




2-7-2018

Creating a Cruciform Examen of the Parish: The Need for Culpability and Discipleship at St. --'s Catholic Church

Emilie Grosvenor

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/saysomethingtheological>

 Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), [Ethics in Religion Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Grosvenor, Emilie (2018) "Creating a Cruciform Examen of the Parish: The Need for Culpability and Discipleship at St. --'s Catholic Church," *Say Something Theological: The Student Journal of Theological Studies*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 2 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/saysomethingtheological/vol1/iss2/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Theological Studies at Digital Commons @ Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. It has been accepted for inclusion in Say Something Theological: The Student Journal of Theological Studies by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@lmu.edu.

Creating a Cruciform Examen of the Parish: The Need for Culpability and Discipleship at St. --'s Catholic Church

Emilie Grosvenor

“When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this Man’s blood; see to that yourselves.” And all the people said, “His blood shall be on us and on our children!” Then he released Barabbas for them; but after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.” ~MATTHEW 27:24-26, NASB

Awakening to an Uncomfortable Truth

Between the Summer of 2016 and the presidential election that November, over fifty young people fell victim to a killing spree at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida. A truck drove through a crowd of people celebrating Bastille Day in Nice, France. A couple of weeks afterward I was particularly horrified to hear that the priest of a small Church in Normandie, located not far from where my own loved ones live and work, had his throat slit on the altar during a weekday mass. These acts perpetrated by men who affiliated themselves with ISIS were used as political fodder, fueling the rise of aspiring neo-fascist leaders internationally, who found in these attacks an excuse to turn away refugees seeking asylum from countries where there is no respite from such violence. Where killing is so commonplace, the death toll is no longer linked to the word “news.” The numbers continue to be divorced from the faces, making it easy for us to mourn for Westerners and use the victims of incessant violence and persecution in Syria as statistics to support policies which alienate *them* from *us*. Meanwhile, 5,000 Haitians sat in detention centers at the border, and a slew of unaccompanied refugee children from Central America were waiting to see if their journey was all for naught. If they would be sent back to a place where destitution or death awaited them, all the while hoping America would choose hospitality. I looked to my faith community, St. --'s Catholic Church¹, to provide the spiritual nourishment I needed to discern the personal Christian response to the global havoc we were witnessing. I could not be sure whether the state of humanity had deteriorated or whether I had become more aware and

¹ The names of specific parishes and persons have been changed or removed for the sake of a more universal application of the parish examen, particularly in the case of the relationships between wealthy parishes and economically disenfranchised communities of faith.

sensitive to the effects of sin in the world. *How are we to be Church right now? What are we going to do? How do we pray? To what are we called?* These are the questions which beckoned me.

On Sunday, November 6th, two days prior to the election of our next U.S. President I was stopped by a woman handing out flyers in front of the church. As a thirteen year parishioner I had never seen anyone advertising and soliciting either ideas or information in front of its doors. The woman in question handed me a flyer that said in bold print, “NO ON MEASURE --.” She asked whether I was a local resident. I replied saying that, no, I was not, but had grown up in the area. She then asked for me to spread the word among members of the community, explaining to me that the measure would prevent any further building projects if they were designed to be above ‘X’ feet tall. I replied that I did not know enough about this measure to endorse it, and that construction in the region had been particularly difficult for close friends of mine who happened to be residents of the city. Furthermore, I had worries concerning its implications regarding social justice. I wanted to be sure that we were not giving developers a green light to tear down rent-controlled apartments, replacing them with luxury condos that would increase traffic and force long-time residents out of the city. She explained to me that the measure could potentially prevent any further additions on Church grounds or prevent restoration after a natural disaster, as was necessary after an earthquake over twenty years prior. Her last assumption seemed suspect at best, and why we would need further additions after a two part renovation project that cost over 30 million dollars left me both angry and confused. We had reached an impasse, albeit one that was reached politely.

I was upset prior to entering the church. The very soul of our nation was on the line in this election. People feared an increase in deportations, a fascist state, the repeal of access to life-saving medical treatment, and my pastor, the man who I had otherwise deeply admired for enabling our Church to be one in which LGBTQ and divorced Catholics felt truly welcome; the man who had given my father last rights, who had overseen our community’s commitment to enacting the seven principles of social justice, chose this measure above all other current sociopolitical issues to advertise before the steps of the church on Sunday.

