopted by hundreds of cities eager to embrace what seemed like a forward-thinking approach to mobility. They set a cultural standard that has influenced lawmakers for decades.<sup>10</sup>

Specifically, in the 1920s they established the norm, which is enshrined by local traffic laws today, that city streets now belonged to cars, rather than people. Then, the 1930s saw the birth of the field of traffic safety engineering. The influential Institute of Traffic Engineers (ITE) began to advocate for wider lanes and parking minimums to facilitate faster, safer, and more convenient travel by car. By 1951 parking mandates recommended by the ITE were in effect in 71% of American cities.<sup>11</sup> The New Deal further pushed the nation toward automobile dependence by using federal funds to support the building of highways, while privately-owned streetcars were ineligible for aid.<sup>12</sup> The trend of car ownership continued to grow after WWII as rapid economic growth rendered cars more

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>10</sup> Montgomery, *Happy City*, 72; Cf. Benjamin Ross. *Dead End: Suburban Sprawl and the Rebirth of American Urbanism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014, 31.

<sup>11</sup> Ross, *Dead End*, 52.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 47.

affordable. In 1956 the auto lobby convinced Congress to pay for 90% of the 41,000 mile Interstate Highway system:

The new roads were called the interstate highway system, but they served local commuting as much as long-distance travel. The damage done to cities was twofold. By subsidizing long-distance commuting, expressways accelerated the stampede to the suburbs and sucked life out of urban neighborhoods. Beltways around cities, justified as bypasses to divert through traffic past congested downtowns, rapidly became crowded rush-hour routes. Meanwhile, the new highways devastated neighborhoods, tearing down what lay directly in their path and spreading a pall of noise, soot, and fumes over what remained standing.<sup>13</sup>

Today suburban sprawl is essentially mandated by local zoning ordinances which prescribe minimum parking amounts for new buildings, and which often prohibit mixed-use development by segregating residential and commercial areas, especially further away from traditional city centers. This combination of local, state, and federal policy decisions over the past century amount to a massive *de facto* subsidy of the automobile which ensures its status as Americans' primary mode of transport. While this program was influenced by corporate special interests, it was nevertheless supported by the public. As Edward Glaeser puts it: "if there was a conspiracy [between the auto industry and the government], then it operated in full view and with abundant popular support. Americans loved their cars and were happy to spend billions creating a fast network of highways."<sup>14</sup>

The scale and prevalence of suburban sprawl have increased drastically in the past half century. The result of this is an increasing public awareness of sprawl's effects on its inhabitants. Of course, car dependency contributes to the sedentary lifestyle that concerns many public health experts, and the fossil fuels which make sprawling life possible represent a huge ecological danger. However, the social and financial costs that this

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>14</sup> Edward Glaeser. *Triumph of the City: How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier, and Happier*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2011, 173.

urban form imposes on its inhabitants often go unnoticed. By attending to these it becomes clear that the physical structure of urban sprawl is in fact a social structure as well, with ongoing implications for Christians who would practice justice in their own city.

The sheer size and low-density of sprawling development has social implications, threatening to isolate people from their neighbors and fellow citizens. According to U.S. Census data, the average density of urban areas, including cities, suburbs, and towns, has dropped from about 10 persons per acre in 1920 to 4 persons per acre in 1990; in housing developments built since 1960 the average density is as little as two people per acre.<sup>15</sup> Living in these kinds of neighborhoods greatly reduces the chances of spontaneously interacting with one's neighbors, and it is these very interactions which generally produce the feeling of being enveloped by and belonging to a community. Furthermore, since residents of sprawled cities must get in their cars to get anywhere, even if they run into a neighbor on the road, they are both insulated by their cars and cannot interact in any way that is more significant than a friendly wave.

It may be objected that living in a city built for cars is actually better for those who rely on deliberate social interaction rather than spontaneous interaction. These people are free to go wherever they want, whenever they want, to socialize with anyone and everyone. However Charles Montgomery points out that sheer distance can and does limit the freedom promised by widespread automobile ownership:

Distance raises the cost of every friendly encounter. . . First we both must chart the geographic area each of us can reach in that time. Then we must see if our territories intersect. Then we need to figure out if the journey to and from a rendezvous point in that zone leaves enough time to make the meeting

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<sup>15</sup> Jeremy Rifkin. *The European Dream: How Europe's Vision of the Future Is Quietly Eclipsing the American Dream*. New York: Tarcher Penguin, 2004, 152-3.

worthwhile. Each of us has an envelope of possibility on the space-time continuum. The more our envelopes intersect, the easier it is for us to actually see each other in person.<sup>16</sup>

Of course this calculus still takes place when people want to socialize in dense, walkable cities. However, the point stands that even in a neighborhood with perfect infrastructure, sheer physical distance remains a limiting factor for neighborly social interaction. A larger social problem emerges from this: namely, infrequent interaction with one's neighbors (or anyone for that matter) prevents familiarity with them. The simple fact is that neighbors who do not interact are not neighbors, but strangers. Montgomery offers the anecdotal example of Randy, who bought an large home at a low price on the far suburban edge:

We may live among noble, honest, wallet-returning people, yet if we do not experience positive social interactions with them, we are unlikely to build those bonds of trust. . . . Most of the adults drove out of Mountain House [Randy's neighborhood] before dawn and returned after dark, cruising, one by one, into their garages and closing the doors behind them. The only people left during the day were the kids. So Randy's lack of trust in his neighbors was at least partly artificially induced. In stretching his daily routine, the city had sucked much of the spectrum of casual social contact right out of the neighborhood.<sup>17</sup>

This anecdotal evidence is supported by much of the empirical literature. In his study, Freeman found that “at least one characteristic of sprawl—automobile hegemony—is inimical to neighborhood social ties.”<sup>18</sup> Kevin Leyden confirms that “the way we design and build our communities and neighborhoods affects social capital and thus physical and mental health. The results [of his study] indicate that residents living in walkable, mixed-

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<sup>16</sup> Montgomery, Charles. *Happy City: Transforming Our Lives Through Urban Design*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014, 57.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 52 – 53.

<sup>18</sup> Freeman, Lance. “The Effects of Sprawl on Neighborhood Social Ties: An Explanatory Analysis.” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 67, no. 1 (2001): 69–77, 74. Freeman’s study is now somewhat dated, but the pattern of sprawling development—and the fact of automobile dependence—which he studied remains essentially unchanged in most of the nation’s large urban areas.

use neighborhoods are more likely to know their neighbors, to participate politically, to trust others, and to be involved socially.”<sup>19</sup> Of course, lower-than-average population density is not the root of all evils. It must be born in mind that sprawled neighborhoods vary wildly in their construction and demographic makeup. A sprawling subdivision may be inhabited by rich or poor, black or white, religious or secular, etc. Furthermore, areas characterized by the word “sprawl” can have ample greenspace or be dominated by parking lots; they can be home to thriving or withered civic institutions. Urban form is only one factor among many which determine the cohesion and health of neighborhood communities.<sup>20</sup> For example, Mazumdar *et al.* found that even in low-density areas, access to destinations (like parks or other such public meeting places) positively affected social cohesion.<sup>21</sup> On the whole then, it is clear that automobile dependence as a result of urban sprawl poses a challenge to social interaction and community; in other words, urban sprawl poses a challenge to the practice of neighborhood.

Suburban sprawl also has significant financial effects on its inhabitants, which are more readily observable and quantifiable than its social costs. First, the infrastructure necessary to accommodate sprawling cities is expensive and this places a burden on taxpayers at the local and federal level. More significantly for present purposes, automobile-dependent lifestyles place a huge financial burden on the average suburban family. Montgomery reports that by 2011 the average family of four in the U.S. spent

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<sup>19</sup> Leyden, Kevin M. “Social Capital and the Built Environment: The Importance of Walkable Neighborhoods.” *American Journal of Public Health* 93, no. 9 (September 2003): 1546–51, 1550.

<sup>20</sup> Nguyen, Doan. “Evidence of the Impacts of Urban Sprawl on Social Capital.” *Environment and Planning B: Urban Analytics and City Science* 37, no. 4 (2010): 610–27.

<sup>21</sup> Mazumdar, Soumya, Vincent Learnihan, Thomas Cochrane, and Rachel Davey. “The Built Environment and Social Capital: A Systematic Review.” *Environment and Behavior*, January 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916516687343>, 34.

more on transportation than on taxes and healthcare combined.<sup>22</sup> Unlike housing, the cost of owning and operating multiple automobiles is not proportionate to income; therefore, this cost is a disproportionate burden on the poor, who often must follow job opportunities to the sprawling outskirts of metropolitan areas.<sup>23</sup> The Center for Neighborhood Technology offered this analysis in 2010:

. . . transportation costs of working families, defined as those households earning \$20-50,000 annually, can equal or exceed housing costs on the urban fringe. The burden of needing to own one more vehicle per household is severe for these families--vehicle ownership alone averages more than \$5,000 per year, while fuel and maintenance can add another \$2,000 per vehicle annually. At a fundamental level, such high costs attached to assets that depreciate in value limit the ability of these families to save and build wealth.<sup>24</sup>

Not only does the physical structure of urban sprawl affect the social cohesion of neighborhoods by forcing people to drive everywhere, but it also significantly affects the financial plight of the working class. In addition to this local injustice, widespread automobile dependence is a significant ecological threat. The effects of fossil-fuel burning on atmospheric greenhouse gas levels are well-documented; furthermore, the effects of anthropogenic climate change will disproportionately be born by the global poor, who are not responsible for this ecological damage.<sup>25</sup>

In the final analysis, urban sprawl constitutes a social structure. It is the result of past and present choices by individuals, businesses, and government. However, at the same time, sprawl constrains the choices of these different spheres. Individuals who wish

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<sup>22</sup> Montgomery, *Happy City*, 49.

<sup>23</sup> Kneebone, Elizabeth, and Emily Garr. "The Suburbanization of Poverty: Trends in Metropolitan America, 2000 to 2008." Metropolitan Opportunity Series. Washington D.C.: Brookings, 2010, 14.

<sup>24</sup> "Penny Wise Pound Fuelish: New Measures of Housing + Transportation Affordability." Chicago: Center for Neighborhood Technology, 2010, 9.

<sup>25</sup> Cynthia Moe-Lobeda. *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013, 27-43.

to buy a home generally have no choice but to buy homes in sprawled subdivisions, because this is the only thing on offer in growing areas with strong job markets; residential and commercial builders cannot build anything but sprawling subdivisions and shopping centers because of zoning ordinances and existing infrastructure; cities hesitate to change zoning laws because they fear it would deter these developers and other businesses from operating in the area.

Furthermore, despite eroding social cohesion, suburban sprawl *as a social structure* connects neighbors who have never met, and allows the choices of one to affect the life of the other in a real way. Persons who live, work, and play in sprawling metropolitan areas contribute to the structure simply by living their lives. They send signals to builders, businesses, and policymakers that sprawl is still a viable urban form, by reassuring them that they will continue to buy homes in areas dominated by parking lots, that they will continue to patronize businesses accessible only by car, that public investment in transit would be unnecessary. Of course many people contribute in more direct ways. Local government officials who plan and zone sprawling cities and developers who build vast subdivisions or office parks make choices that directly contribute to sprawl; however, this physical and social structure cannot be attributed to the choices of any one individual or institution.

Because, by their everyday choices, everyone shares varying degrees of responsibility for the structure of urban sprawl, they also share varying degrees of responsibility for the effects of this structure on their neighbors. These effects include social isolation and unnecessary financial strain, as demonstrated above. The confounding question facing the Christian is: *how* does one love these neighbors? The

average suburban Christian never chose to create a physical environment inimical to friendly interaction and neighborhood, nor did this Christian choose to require her poor neighbors to own and operate one or more expensive automobiles as a prerequisite to participation in society. (Interestingly, if a law to this effect were proposed at any level, it would be rejected as a drastic overreach of government.) However, by her very participation in suburban life, she has made choices which had these effects on her neighbor.

### *Big-Box Retail: Walmart*

When she gets out of her car, the suburban Christian will, in all likelihood, walk into one of several “big-box” chain retailers like Walmart to do her grocery shopping. Such national chains are a significant social structure, affecting the lives of millions of Americans, and mediating relationship between millions of anonymous neighbors in the process. Although chain retailers have existed in America for more than a century, since 1990 they have come to dominate the suburban retail landscape in unprecedented ways. For example, in 1996, the top ten retail chains accounted for 15% of consumer spending, but in 2005, the top ten retailers captured almost 30 percent of the \$2.3 trillion that American shoppers spend in stores.<sup>26</sup>

Because they have the potential to dominate local and regional markets, national chain stores have drawn the ire of many critics. Opponents argue that these chains drive local retailers and producers of goods out of business and “killing” once-thriving downtowns. Big-box retailers are said to drive out local businesses by taking advantage

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<sup>26</sup> Stacy Mitchell. *Big-Box Swindle: The True Cost of Mega-Retailers and the Fight for America's Independent Businesses*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2006, 9-10.

of economies of scale, and simply out-competing “Mom and Pop” shops.<sup>27</sup> However, Mitchell points out that the presence of chain stores presents a challenge to more than just local retail. By driving out local retail, these chains threaten the other businesses which exist in symbiosis with the retail stores:

The list of local professional services that independent retailers require and that chains do not is long. It includes attorneys, accountants, designers of Web sites and advertisements, printers, and marketing firms. . . the work is usually carried out locally and the income earned accrues to someone who lives in the community. This is not the case with chains, which house these functions at their corporate headquarters. Indeed, the whole point of a chain is to consolidate as many operations as possible and to keep local spending to a minimum.<sup>28</sup>

The minimization of local spending is the source of even more serious accusations against these chains. As profit-driven enterprises, the explicit purpose of national chains is to extract as much wealth as possible from any given community, and give it to shareholders, while returning as little wealth as possible, in the form of taxes and wages. Along these lines, critics like Mitchell do not only condemn these chains as ruthless competitors, but as perpetrators of domestic colonialism. After gutting the local economy, it is argued that these chains replace it with an economy that is ultimately extractive:

Communities dominated by global retail chains function in many respects like the colonial economies of the European superpowers, which were organized not to foster local development and prosperity but to enrich the colonizers. In Africa, the superpowers built railroads that, rather than forming links between cities, ran in single lines from the interior to the coast. The aim was to extract resources. So it is with today's corporate superpowers: they restructure local economies according to their own needs, not to spur internal development. They sever the webs of exchange that link local businesses with one another and with residents, and replace them with a single-track economy over which the community has little control and where wealth flows in only one direction: out."

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 40-1.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 42.

On the other hand, many proponents argue that these stores are doing a public service by providing consumers with an ever-increasing variety of goods at an ever-decreasing cost. In this way, stores like Walmart are increasing quality of life in the communities they serve. In one such apologetic for the company, Morillo et al write:

Walmart is not only accused of, but actually does bankrupt small business. . . . Should this be held against the giant retailer, or in favor of it? The latter, clearly. . . . The ethic of the market place is that those who serve the consumer well remain in business, and those who do not must seek other employment, hopefully that which will satisfy customers. Walmart can better serve the populace than the horse and buggy retailers who came before it; that is what economic progress is all about.<sup>29</sup>

The empirical evidence is ambiguous with regard to Walmart and other chains' benefit to the economy as a whole, because their overall impact may be parsed in so many ways: effect on the local labor market, effect on locally-owned retail, effect on retail overall, etc.<sup>30</sup> However, it does appear that big-box stores like Walmart and other chains, at the very least, are detrimental to the local economy *as* a local economy. That is to say, these corporations tend to reduce the self-sustaining productive capacity of the communities in which they operate. First, it is clear that while it can lower prices for consumer goods, Walmart does in fact out-compete and drive locally-owned businesses out of their communities.<sup>31</sup> Second, economic “growth” due to the arrival of retail chains—increasing retail taxes and jobs created—do not reflect real losses that might occur in other cities or regions. Nor does it reflect real growth: “[retail development] does not generate new economic activity. Opening a Target superstore will not increase the amount of milk

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<sup>29</sup> Juan Morillo, Callie McNally, and Walter E. Block. “The Real Walmart.” *Business and Society Review* 120, no. 3 (2015): 385–408, 394.

<sup>30</sup> Bonanno, Alessandro, and Stephan J. Goetz. “WalMart and Local Economic Development: A Survey.” *Economic Development Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (2012): 285–97.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

people drink or how many rolls of paper towels they use. . . The size of the retail spending ‘pie’ is a function of how many people live in the area and how much income they have. Building new stores does not expand the pie; it only reappropriates it.<sup>32</sup> However much retail activity goes on in a region, if that region is dominated by national chains, the majority of the money spent on retail does in fact leave the previously self-sustaining local economy, and is transferred to shareholders, wherever they may be. This is perhaps one of the factors contributing to Goetz and Swaminathan’s findings that between 1987 and 1999, poverty rates and rates of food stamp usage increased in counties with more Walmart stores, other factors remaining constant.<sup>33</sup>

Even if one ignores the challenges posed to the local economy by these stores, there is no guarantee that these chains will stay in a community for any length of time, nor that the community will continue to enjoy their many touted benefits. In fact, chains like Walmart demonstrate a striking disregard for the communities they serve, and will leave just as soon as relocation or consolidation promise a larger profit margin. Ellen Dunham-Jones reports that “Wal-Mart routinely closes fifty to one hundred stores a year in order to ‘consolidate’ four or five stores’ trade areas into a larger supercenter.”<sup>34</sup> In many cases, these consolidated supercenters are as far as 40 miles—a prohibitive distance for most customers—from the communities which had been served by the smaller, now-defunct stores.<sup>35</sup> In summary, Walmart appears to benefit individuals as consumers, but not as participants in a local economy.

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<sup>32</sup> Mitchell, *Big-Box Swindle*, 36.

<sup>33</sup> Stephan J. Goetz and Hema Swaminathan. “Wal-Mart and County-Wide Poverty.” *Social Science Quarterly* 87, no. 2 (2006): 211–26, 220-2.

<sup>34</sup> Ellen Dunham-Jones and June Williamson. *Retrofitting Suburbia: Urban Design Solutions for Redesigning Suburbs*. Updated. Hoboken: Wiley, 2011, 67;

<sup>35</sup> Ellen Dunham-Jones, “Temporary Contracts: On the Economy of the Post-Industrial Landscape.” *Harvard Design Magazine*, Fall 1997, 4-5.

It is clear that the big-box landscape is the result of market forces and the preference of individual behavior, but this social structure is also the result of public policy. Retailers receive millions in public subsidies every year, in various forms<sup>36</sup>. These subsidies are often from city governments, who offer big-box chains and retail park developers millions in order to bring retail “growth” and increased tax revenue into the community. Thus, the ubiquitous chain store is every bit the complex social structure that the sprawling urban form is: both are the result of complex interactions between public policy, corporate policy, and individual choices. Both structures also constrain individual choice; once locally-owned businesses are driven out of town, the Christian has no choice but to participate in the structure by shopping at Walmart or similar stores to meet her basic needs. The primary difference here is that big-box chain stores threaten her neighbors’, and indeed the entire neighborhood’s, livelihood and stability in more drastic ways than urban sprawl does.

### *Industrial Agriculture*

One the Christian walks into her local Walmart supercenter, she will most likely buy at least some processed foods that make use of corn grown in the American Midwest, also known as the “Corn Belt.” In doing so, she participates in the third and final social structure briefly examined in this chapter: industrial agriculture. “Industrial agriculture” here refers to intensive for-profit agriculture which is done at a large scale and makes heavy use of mechanization and artificial “inputs” like fertilizers and pesticides. The industrialization of American agriculture occurred over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but accelerated after WWII. Initially, farmers had adopted mechanization and artificial

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<sup>36</sup> Mitchell, *Big-Box Swindle*, 163-7.

fertilizers to make up for soil exhaustion which they caused by their overly-intensive cultivation.<sup>37</sup> After WWII, however, Midwestern farming came to be dominated by truly industrial agriculture. Economies of scale enabled industrial farmers to consolidate vast swathes of land and grow vast monocultures of corn and soybeans in order to meet the growing demands of the fast food and food processing industries.<sup>38</sup> In addition to this, during the 1970s, Congress passed several bills which incentivized growers to produce as much corn and soy as possible.<sup>39</sup> The majority of American agriculture became dependent upon inputs like nitrogen and phosphorus fertilizers and artificial pesticides in order to increase production, and it remains dependent upon these inputs today.