This experience awakened me to a reality I had previously been blind to despite having been part of the community responsible for its development. The flyer was representative of a greater truth. I argue that in recent years the outreach ministries at St. --’s have been used less as an attempt to link arms with fellow Catholics and those at the margins, and more of a bargaining chip. We are told that an increase in donations is needed so that we can grow our parish even more, to support current ministries and begin new ones. As though, despite having more wealth and resources than the other two parishes in our city, there is no point at which we have enough.

While the majority of St. --’s parishioners mourn the election of Donald Trump, we are also afraid or even ignorant of the need to advocate for the more vulnerable members of our community because it may be construed as being too political. Yet, we actively and publicly support political measures that advance our building projects.

If Christ is found with and within the vulnerable, and we as Church are the Body of Christ, it is each parish’s responsibility to make their own communities vulnerable by walking with those who are being threatened and are thus in a state of fear. We must be strong in our communion with one another, rather than in our demonstrations of giving in so far as we do not

have to sacrifice our personal plans for greatness. Although our parish community consists of many returning Catholics, LGBTQ, and a relatively diverse community of believers, the majority of us have the advantage of race, wealth, and/or education. It is therefore more comfortable for us to give from on high, rather than to share on equal terms. I argue that this manner of being is most akin to that of Pontius Pilate, not that of Christ, and advocate for an examen of the Parish in which we acknowledge our responsibility in bringing about the current state of affairs. In this manner we may discern and act so as to walk with Christ, not empire.

Reality-Check

As a parishioner of Saint --’s Catholic Church, a progressive-leaning, wealthy parish, I have observed the shock and disgust of my fellow parishioners at the outcome of the 2016 presidential election. While there are certainly parishioners who voted our current president into office, our parish is one that prides itself in a tolerance, hospitality, and generosity which runs against the hateful rhetoric heard throughout the Trump campaign. The current presidential administration is thus considered by many parishioners to be the result of ignorance and prejudice far from our own comfortable lives. The material wealth, membership, and general community building within the parish has increased in the past fifteen years. However, I argue that it has made us complacent in the face of situations which demand we live the gospel. Our own distaste for the concept of sin and our shirking of all responsibility of the present sociopolitical state of our nation has given us a free-pass to avoid active community engagement that goes beyond appearances, especially in our relationships with other parishes and the way in which we distribute our wealth. While educating parishioners in Catholic social justice and providing dozens of ministries to transform these teachings into action, the current state of mind at St. --’s is perhaps best compared to that of the Western world in the years prior to the Great War. The outcome of this election is our wakeup call to the reality that while our society has made significant strides toward equality, evil continues to exist.

However, this realization must be transformative. It cannot be a demonization of red states, and thus a further idealization of the perfection of our own community. Only in recognizing our own part in the phenomenal rise of bigotry and fascism can we curb the tide and reorient ourselves toward Christ. If we have convinced ourselves that we are already Christ-like, there is no need for transformation or activism since we are already doing what is required of us. When we count celebrity Trump supporters such as -- among our parishioners and are all but divorced from the community life of the majority minority parishes less than 5 miles from our own we cannot pretend as if the divisions which have come to light do not also have roots in our own community simply because the majority of us voted blue.

Being members of a church in which gay couples and divorced parishioners feel welcome at the table has convinced us that we are already doing all that we can to walk with the marginalized, but to whom much is given, much is expected. In an affluent area, surrounded by like-minded individuals with a strong spirit of community, we have cut ourselves off from the larger community of Catholics, particularly our sister parishes within the city who are far less prosperous and have a greater amount of minorities in their membership. While renovating, rebuilding, adding on, and raising more money for ourselves, St. X’s and Y’s are still struggling to raise funds for basic necessities. We have fallen prey to an over-realized eschatology. The prevailing attitude is best expressed in the following statement: The fellowship indicative of

the Reign of God is being enacted at St. --’s and those who worship at other parishes have but to follow our example or join our congregation.

St. --’s is Different

A prevailing attitude among St. --’s parishioners is that our church is different. The sermons are engaging, the music energized, beckoning the participation of worshippers. There is a spirit of welcome that is particularly appealing to returning Catholics, like myself. St. --’s is a far cry from the long sermon mumbled and read from the pulpit. The choir and the congregation sing with eager voices. There is a rich community life. There are numerous opportunities to grow in faith through service outreach, bible study, book clubs, social justice education, and meditation classes. Our gay and lesbian outreach ministry provides a safe place for those who in the past have been scorned because of their sexual identity. In this manner, St. --’s is different in what I believe to be a positive and exemplary way.