In the same decade, scientists became aware of reports from fishermen along the Gulf of Mexico that every summer, the waters were nearly depleted of fish. Every summer, shrimpers and fishers “had been forced to motor farther and farther out for their catch. Said one boat captain, ‘Drop a line in the water and your bait rots.’”<sup>40</sup> What they had discovered was that the water nearest the Mississippi Delta had become hypoxic—having insufficient oxygen saturation to support fish.

It was later determined that these hypoxic conditions were caused by runoff of fertilizers from industrial agriculture in the Corn Belt, which straddles the Mississippi River Basin.<sup>41</sup> The excess nutrients present in these fertilizers kickstart a process known

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<sup>37</sup> Turner, R. Eugene, Nancy N. Rabalais, Donald Scavia, and Greg F. McIsaac. “Corn Belt Landscapes and Hypoxia of the Gulf of Mexico.” In *From the Corn Belt to the Gulf: Societal and Environmental Implications of Alternative Agricultural Futures*, edited by Joan Iverson Nassauer, Mary V. Santelmann, and Donald Scavia, 10–27. Washington D.C.: RFF Press, 2007, 13-5.

<sup>38</sup> Jack Davis. “Booms, Blooms, and Doom: The Life of the Gulf of Mexico Dead Zone.” *The Alabama Review* 70, no. 2 (April 2017): 156–70, 163-7.

<sup>39</sup> Anthony Kammer. “Cornography: Perverse Incentives and the United States Corn Subsidy.” *Journal of Food Law & Policy* 8, no. 1 (2012): 1–63, 15-6.

<sup>40</sup> Davis, “Booms, Blooms, and Doom,” 159.

<sup>41</sup> Turner et al., “Corn Belt Landscapes,” 17; “Dead Zones: Hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico.” National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, July 2009. <http://noaa.gov>.

as eutrophication: excess nutrients, namely phosphorus and nitrogen, are quickly used to feed a booming phytoplankton population. The food web is not yet adapted to this new, larger phytoplankton population, so that as they die, they form an excess of uneaten organic matter along the seafloor. This organic matter is decomposed by a now-booming population of anaerobic bacteria, whose metabolism results in oxygen depletion in the water.<sup>42</sup> The creation of such a “dead zone” results in a large die-off of marine life, as well as a migration toward more oxygen-rich waters on the edge of the dead zone. The perennial recurrence of the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico represents a consistent strain on the Gulf fishing industry, as reflected by rising prices of large shrimp during the summer, when the dead zone appears.<sup>43</sup> Thus, by shopping at a Walmart store in Texas, buying corn-based food ultimately grown in Iowa, the average suburban Christian contributes to a structure which threatens the livelihood of a fishery employee in Louisiana. This final example demonstrates the impacts that the average Christian can have on neighbors all over the country, whom she has never met, simply by participating in the post-industrial suburban economy.

It should be noted here that these complex political, economic, and social phenomena have only been given a cursory analysis, and the above is not presented as a comprehensive evaluation of urban sprawl, Walmart or other big-box stores, or the American agricultural complex. They have only been treated in enough detail to show that these everyday structures mediate a relationship between concrete persons,

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<sup>42</sup> Nancy N. Rabalais, R. Eugene Turner, and William J. Wiseman Jr. “Gulf of Mexico Hypoxia, a.k.a. ‘The Dead Zone.’” *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* 33 (2002): 235–63, 238.

<sup>43</sup> Smith, Martin D., Atle Oglend, A. Justin Kirkpatrick, Frank Asche, Lori S. Benneer, J. Kevin Craig, and James M. Nance. “Seafood Prices Reveal Impacts of a Major Ecological Disturbance.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114, no. 7 (February 2017): 1512–7, 1514.

establishing neighborly obligations. That is, the actions of the individual on one end affect the choices and opportunities available to the individual on the other end. One need not agree with the negative appraisals offered above in order to accept the argument that those who participate in these structures are neighbors in the biblical sense by virtue of their interaction. That being said, the Christian is morally obligated to love those who are co-participants in these structures, to care for them by treating them justly.

Because the effects of these large, complex social structures can be a great boon to some at the expense of others, it is possible and indeed necessary to evaluate them in terms of justice. If these structures work toward the end of care for the neighbor, they may be considered just, while they may be considered unjust if they stand athwart this end. For example, then, insofar as a social structure like suburban sprawl has disproportionate negative effects on the poor or infirm (who, for example, cannot afford to drive or are physically unable, and therefore cannot participate fully in suburban society) it is reasonable to say that this state of affairs constitutes a structural injustice. Further, the domination of the domestic economy by retail chains and the environmental damage caused by industrial agriculture also constitute structural injustice insofar as they allow some people to profit and flourish at the expense of their neighbors' well-being. The immense question facing the American Christian today is: how can one love her neighbor when she is complicit in injustice merely by buying groceries?

The next chapter will preface the answer with two further questions. First: what kind of church would be able to discern a faithful solution to this problem? Second: how does a response to structural injustice fit within the larger mission and daily life of the church?

## CHAPTER THREE

### Practicing for Justice

The previous chapters have explored what it means for Christians to treat their neighbors with justice, as well as the ethical implications of participation in structures which harm their neighbors. This chapter will attempt to lay a theological groundwork for the tentative solutions which will be proposed in Chapter Four, by exploring the joint questions of what *kind* of church would be able to resist structural injustice and whether the American church is up to this task. The discussion will answer the first question by turning to the work of Stanley Hauerwas and James McClendon, who argue that the church is called to be a community which embodies peace, love, and justice. Their work offers an important corrective to individualistic readings of the gospel which will become significant at the end of the chapter. To answer the second question, the discussion will draw upon the work of Alasdair MacIntyre to explore the relationship between narrative, practices, and virtues. Finally, these concepts will be used to evaluate contemporary “seeker friendly” church practices and argue that these practices cultivate consumerism and individualism which are foreign to the gospel and leave the church ill-equipped to resist structural injustice.

#### *The Peaceable Community*

Stanley Hauerwas and James Wm. McClendon Jr. have devoted much of their work to the ethical significance of the church for Christians, arguing that the church is called to be the community which embodies the gospel and thus witnesses to the

inbreaking of the Kingdom of God into the world. There is not room here for an exhaustive discussion of their ecclesiology, but a summary of their common emphases will suffice. Both Hauerwas and McClendon situate the church within the larger narrative of God's dealings with Israel. The ecclesiology of Hauerwas and McClendon may be broadly understood within the A-B-A' narrative as characterized by McKnight in Chapter One; the gospel is the story of God coming to rule creation through God's people living in obedience to their divine King.<sup>1</sup> This people is called to live as God would have all peoples live, thus reflecting God's goodness and glory into the world.

The story of God's people begins with the election of Abraham. McClendon remarks the creation narrative does not end in the Garden of Eden, but with the creation of a people who will serve God's purposes in creation.<sup>2</sup> Generations later, when this people is redeemed out of Egypt, they are given the Law at Sinai in order that they may be a holy nation (Ex 19:3-6). This call to holiness is not an arbitrary injunction, but a call to be like God (Lev 19:2). To be like God is an organic and essential part of being God's people:

Therefore the task for Israel, indeed the very thing that makes Israel Israel, is to walk in the way of the Lord, that is, to imitate God through the means of the prophet (Torah), the king (Sonship), and the priest (Knowledge.) To walk in the way of God meant that Israel must be obedient to the commands (Deut. 8:6); to fear the Lord (Deut. 10:12); to love the Lord (Deut. 11:22); and thus to be perfect in the way (Gen. 17:1). . . Moreover Israel has the knowledge of the Lord as a just and compassionate God and so Israel too must act justly and with compassion. (Jer. 22:16).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> McKnight, *Kingdom Conspiracy*, 34-5.

<sup>2</sup> James McClendon. *Doctrine: Systematic Theology*. Second. Vol. 2. 3 vols. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012, 179.

<sup>3</sup> Stanley Hauerwas. *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983, 77.

This task does not change with the coming of Christ. Rather, God's people are now called to be like God as revealed in Christ, rather than in the Law: "It is against this background that the early Christians came to understand and believe in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. They had found a continuation of Israel's vocation to imitate God and thus in a decisive way to depict God's kingdom for the world."<sup>4</sup> Jesus also embodied the distinctive nature of God's reign, establishing his rule through vulnerable love and obedience to God rather than coercion or violence. Christian claims about Jesus' life and resurrection are therefore claims about *how* God rules, and this has important implications for how God's people ought to govern themselves. Namely, they are to be a community of peace and solidarity, reflecting God's love and justice into a world of lies, coercion, and injustice.<sup>5</sup> In short, Hauerwas and McClendon maintain that the first task of the church is to become the kind of community that can tell the story of Jesus by its distinctive common practices and the embodiment of distinctive virtues appropriate to his kingdom.<sup>6</sup> In so doing, the church calls the world to task, and shows the world that it stands in God's judgment. This expectation is evident in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, where he reprimands them for mishandling their disputes:

When any of you has a grievance against another, do you dare to take it to court before the unrighteous, instead of taking it before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels—to say nothing of ordinary matters? If you have ordinary cases, then, do you appoint as judges those who have no standing in the church? I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to decide between one believer and another, but a believer goes to court against a believer—and before unbelievers at that?

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>5</sup> Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 99-103; McClendon, *Doctrine*, 366-7.

<sup>6</sup> McClendon, *Doctrine*, 367; Hauerwas, *Peaceable Kingdom*, 100.

In fact, to have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud—and believers at that. (1 Cor 6:1-8).

In this passage, Paul is not only condemning multiple individual failures—although he certainly does that—but also the failure of the Corinthians *as* a community to govern themselves in a way appropriate to Christ’s kingdom. Paul expects the Christians at Corinth to develop the skills to govern themselves peacefully because God’s people are called to mediate God’s rule over creation, to such an extent that someday these saints will judge even the angels. Furthermore, Paul says that the church has already failed by allowing these disputes to fester into lawsuits in the first place, because they have missed the basic premise that within God’s kingdom it is better to be wronged than to wrong another.<sup>7</sup> Finally, throughout this passage Paul emphasizes the fact that this in-fighting is taking place before unbelievers. The implication is that the Corinthians are not only failing to treat each other with justice and love, but that they are also failing to show the unbelievers what life in the kingdom of God is like. A similar expectation, and the same emphasis on peoplehood, appears in Peter’s first letter:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were not a people,  
but now you are God’s people;  
once you had not received mercy,  
but now you have received mercy.

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge. (1 Pet 2:9-12).

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew 5:38-42; Romans 12:16-18; 1 Peter 3:9.

Many would be tempted to read verse 12 in isolation; the idea of witnessing to the truth of the Gospel by a changed individual life is widespread within evangelical theology. However, the call to holiness and honorable living is grounded in the Christians' peoplehood. They are to abstain from the desires of the flesh *as* aliens and exiles; that is, they are to live in such a way *as* members of God's distinctive people.

With regard to structural injustice, two important points emerge from the work of Hauerwas and McClendon. First, while individual action may be required of many Christians, a faithful response to structural injustice must be ultimately corporate, because it is as a community—and not merely an aggregate of individuals—that the church must embody the gospel. Second, the church should not be overwhelmed by the immensity of unjust structures or distracted by a mistaken responsibility to remake the world and solve all its problems. To do so would limit the church's response to top-down political solutions or sweeping "culture war" campaigns, which taken on their own are insufficient to fulfill the church's vocation. Just as policy change on its own cannot meet the biblical standard of justice as care, nor can policy embody the story of Christ and his kingdom; only the concrete community of believers can do that. Therefore, a local church response to structural injustice must begin with this evangelistic vocation must be limited to the goal of faithfully embodying the gospel. Policy change becomes a priority for the church when policy makes Christians complicit in injustice and thus hinders the church in the evangelistic task.

Before exploring public ways of embodying the gospel by resisting structural injustice, it is worth asking whether American churches are being faithful to the corporate nature of their calling within their own walls. Are they the kind of churches which would

even be able to begin responding to structural injustice, of loving their neighbors in this context? What would the daily life of this kind of church look like, and what would its qualities be? To answer this question requires a brief excursus into the relationship between practices, narrative, and virtue.

### *Practices, Virtue, and Narrative*

Alasdair MacIntyre offers a technical definition of a ‘practice’ that will serve as a starting point:

By a ‘practice’ I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.<sup>8</sup>

In these terms, architecture is a practice, while the mere skill of bricklaying is not. The skill of driving a golf ball a great distance is not a practice, but the game of golf is. By internal goods, MacIntyre refers to those goods that lead people to participate in such practices for their own sake, and not merely as means to some external end. MacIntyre gives the example of teaching a child to play chess by offering the child candy for playing, and more candy for winning.<sup>9</sup> The child would play to win, but because the motivation is the external good of candy, the child is not engaging in the practice of chess. The child might even cheat in order to get the candy, and this would be appropriate to the end of getting the most candy possible. However, over time, if the child learns to appreciate the specific kind of analytic and strategic thought required to win a game of

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<sup>8</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. Third. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007, 187.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

chess, and to pursue this, the child may be said to be engaging in the practice of chess. Furthermore, cheating is not only forbidden by the rules of the game, but also counterproductive to these goods which are internal to the practice: “Now if the child cheats, he or she will be defeating not me, but himself or herself.”<sup>10</sup>

It is clear, then, how virtues naturally arise within practices, because they are the specific capacities and habits which allow the practitioner to achieve the goods internal to the practice. On the other hand, vices are those qualities which are counterproductive to the pursuit of said goods. For example, in the practice of evangelism, attentive presence to another person is a virtue, while nosiness, a perverse sort of attentive presence, is a vice.<sup>11</sup> Returning to the example of chess, cunning can be a virtue in that it enables the player to surprise an opponent. On the other hand, a vicious sort of cunning can enable and motivate the player to cheat, preventing the player from achieving the internal good that is playing chess well.

If virtues are themselves primarily understood within the context of practices, practices themselves are primarily understood within the context of larger narratives. This is so in three ways. First, the narrative of an individual life provides the coherence necessary for the virtues to exist. As McClendon explains, “the lives of those who engage in these practices must have at least enough continuity and coherence to permit the *formation* of those virtues and *sustaining* of those intentions—in a word, their lives must take a narrative form. Virtues cannot be mere episodes; practical intentions cannot be mere whims.”<sup>12</sup> To put it differently, virtues require the narrative of a life because they

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> James Wm McClendon. *Ethics: Systematic Theology*. Second. Vol. 1. 3 vols. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012, 175.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 177.

exist in an agent, not in a discrete series or even pattern of choices divorced from the life of a real chooser whose identity persists over time. Practices are also grounded in narrative in the sense that practices themselves are shaped by their own histories, and the long lines of practitioners that have extended the possibilities for these practices. Thus, “to enter into a practice is to enter into a relationship not only with its contemporary practitioners, but also with those who have preceded us in the practice, particularly those whose achievements extended the reach of the practice to its present point.”<sup>13</sup> That is to say, English poets enter into relationship with Shakespeare because his achievements have helped to shape their understanding of what this business of “English poetry” is and can be. Similarly, high jumpers enter into relationship with Dick Fosbury because with the invention of the Fosbury Flop, Fosbury helped to shape today’s high jumpers’ understanding of what the high jump can be. Finally, practices are grounded in narratives of the larger society which gives the practices an intelligible meaning:

What *is* indispensable for making any society (or culture or community) *one* society is that it shall have a narrative tradition whose function is to provide a setting for the several practices of that society, one that unites them in a single web of meaning. . . . That a game is ‘only a game’ distinguishes it from (otherwise gamelike) practices whose fuller meaning is found in their relation to the ongoing story of which they are but parts.<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, a nomadic tribe would not have a practice of architecture, because this would not be intelligible within its narrative self-understanding. On the other hand, American practices of representative democracy are grounded in certain cultural narratives within which individual freedom is essential to national identity.

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<sup>13</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 194.

<sup>14</sup> McClendon, *Ethics*, 177, italics original.

McClendon offers the example of the Eucharist as a practice, in MacIntyre's sense, and this is a helpful summary of these concepts. He recalls 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, the same passage discussed in Chapter One, where Paul reprimands the Corinthians for abusing the covenant meal. As stated previously, some wealthy church members were bringing their own good food and drink to the meal, for their own enjoyment. In doing so, they simultaneously humiliated the hungry brothers and sisters among them and ignored their need. Paul warns them that so long as they act this way, they are not really eating the Lord's supper. In Chapter One, this passage was analyzed in terms of justice as care; the rich Corinthians failed to treat their brothers and sisters in a way which befit their worth as fellow members of the church. This was both a failure of love and of justice. McClendon analyzes the passage differently. He parses the logic of this passage in terms of a practice and its underlying narrative: "the meal is part and parcel of a practice. . . which we might call, until a better name be found, *the practice of establishing and maintaining Christian community*. The 'rules' for the meal are the constitutive rules for that practice. The rules link the conduct of participants to their participation in the meal."<sup>15</sup> This practice is at home within the Passion narrative, which begins shortly after Jesus initiates the new covenant meal. In the Passion narrative, God enters into solidarity with man through Christ entering into solidarity with the sin and death of his people. This is what the Christians reenact and remember when they partake in the eucharist:

This comes clearest if we imagine the contrary—Jesus slips out of town after the meal, escapes, becomes a well-known intellectual leader in another country, and lives to a ripe old age. In that case, though, it is not only the larger story that is changed; what can the meal have meant, now? . . . For the point of the meal is solidarity in the kingdom; those who ignore that have missed the first lesson of the community of care and cannot grasp the meaning of this rite.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> McClendon, *Ethics*, 220.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

These Corinthian Christians are going about the practice all wrong, because they have misunderstood the narrative which gives the practice its shape and meaning. Because they have misunderstood the practice, they are not really participating in the covenant meal, but in something else altogether. This is just like a soccer game in which players are allowed to pick up the ball; it is not really a game of soccer at all. No matter how fervently they play, the participants in this new game will never become the kinds of people—that is, they will never acquire the quite the same virtues—called for by the practice of soccer. Likewise, so long as the Corinthians do not understand the eucharistic practice of establishing and maintaining Christian community, the Corinthian church will not become the kind of community which can faithfully tell the story of Jesus.

Compare McClendon’s analysis of the Corinthians’ failures to an anecdote offered by Stephen Fowl.<sup>17</sup> Fowl tells the story of a local church staff which decided to share a refrigerator in the church office. Over time, sandwiches and sodas began to disappear. Staff members could not figure out who was eating their food, because whenever they would ask, everyone would deny it. Eventually the constant lying and petty theft caused such division among the staff that the church secretary was forced to spend several days dividing the refrigerator up into private sections. The staff members were given strict instructions not to touch any food that was not in one’s own section, and this ultimately ended the conflict, but this solution is evidence of a much greater problem facing a great many churches in America. The leaders of this church, charged with the ministry of reconciliation, lacked the practices and virtues necessary to do something so

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<sup>17</sup> Stephen Fowl. “Being Blessed: Wealth, Property, and Theft.” In *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, Second., 493–505. Chichester: Wiley, 2011, 465.

simple as sharing a refrigerator. This church is simply not up to the task of resisting structural injustice, nor is any church which exhibits these vices. This deficiency, this inability to live peaceably as a community, is widespread in American churches because they have been misled by consumerism and an individualistic gospel narrative, and have adopted practices which cultivate consumer vices rather than Christian virtues.

### *Consumerism and Individualism*

Many evangelical preachers lament the fact that Christians in America do not live very differently than other Americans. Ronald Sider dedicated a whole book to the subject: he points out that evangelical Christians are just as likely to watch pornography or get divorced as non-Christians, and even more likely to espouse racist views.<sup>18</sup> Nor is their theology especially Christian. In a detailed and widely-cited study of the religious beliefs of American teenagers, Christian Smith and Melinda Denton concluded that the de facto religion of the vast majority of American teenagers—including professing Christians—is what they call “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.”<sup>19</sup> The first tenet of this vague spirituality is that people ought to behave morally toward one another (Moralistic). Second, God wants people to be happy and feel good about themselves (Therapeutic). Third, God is not generally active in daily life unless one needs God to solve a problem (Deism). This is a far cry from orthodox Christian theology, and it reveals a widespread lack of spiritual resources within the church today. Finally, the economic lives of American Christians are virtually indistinguishable from those of non-Christians.