This progressive and welcoming philosophy is congruent with the largely liberal population of the city. The city’s population rose by nearly 10% between 2000 and 2014. The church itself grew astronomically in membership, tripling in size from two thousand registered families in 1994, to nearly 8,000 today.² An increase in the city’s population led to an inevitable decrease in available parking in and around its campus. Despite taking up a full city block, St. --’s facilities were constructed in such a way that there was inadequate space for the wide variety of parish activities occurring simultaneously on church grounds. As a result, members of the community found that remodeling the Church grounds, which were first constructed in 1926 when the parish held far fewer members, to be understandable and indeed necessary.³

Who Do You Say That I am?

In *Christology at the Crossroads*, liberation theologian Jon Sobrino stresses Christ’s identity as defined by his relationship with *Abba*, or God as Father, and the Reign of God.⁴ This is not only congruent with Jesus’ own words and actions as presented in the gospel, but with Christian Trinitarian theology which defines the triune nature of God by relationship, justice, and therefore love.⁵ Jesus is not a messiah who preaches primarily of his own importance, but gives

² Information retrieved from a local online newspaper no longer in publication. For more information, contact author.

³ Ibid.

Information obtained from parish website. For more information contact author.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the budget of the 30 million dollar renovation project, which included, among other things, new community centers, a parking garage, and a new gym for the school. Much of this was given by wealthy donors whose names now appear on the side of the Church office building. Rather, this paper seeks to focus on the reprehensibility of the lack of sharing and solidarity present in St. --’s relationship to Catholic parishes in the city despite their abundance of wealth and resources.

⁴ Jon Sobrino. *Christology at the Crossroads*. (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York, 1978), 91.

⁵ Justo L. Gonzalez. *Manana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective*. (Abingdon Press: Nashville, 1990), 115.

Margaret Farley. *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*. (Bloomsbury Academic, 2008), 153.

himself entirely in service to *Abba*, and to the Reign.⁶ Sobrino summarizes this theological claim as follows:

Thus, Jesus’ original experience of faith entails trust in the Father and confidence in the Father’s activity; it also entails hope in God’s future and of God’s kingdom. To put it a bit differently; it entails hope in people’s filiation with the Father and in brotherhood between human beings.⁷

As Christians, we are called to walk with Christ. Thus, when oriented toward the path of Jesus, our wants align with God’s wants. Conversely, sin is defined by its efforts to inhibit the breaking-in of God’s Reign. In light of these definitions of the Reign of God, and sinfulness, Sobrino notes that Jesus’ crucifixion is the direct result of his opposition of the power structures of his time, comprised of both Jewish religious leadership, particularly as it pertains to the Temple cult, and the occupying Roman government. He asserts, “Those with religious and political power try to cover the sinfulness of the situation in the name of the deity.”⁸

This is not to pit Jesus against his religious tradition. Sobrino, as well Thomas P. Rausch, assert the importance of emphasizing Jesus’s context as a Palestinian Jew.⁹ We know from the gospels that Jesus and his family faithfully practiced their Jewish faith. The infancy narratives in Luke culminate with an adolescent Jesus teaching Jewish scholars in the temple (Luke 2:41-52).¹⁰ The crisis in Galilee begins with Christ’s preaching in a Galilean synagogue.¹¹ Jesus enters Jerusalem and the temple courts in celebration of the Passover. He even affirms the goodness of the woman who gives her only coin to the Temple treasury (Mark 12:42-44, Luke 21:1-4). Rather, Jesus’ anger which culminates in the turning of the tables in the Temple courtyard, an action that most biblical scholars agree sealed his condemnation unto death on the cross, is flared by the sinfulness of people in his community masked as piety and servitude to God.¹²

Herein lies the need for a constant self-examination, not only by individual parishioners, but by the Church institutions as a whole, for as C.S. Lewis dramatized in his book *The Screwtape Letters*, evil is more often than not subversive.¹³ It is rare that evil flaunts itself as such. The first sin represented in Genesis is masked with good intentions. So too is it easy for religious institutions, especially those with a great deal of wealth and power, such as St. --’s, to fall into the trap of disguising the sin in question as pious servitude to God.¹⁴ Philosopher of religion Brian Gregor summarizes this point succinctly stating, “Sin and evil love to hide themselves.”¹⁵ The danger is that the very structures that exist with the sole purpose of aiding, in

⁶ Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 94.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 203.

⁹ Jon Sobrino. *Christology at the Crossroads*. (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York, 1978)

Thomas P. Rausch. *Who Is Jesus?*, (Collegeville:Liturgical Press, 2003).

¹⁰ NASV unless otherwise indicated.

¹¹ Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 94.

¹² Thomas P. Rausch. *Who Is Jesus?*, (Collegeville:Liturgical Press, 2003).

¹³ C.S. Lewis. *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*. “The Screwtape Letters.” (Harper One: New York, 2002), 179-296.

¹⁴ Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*

¹⁵ Brian Gregor. *A Philosophical Anthropology of the Cross: The Cruciform Self*. Indiana University Press:Indianapolis, 2013), 59.

however small a way, the revealing of the Reign of God through fellowship may, due to the fallen world’s tendency toward sin, work against it.

Criteria of an Examen of the Parish

Liberation theologians such as Jon Sobrino are heavily influenced by Jurgen Moltmann’s assertion that all legitimate Christian theology must begin at the cross. It is at the cross that Jesus demonstrates his ultimate obedience and servitude to the Reign of God. Justo L. Gonzalez asserts that Christ is entirely “for others.”¹⁶ His being for others is radical in that it is given primacy in determining his course of action over and against social customs. Gonzalez remarks:

His was a strong, assertive “for-otherness.” He was for others, not only when he healed the sick, forgave those who condemned him, and died on the cross but also when he cleansed the Temple, spoke the harsh truth to the Pharisees, and called Herod a fox...Since the present order of the world is not one of equality, his stern for-otherness was not evenhanded. He could break all social proprieties by speaking to a Samaritan adulteress (John 4:9) and could be harsh with the socially acceptable and profoundly religious Pharisees and scribes. He would pronounce blessing and curse almost in the same breath, and not on the basis of religious practice but on the place of different people in the ordering of society.¹⁷

Gonzalez goes on to list the beatitudes which contrast sharply to society’s perpetual marginalization and persecution *against* the other. According to Sobrino, Christ’s for-otherness, and the against-otherness of the world collide in such a way that the cross is the only possible outcome.¹⁸

Unlike the theology of passivity, the intended result of an image of the imperial Christ which has long been used precisely to justify unjust power structures, obedience to the ushering in of the Reign presented by the crucified Christ is an active call to discipleship. Like Christ, we are called to want what God wants, and to work for its reality, even unto death. In Matthew’s gospel Jesus says, “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24).

According to Gregor, self-understanding is always mediated through another.¹⁹ Thus, as the *Imago Dei* we are most fully capable of self-examination before God as revealed on the cross since this is where the gratuitousness and unconditional nature of the love which defines God’s self is most apparent. Thomas Rausch asserts that the love to which Jesus calls his disciples is a self-sacrificial love.²⁰ This is evident in Jesus’ statement “There is no greater love than this, than to lay down your life for your friends” (John 15:13). According to Henri Nouwen, Jesus is *Immanuel*, God-with-us, in his compassion, in his suffering-with-us. For this reason an examen of the Church must be first and foremost rooted in God as Love demonstrated through

¹⁶ Gonzalez, *Manana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective*, 151.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 151-152.

¹⁸ Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 203.

¹⁹ Gregor, *A Philosophical Anthropology of the Cross*, 7, 27.

²⁰ Thomas P. Rausch. *Radical Christian Communities*. (Wipf and Stock Publishers: Eugene, Oregon, 1990), 34.

compassion and self sacrifice.²¹ This divine reality is most concretely revealed to humanity before the crucified Jesus. Furthermore, a theology which begins with the cross is a call to action which demands a choice. Either we take up our cross and follow him, dying unto ourselves, finding new life in the way of Christ, or we are actively working against the Reign of God, taking an active role in his crucifixion.