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<sup>18</sup> Ronald J Sider. *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience: Why Are Christians Living Just Like the Rest of the World?* Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005, 17-29.

<sup>19</sup> Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 162-6.

American Christians on the whole participate in the larger consumer culture just like every other American, as evidenced by the multibillion Christian media industry.<sup>20</sup> All of these deficiencies in the lives of American Christians may be partially characterized as the fruit of consumerism.

Consumerism may be broadly defined, as many Christian critics do, as “an ethos—a collection of attitudes, values, and cultural constructs—that places great value on shopping and consumption, such that consumption defines the parameters of the good life and the ultimate goals of the human, and a concomitant lack of attention to the moral dimension of consumption.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, it is the belief that one can “Have It Your Way.” From a consumerist perspective there is no inconvenience, discomfort, or dissatisfaction that cannot be fixed by purchasing the right product or service. On this view it is also assumed that it is good and proper for one to pursue fulfillment along these lines. When fully grown, these beliefs apply even to identity and relationships. Just as any inconvenience can be solved by the right purchase, an inconvenient identity can be remade by purchasing the right products and associating oneself with the right brands, without reference to concrete human relationships. To be a rebel, buy Levi’s jeans. To be creative, buy an Apple computer. To be an athlete, buy Nike shoes:

The marketers recognize that an inwardly generated self is a fiction. We are selves in dialogue. . . People need to ‘locate themselves in a larger experience,’ and they need social recognition for their identity projects. To the degree that social identities are attenuated as the mooring of self-identification. . . companies can position their goods and images . . . not simply as fulfilling desires but as meeting a felt need for connection, recognition, and values to live by. . . Social identities remain but as one is turned into a consumer, they are increasingly shaped and conditioned by patterns of consumption. We identify our real selves by the

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<sup>20</sup> Skye Jethani. *The Divine Commodity: Discovering a Faith Beyond Consumer Christianity*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009, 16-7, 53-6.

<sup>21</sup> Laura M Hartman. *The Christian Consumer: Living Faithfully in a Fragile World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 6.

choices we make from the images, fashions, and lifestyles available in the market, and these in turn become the vehicles by which we perceive others and they us.<sup>22</sup>

The imagination of American Christians today is dominated by consumerism. This is evidenced by “the emergence of a Christian subculture that parallels the secular culture in every way. . . with a speed matched only by the Chinese black market, Christian merchandisers produce knockoffs of every secular phenomenon virtually overnight.”<sup>23</sup> Christian merchandisers embody the Christian endorsement of consumerism in America today insofar as they are for-profit businesses explicitly trying to turn Christianity into a brand and sell it. However, even non-profit parachurch ministries reinforce consumerism because their structure mimics that of market enterprises. These ministries compete with other media enterprises for viewers and subscribers on the basis of consumer appeal, and their successful adoption of secular marketing methods accounts for much of the growth of evangelicalism within the last 60 years.<sup>24</sup> Of course the influence of consumerism in American Christianity is not limited by the success of the parachurch, because consumerism has come to dominate the local church as well, wherever the “attractional” or “seeker-friendly” model of church is adopted.

“Seeker-friendly” here refers to an approach to organizing a local church which emphasizes numerical growth as the central criterion for legitimacy and success. The seeker-friendly, attractional church hopes to be ‘relevant’ to the unchurched in the hopes that they will join. This is usually done through the pursuit of convenience,

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<sup>22</sup> Joseph E. Davis. “The Commodification of Self.” *The Hedgehog Review* 5, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 41–49, 46.

<sup>23</sup> Skye Jethani. *The Divine Commodity: Discovering a Faith Beyond Consumer Christianity*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009, 19.

<sup>24</sup> D. G. Hart. *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004, 119 – 126.

customization, dynamic and entertaining worship services, and chic branding. Proponents claim that these practices are simply pragmatic responses to the reality of life in a consumer society. As Lyle Schaller puts it, “The big issue. . . is not whether one applauds or disapproves of the growth of consumerism. The central issue is that consumerism is now a fact of life.”<sup>25</sup> Kent Carlson and Mike Leuken, co-pastors out of Illinois, and have documented at length their church’s experience with the seeker-friendly model and its consequences.<sup>26</sup> Their church staff became enamored with the possibilities of large-scale success and significant spiritual impact promised by proponents of the attractional church. They made several changes to their church practices, but most significantly, they reoriented their Sunday morning services to spiritual seekers, while relegating the service for older, committed members to Wednesday nights. After making this change, and adopting a more contemporary, spectacular style of worship, the church did in fact grow very quickly for years. However, Carlson and Lueken eventually grew disenchanted with this approach as they realized what effect they were having on their congregation: “Gradually, we began to get some clarity on a troubling truth: attracting people to church based on their consumer demands is in direct and irredeemable conflict with inviting people, in Jesus’ words, to lose their lives in order to find them. It slowly began to dawn on us that our method of attracting people was forming them in ways contrary to the way of Christ.”<sup>27</sup> Because the medium is the message, to engage Christians as consumers, to compete against other providers of spiritual goods and services on the basis of

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<sup>25</sup> Lyle E Schaller. *The Very Large Church: New Rules for Leaders*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2000, 100.

<sup>26</sup> Kent Carlson and Mike Lueken. *Renovation of the Church: What Happens When a Seeker Church Discovers Spiritual Formation*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

attractiveness and convenience, is to offer a tacit endorsement and reinforcement of consumerism itself.

In Alasdair MacIntyre's terms, building an attractional, seeker-friendly church may be said to constitute a practice. The rules of the practice are the rules of market competition. There are several goods internal to the practice: there is the thrill of executing a perfectly planned worship "experience," and the sense of excitement which comes from participating in something that feels large and important. Carlson and Lueken admit, rather candidly, that one important good internal to this practice is the satisfaction of being a pastor at a large, that is, "successful" church.<sup>28</sup> If this practice has rules and internal goods, it must also have virtues which it requires of its practitioners. Of pastors, this practice will require the virtue of marketability, the ability to discern what one's target demographic will find appealing. It will also require of them the virtue of charisma and energy, necessary to delivering entertaining and "relevant" sermons. From members of the congregation, this practice will probably require whatever virtues are necessary to becoming a good brand ambassador, like being adept at social media. However, this practice does not require or cultivate the virtues proper to the practice of building a community of eucharistic solidarity, as described by McClendon. Insofar as Christians are consumers, their churches cannot be the kind of communities that embody the gospel in their life together. Any church which cannot be faithful to its own corporate vocation is simply not up to the more difficult task of loving its neighbors amidst unjust structures.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 81.

However, those who would challenge consumerism and its hold on the American church must also challenge the theological individualism which makes this possible. “Theological individualism” here refers broadly to any view of the Christian life and mission as an individual vocation. Theological individualism is more difficult to point out than consumerism because it is a much deeper, older current within Protestantism in general and American Christianity in particular; it is the widespread telling of the gospel which McKnight called C-F-R-C in Chapter One.<sup>29</sup> On this view, Christians succeed or fail in their mission as individuals. The problem is that individualistic Christians are blinded to issues of structural justice because they lie outside the individual frame of reference. On the individualistic view, it is thought possible for a Christian to fulfill the obligation of “neighbor-love” by lending financial aid to her poor neighbor while constantly participating in the structures that have contributed to that poverty.

For example, suppose a wealthy evangelical woman, W, learns that a fellow member of the local PTA, M, is struggling because the big-box store where M works does not pay a living wage. On an individualistic view, W can adequately love M by giving her financial assistance even as W herself continues to support the store’s practices by shopping there. Alternatively, W’s family might own a large share of the chain’s stock, so that she is actively enriched by the same practices that impoverish M. In individual terms, structural issues like this are irrelevant to the Christian’s obligations to love neighbor. Furthermore, because these structures were not created by the choice of any single individual, it would be fruitless to try and envision solutions in terms of individual behavior, even though individual behaviors may also need to change.

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<sup>29</sup> McKnight. *Kingdom Conspiracy*, 24-35.

### *Witness in their Midst*

The preceding discussion has attempted to lay a theological groundwork for local church responses to structural injustice by asking the question, “what kind of church would be able to love her neighbors in the midst of unjust structures?” Hauerwas and McClendon emphasize that the church’s task is to become a community which imitates God and reflects God into the world by governing itself peaceably and justly, rather than through coercion or deception. If unjust structures are the result of large groups of people failing to live justly together, it is especially important that Christians learn, at the very least, to live justly among their fellow church members. It is also important along these same lines that churches reject the consumerism and individualism which blind so many Christians to the needs of their neighbors and the effects of their actions. Rejecting consumerism and individualism will require churches to abandon consumeristic and individualistic practices, and to adopt practices which cultivate neighborly virtues. Among many other things, it is especially important with a view to structural injustice that Christians learn to share. They might begin by sharing their food with one another. From there they might progress to sharing their vehicles by organizing a carpool, or they might share household appliances which are used infrequently, so that it would not be necessary for everyone to buy one of the same thing. A church with the resources might plant a community garden and invite neighbors outside the church to share in its yield. These practices have the potential to cultivate the virtues proper to the peaceable kingdom of God which will be necessary to guide any local church response to structural injustice.

One more thing must be said in closing. The fact that consumerism has infiltrated American churches, and that these churches have felt pressed to compete for souls in the consumer marketplace reveals an important aspect of the challenge at hand. The local church must respond to structural injustice *in the midst of* the world, that is, in the midst of the very structures which make Christians complicit in injustice. They cannot simply remove themselves from participation; even churches that explicitly reject consumerism are still dependent on social media companies for communication, and their members still wear branded clothes. In the same way, suburban Christians who condemn the effects of urban sprawl on their neighborhoods probably have no way to get to church besides driving. Even the most faithful churches are already participating in these structures as they go about their life together. This is why it essential for local churches re-emphasize their corporate mission to become just and peaceable communities. As unjust structures infiltrate the life of the church, Christians must at least make the spiritual and cultural changes *within* the church which will make a larger response outside the church possible. Furthermore, because unjust structures have already infiltrated the life of the church, it is not an option to sit and wait for these structures to change on their own. Local church bodies must attempt to respond to this challenge within their concrete communities in whatever ways they can. The next chapter will offer tentative conceptual guidelines for some ways they might begin.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Building Just Structures

This chapter will seek to synthesize the preceding discussion of biblical justice-care, social structures which mediate concrete relationships, and corporate witness as the task of the church, into tentative practical recommendations for local church bodies. It has been argued hitherto that the biblical vision of justice is one in which justice consists in loving one's neighbor and concretely caring for them. However, the Christian's obligation to love her neighbor and do justice is complicated by structures—social, political, and economic—that mediate relationship between the Christian and neighbors she may never meet, but is nonetheless called to love. By participating in unjust structures, the Christian is complicit in injustice, but because these same structures constrain individual choice, the individual Christian's options are severely limited with regard to these. Fortunately, bearing in mind the corporate nature of the church's witness as demonstrated in Chapter Three, the onus of confronting unjust structures does not fall upon the individual Christian alone. The task at hand belongs to the church as a body. While it is not controversial that the church ought to witness against injustice wherever it occurs, when dealing with structural injustice it is necessary to witness to the possibility of just alternatives to these structures. The structures in question are systems of daily living: they are the ways we lay out our communities, the way we travel to work and the ways we procure food. It would be folly to demand that these systems simply be destroyed, without offering alternative ways of meeting these needs. Thus the task of the church is twofold: she must witness against structural injustice, while making efforts to

build alternative just structures so that Christians may extricate themselves from complicity in injustice. In practice, these two aims will probably be combined, because building neighborly, caring, just structures will surely be one of the most powerful witnesses against structural injustice. The present chapter will briefly draw upon the work of Wendell Berry to outline some [principles] for building neighborly structures, and will conclude by proposing that local church bodies build up and invest in just structures within their own communities.

### *The Caring Economy*

In his 1977 classic *The Unsettling of America*, Wendell Berry argues that the ecological, economic, and social crises of his day are connected phenomena, symptomatic of an ailing culture. One theme of the book, which is most relevant to the present study, is the contrast between the paradigm or mode of “exploitation” and that of “nurture.”<sup>1</sup> The terms are abstract, and the term “mode” is used because “exploitation” and “care” do not refer to any particular economic or political systems. Rather, they describe a sort of cultural assumption, a set of values, an approach to interacting with the world and with others:

Let me outline as briefly as I can what seem to me the characteristics of these opposite kinds of mind. I conceive a strip-miner to be a model exploiter, and as a model nurturer I take the old-fashioned idea or ideal of a farmer. . . . The standard of the exploiter is efficiency; the standard of the nurturer is care. The exploiter's goal is money, profit; the nurturer's goal is health--his land's health, his own, his family's, his community's, his country's. Whereas the exploiter asks of a piece of land only how much and how quickly it can be made to produce, the nurturer asks a question that is much more complex and difficult: What is its carrying capacity? (That is: How much can be taken from it without diminishing it? What can it produce *dependably* for an indefinite time?) The exploiter wishes to earn as much as possible by as little work as possible; the nurturer expects, certainly, to have a

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<sup>1</sup> Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*. First Counterpoint edition. Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 1977, 9-10.

decent living from his work, but his characteristic wish is to work as *well* as possible. The competence of the exploiter is in organization; that of the nurturer is in order--a human order, that is, that accommodates itself both to the other and to mystery. The exploiter typically serves an institution or organization; the nurturer serves the land, household, community, place.<sup>2</sup>

Within the exploitive mode, one flourishes without reference to the flourishing of the neighbor, with the result that in practice one often flourishes at the neighbor's expense. Dealing with employees, or trade partners, the exploiter will give as little as he can get away with. On the other hand, within the nurturing mode, one recognizes interdependence, and refuses to flourish at the expense of the neighbor. The farmer refuses to profit overmuch by exhausting his soil or working his animals too hard or cheating his farmhands out of their wages. He recognizes that while in the short term he may benefit by exploiting them, his fate is ultimately tied up with theirs. The healthier his land and animals are, and the better provided for the farmhands are, the more the nurturing farmer prospers.

From a Christian perspective, the nurturer is the one who deals justly with the neighbor, because he fulfills justice's demand for concrete care. The exploiter, on the other hand, is the one who perpetrates injustice. An important consequence of this is that when exploitation is the default mode of a society or culture, this society will build exploitive, unjust structures. This has been evident as long as there have been empires and slave trades, and it is evident in the unjust structures examined in Chapter 2. Urban sprawl was built by competing exploiters. The auto industry's lobbying efforts, from the invention of crosswalks to the Interstate Highway system, which resulted in the urban sprawl that exists today, were not motivated or guided by care for the communities in

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

which they would be implemented. As well-intentioned as some involved individuals may have been, the assumed end-goal of their activity was always to sell more cars at the lowest cost to the automakers. Because success was defined in exploitive terms, concerns of concrete neighborly care were only obstacles to success, if they ever entered the picture, that is. Similarly, the big box chains which populate the sprawled city are not dedicated by any stretch of the imagination to the flourishing of the communities in which they operate. These national profit-driven enterprises necessarily define success as taking as much money as they can get away with from customers, while paying as little as they can get away with to suppliers and employees. Doubtless, there are thousands of well-intentioned, conscientious individuals working for such companies, but the minute they cease to be effective exploiters, they cease to be effective workers by standards internal to the enterprise. The industrial agriculture which produces so much of the food in big box grocery stores is a product of exploitation. The industrialized farmer must coax the greatest yield out of the land at the lowest cost, both in terms of money paid to fertilizer and equipment suppliers, and in terms of man-hours of attention devoted to the land. This effort to save time and money above all, rather than to cultivate health, is why industrial agriculture is dependent upon nitrogen fertilizers; the exhausted soil cannot produce at its original capacity, and thus requires “energy subsidies” from without in order to meet the farmer’s demands. Without care for the land close at hand, the farmer simply cannot care for his neighbors, the fisherman of the Gulf affected by the hypoxic zone.

This last example reveals the vital connection between the exploitive mode and the creation of larger unjust, uncaring, un-neighborly structures. If one follows Wendell

Berry and uses the language of economy to denote “our way of living from our land,” it becomes clear that the structures which order a community’s life together can never be caring—which is to say they can never be truly just—if the basic process of taking their common life from the Creation is not itself caring. It is simply incoherent to think of caring for one’s neighbor while simultaneously damaging the very source of his life, which ultimately is the land.

### *The Economy of Place*

Along these lines it becomes clear that in general, the caring, neighborly economy is an economy of place. This is because within the neighborly mode, one’s own flourishing is tied up with the flourishing of one’s community. If it is to be neighborly and just, the process of economy, of making a life together, cannot take place at the expense of the land or its inhabitants, and adapted to what the place can bear. This condition is what Wes Jackson, a colleague of Berry, has called being “native” to a place.<sup>3</sup> Jackson opens his short book with the story of Rice County Kansas. Before the arrival of Europeans, Rice County was home to the Native American kingdom of Quivira. The Quivirian civilization was advanced, and its people displayed sophisticated masonry and hunting technologies. Jackson reports that archaeologists have estimated that 25,000 Quivirians lived in what is now Rice County before the arrival of Europeans. By the time of Jackson’s writing, well after the settlement of Rice County by white Americans and the introduction of mechanized farming, the land of Rice County only supported 10,400 people.<sup>4</sup> Jackson argues that the Quivirians flourished where later white

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<sup>3</sup> Wes Jackson. *Becoming Native to This Place*. Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

settlers could not because the Quivirians achieved the condition of nativeness. That is to say, they situated their own activity within the natural systems of their region, lived within the land's means, and developed a nurturing culture and social structure. Jackson quotes Wallace Stegner's description in *Wolf Willow*:

[The natives grew] long strip farms, each with a frontage on the river which gave not only a canoe landing but an access to water for the irrigation of gardens. The strips ran far back and were combined in common pastures. On these pastures the *metis*' stock could run freely while people were off on the annual hunts. The processes of adaptation to Plains life and to the uncertain rainfall had led the *metis* to an economy not unlike that of the Apache after the acquisition of the horse. They were half horticultural, half nomadic, and their system of land division was appropriate to their life.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, when the white settlers came to the plains, they divided parcels of land into grids. This system of land division was not "native" to Plains life because it did not operate at the same scale as the land's economy. The natives had enjoyed the fertilization and food provided by the roaming buffalo herds, and they achieved economic resilience by adapting to this native process: "Nutrients and sunlight picked up by the bison in the neighborhood of the Mandan Indians of North Dakota, for example, were likely harvested by Quivirians in Kansas, and vice versa. 'Holding' nature as a commons was a way of spreading the risk. It blunted the extremes of floods and drouths, cold and heat."<sup>6</sup>

In economic terms, this means that just as "all politics are local," all economies are local, in the sense that the economic process occurs in particular places. Food is produced on particular farms, and raw materials like lumber come from particular forests.

Manufacturing takes raw materials from such particular places and transforms them (in particular factories) for new use in other particular places. Even service industries depend

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 17; quoting Wallace Stegner. *Wolf Willow*. New York: Penguin, 1962, 59.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

on the particularities of place, like access to particular educational institutions or local cost of living for the service workforce. The financial industry appears at first to be exempt from the contingencies of place. However, on further reflection it is clear that even the bizarrely ephemeral wealth created by stock markets and financial markets is held by particular investors, who use it to buy goods produced in particular places, using raw materials ultimately taken from the land. The white settlers cut themselves off from this productive source of energy and nutrients by dividing the prairie with their fenced grids. This ill-adapted and alien practice of land division sabotaged the settlers' ability to care for the land from the beginning, and it is one failure of nativeness among many others that has caused 10,000 modern inhabitants of Rice County to struggle where 25,000 natives could flourish.

For present purposes, it will be helpful to weigh the structures examined previously against the standard of nativeness. In general, the structures examined in Chapter Two are not native, because they disregard place, and function to alienate people from the land and its other inhabitants. The sprawling city built for cars disregards place, because its inherent purpose is to allow individuals to go where they want to as conveniently as possible. Furthermore, if one recognizes land as one of the community's limited resources, the practice of building immense parking lots to accommodate personal vehicles becomes a waste of the community's assets. Of course, transportation and infrastructure are necessary for healthy communities, but these necessities must be provided in a way that takes thought for the health of the land and its inhabitants. In some cases paved roads for personal vehicles might be the most caring answer to a community's needs, but in general it appears that modern American sprawl was built to

accommodate individuals rather than cultivating the community it serves—even at the expense of community itself.