The second criterion involves reflection upon the nature of our discipleship. Do we find the self-sacrifice and suffering-with of Christ on the cross mirrored in our parish? Implicit in the need for an examination of conscience, whether it be at the individual or community level, is the culpability of human beings. We are not perfect. The complete communion of the Reign cannot be fully realized without the breaking-in of the transcendent God. It is already, and not yet. Gregor thus asserts that a “cruciform philosophy must therefore be thoroughly eschatological in orientation.”²² We wait in joyful hope for *parousia* as disciples of Christ doing all that we can to reveal the little we can of the Reign of God in the meantime. Ours is an active waiting; a preparation. There is therefore a need for balance between humility and mission. We must do all that we can to act as Christ by liberating those held captive by injustice, while recognizing that we too are culpable and will not see complete liberation from evil until the not-yet of the Reign breaks through. The cross demands that we strive for obedience to the call of the Reign of God while remaining in a state of eschatological hope.

Thomas Rausch describes the *already* of the Reign of God as follows:

The reign of God is inclusive of all dimensions of human life. Those who live as disciples of Jesus, seeking God’s reign through prayer and compassionate service, reproducing in their own lives his self-sacrificial love, enable others to recognize God’s presence and action in the world. They become living signs of God’s presence until he comes again.²³

Love as self-sacrifice, compassion, and service is incongruent with a theology that asks the bare minimum. Donations, tithes, and general charity is a virtue only insofar as it promotes justice. In our society, as in that of Jesus, a few have far more than the many. Offering ourselves from a place of comfort rather than a place of sacrifice does not promote the solidarity indicative of true compassion. Rather, if we are charitable from on high we may increase divisions instead of allowing for opportunities of fellowship. The desire to stay comfortable while still giving off the impression, both to others and ourselves, that we are doing all we can to walk with Christ is tempting, especially in a consumerist culture such as our own. However, it does not mirror the way of the cross, and thus will inevitably reinforce societal injustice.

Compassion means to suffer *with*. Thus, if God is a compassionate God, God is with us in our moments of grief and pain, providing consolation in desolation. As the Body of Christ, we are thus called to suffer with the vulnerable as well. Compassion is not simply an intellectual assent of another's suffering, it is defined by a sharing of emotions. It is by this ideal that we hold ourselves accountable as Christians.²⁴ The compassionate Christ calls us out of our comfort.

²¹ Henri J.M. Nouwen, Donald P. McNeill, Douglas A. Morrison. *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life*. (Doubleday:New York, 1982), 3, 13.

²² Gregor, *A Philosophical Anthropology of the Cross*, 51.

²³ Rausch, *Radical Christian Communities*, 34.

²⁴ Nouwen, *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life*, 3, 13.

Furthermore, to suffer with the vulnerable is to make ourselves vulnerable. The second criterion can thus be summarized by the following questions: Who are the vulnerable? Are we as a community joining them in their vulnerability, seeking to aid in their liberation, or are we contributing to the oppressive structures which perpetuate the injustice that forces them into a state of vulnerability?

In her book, *Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology*, feminist-liberation theologian Elizabeth Johnson defines three principles of liberation theology which will serve as the final criterion in the examen of the parish. The questions are as follows:

1. What elements from our own tradition had a hand in this present circumstance?
2. Where is the complicity of the Church and its preaching?
3. How have we understood Christ in a way that is helpful to the oppressor?²⁵

In sum, the three criteria for the examen of the parish are first, self-examination resulting from the awareness of oneself before the crucified Christ. Secondly, a recognition of the injustices within our world, the marginalization and forced vulnerability of peoples, and an acknowledgement of our inherent culpability in not only individual sin, but in the structural sins that perpetuate such injustice. The final criteria expands upon this recognition through reflection on the specifics of how the parish reinforces injustice, rather than joining the vulnerable in their suffering.

An Examen of St. --'s Catholic Church

When I falter, and make choices in desolation, having fooled myself into thinking that my sins are rooted in righteousness, my acquaintances are not those who have the knowledge and courage to confront me concerning my wrongdoing. It is my oldest friends, my closest family who will condemn my actions, demand change, and force me to look upon things as they are, and not how I like to think they are. In her book *Just Love*, Margaret Farley describes such unconditional love, *agape*, as all encompassing. As such, it cannot only acknowledge what is true and good in the character and actions of those we love. It forces us to encounter their faults, as well as our own. When encountered with love, these failings are not condoned. Rather, in gratitude of such abounding, unfailing love, we seek to transform our own failings into qualities worthy of our beloved. Christ has redeemed us, and we out of our love, seek to follow in his perfect way, though we know such perfection is unattainable in this life. We strive for Christ, for love, for God.

Furthermore, It is my intent to write this examen not with a finger pointed outward, but as a reflection in which I too am culpable, and realizing this, attempt to awaken my fellow parishioners out of their over realized eschatological imaginings from a place of humility, love, and gratitude for the faith which my parish has imparted to me. I therefore feel compelled to speak when I see the community to which I owe much of my religious education and spiritual support no longer acting in the manner which first inspired me to enter its doors as a believer over a decade ago.

²⁵ Elizabeth Johnson. *Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology*. (Crossroad: New York, 1990), 87-88.

As previously mentioned, much of St. --’s growth, in addition to an increase in the population density of the surrounding city, is due to returning Catholics who found hope in the vibrancy and hospitable spirit of its community. Rausch’s explanation of the move from the early Church’s eschatological hope to the fear of judgement provides context for the distaste held by disenchanted and liberal Catholics, particularly baby boomers born in the West prior to Vatican II, in regards to the language of sin and repentance. While this led to reforms at the Second Vatican Council which sought to renew eschatological hope, ignoring the role of sin naturally leads one to neglect the importance of self-examination. Focusing upon only the good of the community plays a key role in over-realized eschatology, the parishioners false sense that the Reign of God is already fully actualized in their community. This blinds believers to the struggles taking place within and outside their community, effectively killing the hope of the fulfillment of the Reign through Jesus Christ since it is no longer deemed necessary.²⁶

It is for this reason, that I argue that St. --’s does not currently take the cross seriously. We avoid it. The cross demands a choice. Will we be made humble, finding the courage to examine our role in our current sociopolitical reality? Or will we turn away from the cross, asserting that we are not to blame for we are already doing all that we can? Will we choose to walk with the vulnerable Christ to Golgotha?

I have established that the crucified Christ is the most concrete demonstration of the love of God due to the suffering and self-sacrifice involved. God makes Godself vulnerable for our sake through the humanity and murder of Jesus Christ. Choosing the way of the cross is thus to move onto the second criterion which results in our ability to recognize Christ in the vulnerable who surround us. In the present climate of fear reflected in the election of a bigoted leader, the most victimized and vulnerable persons are doubtless our undocumented immigrant and Muslim brothers and sisters. While it is true that the many ministries of St. --’s do much good, the attitude of many of our parishioners, that such injustice is entirely the result of what took place at the ballot box, excuses us of all culpability and responsibility to those on the margins. Like Pontius Pilate, we wash our hands of the situation, failing to acknowledge that we hold great influence in curbing the tide.

However, taking a firm political stance on Measure X is testament to the fact that our leadership at St. --’s is fully aware of their powerful influence. If this were not so, activists on the part of those against the measure would not be allowed in front of the church doors, nor would the pastor’s name appear on an advertisement listing those officially opposed to the measure.²⁷ Brett Hoover, author of the book, *The Shared Parish: Latinos, Anglos, and the Future of U.S. Catholicism*, asserts that “The process by which leaders sell their vision can be seen as a form of cultural production.” Nonetheless, the moral state of the parish does not rest entirely on the shoulders of its pastor. Hoover argues, “Catholics might be tempted to understand this role of cultural production exclusively in terms of the exercise of power of a centralized authority, but the laity are not simply faithful soldiers to be told what to do...”²⁸ Alternatively, in the

²⁶ Thomas P. Rausch. *Eschatology, Liturgy, and Christology: Toward Recovering an Eschatological Imagination*. (Liturgical Press: A Michael Glazier Book, Collegeville: Minnesota, 2012),4-10,160-161.

²⁷ Information retrieved from local daily newspaper. For more information contact author.

²⁸ Brett C. Hoover. *The Shared Parish: Latinos, Anglos, and the Future of U.S. Catholicism*. (New York University Press: New York and London, 2014), 205.

knowledge that we cannot force the action of others, we may strive to make ourselves vulnerable by walking with Christ as he inhabits our immigrant or Muslim neighbor.

Having acknowledged the choice directed to St. --’s in face of the cross, as well as recognizing the crucified Christ in the face of those who have become victims of fear and injustice as a result of our current sociopolitical context, it is thus necessary to conclude the examen with Johnson’s three principles to ascertain our own community’s culpability in perpetuating the marginalization of the other.