Of course, most American sprawl is justified as serving the community by connecting residents to businesses: shopping malls, movie theaters, restaurants, etc. At this point one must ask the question of whether these businesses are native to their place, whether they operate within the framework of care or exploitation. Returning to the example of Wal-Mart and other big-box retailers, it is clear that the health of the place and its inhabitants is not high on these companies' lists of priorities. The purpose of corporations like Wal-Mart is to make as much money from the community for shareholders, regardless of where they live. Of course, members of the community benefit from cheap consumer goods, but the money spent there ultimately leaves the community, the place. Furthermore, when big-box stores drive out local businesses, they lower the native productive capacity of the place. Inhabitants do not mind this very much so long as the big-box stores remain in place, but as Berry points out, "there is nothing at all to keep a brought-in industry in place when the place has become less inviting, less exploitable, or less profitable than another place."<sup>7</sup> If the members of a community are dependent on placeless chains for their food, clothing, and services, they are vulnerable to the vicissitudes of a placeless economy. If and when these chains leave, the place and its people will suffer. Finally, dependence on such placeless chains inhibits the nativeness of the people themselves, by alienating them from the sources of their food, clothing, furniture, etc. (Most) shoppers at big-box retailers have no idea where such goods are produced, or more importantly, how they are produced. As a result, these shoppers

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<sup>7</sup> Wendell Berry. "Local Economies to Save the Land and the People." In *Our Only World: Ten Essays*, 53–67. Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 2015, 62.

simply cannot know whether they are participating in an exploitive economy or a caring one.

At this point, one might object that this state of affairs the simple result of modernity, that a post-industrial economy must be organized in this way for us to enjoy all the blessings of modern life. It might be further argued that making nativeness a prerequisite to the just practice of economy is a Luddite call to return to subsistence farming. However, the above is not a polemic against any particular mode of transport or the retail sector as such. It is not even a polemic against international, publicly-traded, for-profit corporations as such. The physical, economic, and social structures condemned above are opposed for their lack of nativeness. That is to say, the problem is not with these things themselves, but their employment without care for particular communities and places.

Furthermore, a native, caring economy is not necessarily a strictly “local” economy. Localness is not the same thing as nativeness or care for people and their places, because what constitutes “local” is more or less arbitrary. Natural systems at any scale are affected by systems which are both much smaller and much larger. For example, the amount of rainfall which any small farm receives is determined by global weather patterns, as well as local factors like topography. At the same time, the overall productivity of the farm depends on the health of its soil, which is determined by communities of worms, insects, and a whole microscopic ecosystem. There is therefore no objective natural standard for what constitutes “local.” Indeed, as Jackson points out, the Quivirians of Kansas “did not do all their shopping locally either. They traded from Minnesota to Mexico City. They relied on millions of bison calories each year, brought

across the current county boundary to their grass huts, calories stored from short grasses grazed from New Mexico to the Canadian prairies. The hides and the horns and the shoulder blade scrapers came from the Great Plains commons.”<sup>8</sup> Nativeness, then, is not a hard and fast commitment to any arbitrary place and scale, but carefully adapting the practice of economy—taking life together from the land—to the particularities of place *wherever economy occurs*. That is to say, buying goods produced with care far away is an act of greater nativeness than buying goods produced through exploitation locally.

Just as nativeness does not occur at any particular scale, it does not necessarily happen at any particular level of economic development. Even in an advanced global economy, all economy is local; economic activity happens *somewhere*, and has an effect *somewhere*, even if these are not the same place. Food is grown on particular fields, irrigated by water from particular lakes and rivers. Raw materials are taken from particular forests and quarries and mines, and turned into industrial or consumer goods at particular factories. Manufacturing costs are determined by labor laws of particular jurisdictions and the cost of living in the particular places where the factory workers live. Even the ephemeral wealth created by the world’s financial markets is created by investing in the above enterprises around the world; this wealth is used by particular people to buy food grown in particular fields, irrigated by water from particular lakes and rivers.

Bill McKibben offers two examples of how enterprises other than agriculture can be native, pursued with care for people and their places. In his home county, local foresters founded an initiative called Vermont Family Forests (VFF), dedicated to

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<sup>8</sup> Jackson, *Becoming Native to this Place*, 11.

reforming the local forestry industry. Members must follow strict ecological guidelines, but caring for the land increases operating costs. One solution pioneered by VFF is to market “inferior” flawed wood, with knots and stains, to builders as having character and flare, which “enables loggers to get a decent price for the lesser trees they thin to improve stands, and makes the forest as a whole more profitable.”<sup>9</sup> VFF has also drawn plans to restore local ownership of the forests:

In their ‘community equity forest’ model, when acreage comes on the market the local land trust buys the development rights to make sure the land doesn’t turn into yet another subdivision. VFF then buys the land itself, and resells it in shares to local people, including many who live below the poverty line. With each share comes the right to cut firewood on the land (and thereby help get rid of the trees that need to be thinned) as well as a share of the profits when, every ten years or so, the land is logged under the program’s strict ecological requirements.<sup>10</sup>

Such local initiatives have the potential to “nativize” the production of almost any commodity, and the example of Vermont Family Forests offers hope that the global production and trade of commodities can indeed be caring and just.

Information and entertainment services can also be native to their places.

McKibben offers the example of WDEV, the radio station that has served Vermont since the 1930s.<sup>11</sup> On Thursdays nights in the summertime, WDEV broadcasts local stock car races, but afterward broadcasts dinnertime jazz. Every morning WDEV broadcasts a talk show dedicated to local Vermont issues, and on Fridays broadcasts from the lobby of the state legislature, interviewing representatives live. The station is also home to high school sports, and political talk on both the left and right. In short, WDEV is the antithesis of high-powered stations owned by multibillion dollar corporations, broadcasting nationally

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<sup>9</sup> McKibben, *Deep Economy*, 159.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 129-39.

syndicated content tailor-made for one specific demographic. As McKibben puts it, listening to WDEV, “you hear *things that other people are interested in*. Which is pretty much the definition of community. If you’re a senior citizen, you find out what’s going on in the schools, and if you’re a jazz fan, you hear some bluegrass, and everyone gets the Norwich hockey scores.”<sup>12</sup>

Unfortunately, stations like WDEV which effectively and consistently serve a community, are a dying breed, and the radio spectrum is dominated by large corporate broadcasters which serve demographics, rather than communities.

However, there is hope for grassroots efforts to nativize radio. Similar to Vermont Family Forests’ community equity forest scheme, McKibben spotlights one group, Prometheus Radio, dedicated to helping communities acquire their own low-power stations, even organizing antenna “barn-raising” for volunteers.<sup>13</sup> Not only commodity industries, but broadcast media can also be native to their places.

Not only can higher-order economic activity care for people by being native to their places, but it can also be done caringly in more exclusively human terms. It is possible for prosper without exploiting others. William Cavanaugh offers the example of the Spanish Mondragon Cooperative Corporation, founded in 1956.<sup>14</sup> Influenced by Catholic social teaching, Mondragon was founded on the idea that that a just social order is predicated upon distribution of property and dignity:

Mondragon is entirely worker-owned and worker-governed, and it is based on a system of one vote per worker. At Mondragon they believe that labor hires capital, instead of capital hiring labor. Their capital comes largely from a credit union that is supported by workers and the community. The highest-paid

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>14</sup> William Cavanaugh. *Being Consumed*. 2009, 27-8.

employee can make no more than six times what the lowest-paid makes; 10 percent of surpluses are given directly to community development practices.<sup>15</sup>

Mondragon is an example of an economic community in which no one flourishes at the expense of another. In addition, the case of Mondragon shows that just communities can be resilient and competitive in large markets. At the time of Cavanaugh's writing, in 2008, Mondragon employed 60,000 people and its sales of manufactured goods exceeded \$3 billion.<sup>16</sup> In summary then, it is possible for social and economic structures to be just, in the biblical sense of justice-as-care: it is possible to build *neighborly* structures. The final section of the present study will explore practical possibilities for particular bodies of believers to bear prophetic witness against structural injustice, and extricate themselves from participation in structural justice, by cultivating just, neighborly structures.

Before offering examples of ways that local church bodies can combat structural injustice, one further feature of Jackson's concept of nativeness bears pointing out. Nativeness is a moving target, a shifting standard, and the options available today are constrained by choices made yesterday. Returning to the example of gridded plots of land where the natives drew no such lines, Jackson writes:

Human history forces upon us the terms of our coming nativeness as much as or more than does our freedom to choose. [In 1874], we still had a chance for a kind of pastoral commons on the Great Plains. Few fences were up. The great bison herd was still intact. . . . But by 1885, eleven years later, the year the first patent deed was issued. . . a quantum leap had been made. The grid was absorbing settlers within well understood property rights. By 1900, nearly every quarter section was occupied.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Jackson, *Becoming Native to This Place*, 18.

Thus, the task at hand, of building just, neighborly structures will continue to be complicated by the ongoing construction of unjust, exploitive structures. Any Christian response, then, must be realistic in the sense of taking present realities seriously. This response must proceed carefully and attentively.

### *Justice in the City*

The most important reality to acknowledge, in seeking to apply the insights of Wendell Berry and Wes Jackson, is that the majority of the world's population now live in urban or suburban settings, and not in agrarian communities.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, today's city, in its very organization and construction, is an engine of exploitation. Peter Newman and Isabella Jennings quote Peter Berg, writing:

The only thing that keeps our present large metropolitan areas going is that they can still exploit their region or other regions for their continued support. For example, Los Angeles gets water from the Colorado River and northern California. Its liquid natural gas is from Indonesia. A large percentage of its labor comes from Mexico. Its electrical energy is derived from coal that comes from the Four Corners area of the Southwest (Berg 2001).<sup>19</sup>

Not only are cities the locus of economic exploitation, but normal citizens can effect much more meaningful policy change at the municipal level than at the state or national level. More local units of government are closer to the actual people and places they serve, and are therefore better equipped to enact caring, just policy. McKibben goes so far as to say that local governments have done more to combat climate change than the federal government: "Instead [of the federal government] cities and states have been active: San Francisco adopting a commitment to solar power, California cutting auto

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<sup>18</sup> "The World's Cities in 2016." Economic & Social Affairs. United Nations, 2016, ii.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Newman and Isabella Jennings. *Cities as Sustainable Ecosystems: Principles and Practices*. Washington D.C.: Island Press, 2008, 33.

emissions, seven eastern states banding together to control power plant emissions.”<sup>20</sup> It is clear, then, that if today’s church would build just, neighborly social and economic structures, local bodies of believers must learn how to do this in an urban setting. Local churches must become native to their cities, and witness to the reality of the Kingdom by embodying and teaching neighborly care for the people and their place. The present study concludes by proposing three strategies that the average, suburban church can and should adopt to combat structural injustice. The first is theological, the second is social, the third is more strictly economic.