The elitism inherent in the idea that our parish is different, as well as the prioritization of accumulating wealth to not only maintain our already remodeled campus, but to further expand its growth is indicative of our placing our economic prosperity prior to the needs of the marginalized. For the purposes of this paper, the examen of the parish of St. --’s will be determined by the marginalized of our own community. We need not even leave our immediate Catholic circle in order to bear witness to the greed of our parish perpetuating injustice toward the other. St. X’s and St. Y’s, both commonly known as majority minority parishes comprised of mostly low-income parishioners, especially in comparison to those of St. --’s, do not seem to benefit from the increased prosperity of their neighbor St. --’s.

The establishment of a joint parish initiative between the three parishes was partly created as a safeguard against this outcome. Its goal is stated as follows:

We are seeking substantive sharing opportunities that save money and share resources. The specifics however, will be up to future committees and collaboration among parish leadership. This collaboration is not intended to merge the parishes into one; it hopes to retain their individual character.²⁹

However, the sharing of wealth seems a gross overstatement when one takes a single look at the outside of each Church. While St. --’s recently completed a 4.5 million dollar renovation of its school gymnasium, St. X’s elementary school hosts some of its elementary school classes in bungalows.³⁰ Both St. X’s and St. Y’s remain small in size and lack the grandiose interior of St. --’s. This is not however, to assume that bigger is better. The classrooms at St. X’s are adequate. St. X’s and Y’s are beautiful in their simplicity and in the obvious devotion of their parishioners. There is a beauty in the dressed statues, flower offerings, and candle lightings at St. X’s that inspires in me a sense of community and prayerfulness, especially since St. --’s instituted the use of electric candles.

Nonetheless, even if the simple aesthetic is purposeful and part of what the joint parish website nominates as the retaining of each church’s “individual character,” the wealth of St. --’s parishioners provides the church with social capital that is not being adequately shared with its two neighboring parishes. This is evident in their lack of basic contemporary resources.

While the joint parish website holds mass times and a link to the purported website of each church, as of the writing of this paper, St. --’s has the only functioning link.³¹ St. --’s website is busy with links to the Church bulletin, volunteer opportunities, livestream masses, and

²⁹ Information from joint parish website. For more information contact author.

³⁰ Information retrieved from local daily newspaper. For more information contact author.

³¹ Information from joint parish website. For more information contact author.

ways to give both online and by text; a one-time gift, or an automatic recurring payment. In fact, while the link for St. X’s website is not functioning, St. Y’s does not even have one which is listed. It can thus be assumed, for someone visiting the city, searching the joint parish website for details on local churches, it is far more likely that they will visit St. --’s than the other churches. St.--’s high quality website and social media presence would not be inherently wrong were this a resource evenly shared among other community parishes. Instead, a visitor to the website is left with the feeling that St. --’s is the only church in the city worth attending.

Finally, St. X’s is largely considered by parishioners to be the community’s Latino parish, while St. Y’s, located adjacent to a resource center for the homeless, ministers to the poor. However, this is not the case. While St. X’s is predominantly Latino it is what Hoover would nominate as a shared parish, as is St. Y’s. They each hold bilingual, English, and Spanish masses every Sunday, encouraging solidarity among members of the community regardless of their ethnic background. While St. --’s has committed to holding Spanish masses in the future, this is not a current practice.³²

With a notable but minority hispanic membership, and masses held solely in English, St. --’s isolates itself from the justified fears of the local latino community. Parishioners such as myself are either unaware of the undocumented status of their fellow English-speaking parishioners, or divorced from the reality of ICE raids, deportations, and the separation of families which hang over the heads of Catholic residents in our own city only a few miles away at both St. X’s and St. Y’s. Being different, liberal, progressive, and elitist draws a line that prevents communal fellowship with our neighboring parishes.

It is the prioritization of commodities over fellowship that serves as the justification for policies that actively work against the Reign of God, such as the Muslim ban and deportation of Latino/a immigrants resulting in the separation of families. Though the majority of my fellow parishioners and I did not vote for Donald Trump, by determining that we were already doing that which is required of us, we have avoided the vulnerable, suffering Christ of the cross, and thus solidarity with Christ in our neighbors, St. X’s and St. Y’s. Thus, while our ballots may have spoken for social justice, our elitism served an order of separation. It is easy to wash our hands of the crucifixion, of the suffering of our neighbors, when we are not in communal relationship to them.