First, the church must be more attentive to the Kingdom of God as an organizing principle. The Kingdom concept makes sense of both individual salvation and churchly social ethics, as argued in Chapter Three. Evangelical churches in particular, as they call individuals to salvation and discipleship, must not preach *individualism*, or else an individual perspective will continue to blind the vast majority of American Christians to their complicity in structural injustice. Furthermore, a proper focus on the political implications of the Kingdom of God as a real polity has the potential to divest the American church of any undue obsession with national electoral politics and the abstract national “culture war.” As McClendon and Hauerwas argue throughout their work, the task of the church is not to ensure the dominance of one nation-state over others, or safeguard abstract “Judeo-Christian values.” Rather, the task at hand is to witness to the truth of Kingdom proclaimed by the crucified and risen Christ by becoming a community that embodies Christian love and faithfulness, among its members and toward its

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<sup>20</sup> McKibben, *Deep Economy*, 172.

neighbors. This task is most properly done locally, because it occurs in relationship between concrete persons.

After a proper theological perspective has been adopted, the next strategy for building neighborly structures is social. Local church bodies must intentionally get to know the place and the people who live there, so that they can know how to care for them. They should also promote relationship in the communities they serve. These are necessary for two reasons. First, some familiarity with one's neighbor is prerequisite to loving that neighbor. Most people who participate in the construction of unjust structures do so because they simply do not know the effects that their choices have on the well-being of their neighbors. Second, by facilitating relationship within a community, churches can facilitate various policy changes or joint efforts that residents might wish to initiate down the road. There are doubtless many people of goodwill, Christians and otherwise, who do in fact want to resist structural injustice, but are simply too isolated—geographically or socially—to start doing anything about it.

Practically speaking, this process might begin with something as simple as Christians hosting front-lawn cookouts or graduating to block parties as pastors Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon suggest in their recent popular book.<sup>21</sup> There are myriad practical possibilities to this effect, many of which come from secular activists interested in building better cities.<sup>22</sup> One notable and widely-cited example is a project known as Share-It Square in Portland.<sup>23</sup> In 1996, after noticing a lack of interaction and familiarity

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<sup>21</sup> Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon. *The Art of Neighboring: Building Genuine Relationships Right Outside Your Door*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012, 90-94.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Mike Lydon and Anthony Garcia. *Tactical Urbanism: Short-Term Action for Long-Term Change*. Washington D.C.: Island Press, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 96-8.

in their neighborhood, a group of Portland residents led by Mark Lakeman decided to take action. They applied for a block party permit for a party which would take place on the central intersection. When the party was approved, however, the community did not simply grill and throw a frisbee; rather, they reclaimed the intersection as a makeshift town square, dubbed Share-It Square. The residents painted a mural spanning the entire intersection, and built a 24-hour self-serve tea station on one of the corners, as well as a community bulletin board and playhouse for children on the others. City officials initially demanded that the intersection be returned to its original condition, but residents successfully appealed to the city, by arguing that the intersection slowed neighborhood traffic and increased safety. Less than a year after the construction of Share-It Square, city officials began discussing the possibility of an ordinance which would facilitate future projects of this sort.

There are still more ambitious possibilities for churches to get involved in facilitating structural justice by facilitating relationships between people in their places at a larger scale. One non-profit, Earth, Inc., is at work producing an annual “shareholder’s report” for inhabitants of the planet Earth. The proposed report would inform residents of the global community about the triple-bottom-line (economic, social, and ecological) of the planet.<sup>24</sup> Depending on their size and available resources, local churches or denominational associations could publish “shareholder’s reports” for their city or region. These might report on anything from regional ecological health (air quality, water levels, soil erosion, etc.) to the local economy or the state of local schools, and inform residents of action they can take to address local problems. Neighborly reporting of this kind could

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<sup>24</sup> [http://www.earthinc.org/earthinc.php?page=shareholder\\_report#](http://www.earthinc.org/earthinc.php?page=shareholder_report#); cf. Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, 41-3, 228-30.

further the process of constructing just structures by connecting people with the people whose lives are tied to their own by these structures.

Lastly, local churches should pioneer neighborly ways of practicing economy—taking their life together from the land—and invest in those which already exist in their community. Within the church body, Christians might embody the economic mode of care by practicing Koinonia; put simply, church members should share their material wealth with one another. Members could create a “library” of tools and appliances that are not used everyday, like power tools or sports equipment, allowing others to borrow them whenever necessary. Larger churches could even devote a shed or barn to these items, keeping track of who borrows what with the use of barcode stickers and an online register. This would reduce the cost of living for individual members, ease the toll upon the land by consuming an excess of appliances and other material goods, and demonstrate the possibility of an alternative economic mode to the neighborhood.

Local churches might receive similar benefits by planting community gardens, stewarded ultimately by the church, but open to the whole neighborhood. If churches lack the administrative capacity or physical space to begin these efforts, they can support caring economies of place by simply encouraging their members patronize local businesses and farmer’s markets.

Finally, in the attempt to resist structural injustice and love their neighbors, churches and individual Christians must take advantage of opportunities presented by recent innovations. Makerspaces and urban retrofits are two promising innovations that can help to construct neighborly communities and economies. Makerspaces are the product of the “maker movement,” a recent upsurge in high-tech small-scale

manufacturing caused by the convergence of innovations in 3-D printing and various D-I-Y subcultures. Makerspaces themselves are workshops which spread costs of operation across members in order to provide members with access to various tools, which, taken together, would be prohibitively expensive for an individual “maker.”<sup>25</sup> Many makerspaces offer classes and technical training as well. While some predict that the maker movement will ignite a revolution across the manufacturing sector, more conservative predictions focus on the ways makerspaces are already lowering costs for local businesses and increasing the range of goods and materials which can be produced locally.<sup>26</sup>

churches with sufficient financial, physical, or social capital could invest it in local makerspaces or other similar coworking spaces, which cut costs for local business and increase neighborly interaction and cooperation.

Finally, local churches can make common cause with the urban retrofitting efforts, which seek to retrofit defunct big-box stores, single-use subdivisions, and sprawling parking lots and put them to new use in the service of the local community.<sup>27</sup> Of particular interest to the average church are retrofits of dead shopping malls and abandoned big-box stores, or “ghostboxes.” These efforts take advantage of the massive structures to provide valuable community spaces like restaurants and venues, schools, libraries, even churches.<sup>28</sup> Churches ought to seek out these opportunities to convert

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<sup>25</sup> John Tierney. “How Makerspaces Help Local Economies.” *The Atlantic*, April 17, 2015. <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/04/makerspaces-are-remaking-local-economies/390807/>; Eric Joseph van Holm. “Makerspaces and Local Economic Development.” *Economic Development Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (2017): 164–73.

<sup>26</sup> Holm, “Makerspaces and Local Economic Development,” 169.

<sup>27</sup> Ellen Dunham-Jones and June Williamson. *Retrofitting Suburbia: Urban Design Solutions for Redesigning Suburbs*. Updated. Hoboken: Wiley, 2011.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 67-80.

“ghostboxes” within their neighborhoods from engines of local exploitation to engines of local production, and support them in whatever ways possible.

### *Conclusion*

To paraphrase Wendell Berry, it is a mistake to assume that big problems can only be addressed by big solutions.<sup>29</sup> As long as Christians think about justice in terms of approximating abstract models of a just society, when they are faced with structural injustice they will be limited to big, top-down responses. On the other hand, when Christians recognize the biblical emphasis on justice as a condition of personal relationships, a new realm of possibility opens. On this view, when faced with instances of large-scale—even global—structural injustice, the Christian’s task is not to fix the world but only to care for the neighbor. Structures limit Christians’ ability to care for their neighbors in certain respects, but not in every respect. There is always something one *can* do, and the most important thing is to act in hope and make a go of it. In this way, it is telling that in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus never told his listeners whether the injured man recovered. The Samaritan was a good neighbor because of his faithfulness, not his effectiveness.

The Christian has a great opportunity to begin combating structural injustice within the local church body itself. Whenever Christians practice life within the peaceable kingdom, whether by baptism, Eucharist, or simply by sharing meals and possessions, they are cultivating the kinds of virtues which will enable them to discern responses to larger problems outside the church. That is, they are learning to see with the

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<sup>29</sup> “On Being Asked for ‘a Narrative for the Future.’” In *Our Only World: Ten Essays*, 167–76. Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 2015, 173.

eyes of God and think God's thoughts, learning ways of being that are foreign to the ways of being which led to the creation of exploitive and unjust structures in the first place. In this way Christians can gain a fresh perspective and a new understanding of the problems they face, and wherever this is done, Christians will may discern responses to structural injustice which are much more effective or practical than those proposed above.

Finally, Christians should take heart in the fact that so many possibilities for structural justice have already presented themselves. An economy of place, as described by Wendell Berry and Wes Jackson, is a real possibility. It is possible, within the church and without, for people to live together and take their life from the land in a caring way; the flourishing of one person need not require the exploitation of another. It is possible to begin building just structures even at the smallest level, by reclaiming a neighborhood intersection for the community, or investing in a sustainable agricultural economy of place by shopping at the farmer's market. Over time these small efforts can lead to broad, drastic change. The unjust structures discussed above were built gradually by the seemingly unrelated choices of myriad individuals; over time these grew into something formidable. But they were built nonetheless—and they can be torn down. Individual Christians and the Church as a whole may rejoice in this fact and hope in God's action as they seek to live faithfully and love their neighbor in the midst of structural injustice.

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