The Call Toward Communal Life: A Parish Theology of Accompaniment

The end of the examen is not guilt, but discipleship. Having recognized the manner in which our faith tradition as practiced at St. --’s serves to perpetuate injustice, and acknowledging the need for fellowship with our neighbors, it is thus necessary to take steps toward liberation. In Glenn Bucher’s essay “Toward a Liberation Theology for the ‘Oppressor’” he notes that the oppressor is not only the source of marginalization, but the source of his/her own imprisonment as well. Therefore, the oppressor must also be liberated. It is through discipleship that both the oppressive force and the victims of oppression are liberated through gratuitous love of Christ.³³ This involves discerning how we transform this new awareness into serving Christ.

³² Information from parish website. For more information contact author.

³³ Glenn R. Bucher, “Toward a Liberation Theology for the “Oppressor”” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 44, no. 3 (1976): 534. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1462822>.

Since Christ defines himself through his relationship to God the Father, and to the Reign of God, and furthermore the Trinity is constitutive of relationship, and thus love, we, as followers of the cruciform Christ must seek out relationship in working for the Reign of God.³⁴

Liberation theologian Roberto S. Goizueta argues that a theology of accompaniment is the most congruent with walking with Christ, thus the title of his book, *Caminemos con Jesus*. When we walk together, rather than performing charity from on high, we imitate the equanimous relationship of the Trinity, as well as Christ’s servitude to the fellowship and love that reveal the Reign of God.³⁵ Room must first be created wherein this relationship may develop. This involves an erasing of the divisions which serve to keep us captive to sin, so that we may be liberated unto fellowship.

I argue that the most effective manner of doing so is solidarity in worship among the parishes. If I worship alongside the vulnerable, not only does it allow for the cultivation of relationship, but also for suffering-with. Through this compassion I am able to see the crucified Christ in the face of the undocumented, the immigrant, and the poor. This cruciform theology propels us to act against this suffering out of genuine love for another, rather than as a comfortable deed which satisfies our desire to be a good Christian. Furthermore, it creates in us a hope for *parousia* and eliminates an over-realized eschatology within parish life as believers encounter the cross with humility in knowing that we work for the Reign which can only be completely fulfilled with the breaking-in of the transcendent God. Worshippers from St. --’s must be actively encouraged to worship at St. X’s and St. Y’s. Furthermore, Spanish masses should be instituted without further delay as we actively invite them as guests within our Church. The annual St. X’s *Posada* which takes place at St. --’s must be followed by numerous joint parish events. Finally, the financial prioritization should be given to lifting up our fellow parishes, even if that entails curtailing our own parish’s growth, for Jesus’ call to love is one of self-sacrifice.

³⁴ Roberto Goizueta. *Caminemos con Jesus: Toward a Hispanic/Theology of Accompaniment*. (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York, 1995), 66, 69.

³⁵ Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesus*, 66.

Bibliography

Bucher, Glenn R. "Toward a Liberation Theology for the "Oppressor"" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 44, no. 3 (1976): 517-34. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1462822>.

Farley, Margaret. *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*. Bloomsbury Academic (2008).

Goizueta, Roberto S. *Caminemos con Jesus: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment*. Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York (1995).

Gonzalez, Justo. *Manana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective*. Abingdon Press: Nashville (1990).

Gregor, Brian. *A Philosophical Anthropology of the Cross: The Cruciform Self*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington:Indiana (2013).

Hoover, Brett C. *Comfort: An Atlas for Body and Soul*. Riverhead Books: New York (2011).

Hoover, Brett C. *The Shared Parish: Latinos, Anglos, and the Future of U.S. Catholicism*. New York University Press: New York and London (2014).

Johnson, Elizabeth. *Consider Jesus: New Waves in Christology*. The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York(1990).

Lewis, C.S. *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*. "The Screwtape Letters." Harper One: New York (2002).

Nouwen, Henri J.M. *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life*. Doubleday: Image Books, New York (1982).

Rausch, Thomas P. *Eschatology, Liturgy, and Christology: Toward Recovering an Eschatological Imagination*. Liturgical Press: A Michael Glazier Book, Collegeville: Minnesota (2012).

Rausch, Thomas P. *Radical Christian Communities*. Wipf and Stock Publishers: Eugene, Oregon (1990, 2002).

Rausch, Thomas P. *Who Is Jesus?: An Introduction to Christology*. Liturgical Press: A Michael Glazier Book, Collegeville: Minnesota (2003).