

INTERNAL INJURIES

Moral Division within the Churches

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As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body.

Colossians 3:12-15

In general the churches . . . bore for me the same relation to God that billboards did to Coca-Cola: they promoted thirst without quenching it.

John Updike, *A Month of Sundays*

It is an insidious paradox of Reformed churches that our theological commitment to the unity of the church is paired with the reality of our continual schisms. Reformed churches have been central to the quest for the unity of Christ's church, but at the same time they have been internally wounded by constant division and subdivision. Of the great ecclesial movements emerging from the sixteenth century Reformation and its aftermath, it is the Reformed family of churches that has multiplied by a continual process of division born of disagreement, controversy, and partition. In the United States alone there are twenty-seven Reformed denominations, and this does not number churches with forgotten Reformed roots – Baptists and churches of the Stone-Campbell movement. Korea, the pride of Presbyterian missionaries, is now home to ninety-two Presbyterian denominations, and counting!

At the outset, the restored unity of the church was understood to be reformation's goal. John Calvin's critique of the late medieval Catholic Church and its practices was pervasive and often harsh, yet its purpose was always reform, not separation. More than two decades after Luther's dramatic challenge to Rome, a young Calvin wrote an open letter to Cardinal Sadoletto in which he acknowledged that the most serious of Catholic charges against the reformers was, "that we have attempted to dismember the Spouse of Christ. Were that true," he continued, "both you and the whole world might regard us as desperate." While acknowledging the reality of division within the church, Calvin maintained that the reformers "desired nothing more than that religion being revived, the Churches, which discord had scattered and dispersed, might be gathered together into true unity."¹

As the years passed, Calvin became increasingly disturbed by the fragmentation of the church. As the Council of Trent was concluding its sixteenth session, he wrote to Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer, agonizing, “This other thing also is to be ranked among the chief evils of our time, viz., that the Churches are so divided, that human fellowship is scarcely now in any repute among us. . . . Thus it is that the members of the Church being severed, the body lies bleeding.”² As late as 1560, while Trent was still in session, he wrote to the persecuted Reformed Churches in France concerning his conviction that a universal council of the Church was necessary to put an end to the divisions in Christendom. The hoped-for council should include representatives from the whole church, Calvin wrote, for he assumed inclusion of the Catholic bishops in the council together with elected persons who desired the reform of the Church. He was even open to the possibility that the pope would preside (but not rule) over the council.³

Of course, Calvin’s hopes were not realized. Within a generation the Protestant movement had split into distinct branches – Lutheran, Reformed, Anabaptist, and Anglican – that became increasingly distant from, and often hostile to, one another. In turn, these branches splintered along national and theological lines so that, in our time, thousands of separate churches are strewn across the world. Church divisions are occasionally healed, but most have endured, so that denominationalism is simply “the way things are” for most contemporary Christians. Among Protestants, division is assumed to be the normal condition of the church, and when disputes arise, subdivision is too often the first impulse rather than the last resort.

Sixteenth and seventeenth century divisions were largely theological, and most contemporary ecumenical dialogues address those continuing theological differences in a search for convergence, consensus, and agreement. But deep disagreements over moral issues have also been present from the beginning. In the United States, many churches coped with tensions over moral issues ranging from temperance to slavery, with some leading to threats of separation and the reality of division. Presbyterian schism over the issue of slavery predated the Civil War, and the north-south split endured until 1982!

In our time, deep disagreement over moral issues has come to dominate the lives of many churches. Actual schism has now occurred in The Episcopal Church and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), while the Evangelical Lutheran Church faces that prospect this summer. Tragic fissures in the Anglican Communion threaten to disengage provinces, reducing some of them to mere national denominations. In all of these divisions, the place of gay and lesbian persons in the church is the defining moral issue. Although it is played out in slightly different ways in various churches, the dispute is centered on ordained ministry, and recently on the related issue of “same-sex marriage” as well. It is not immaterial to the conflicts that ordained ministry is central, for in spite of our talk about its servant character, it is what provides access to power in the institutional life of the churches.

The Broadening Church

Mainline American Protestant churches long ago determined that significant theological latitude was tolerable. Presbyterians abandoned strict subscription to the Westminster Confession in the early eighteenth century, requiring simply that ministers adopt the confession's "essential tenets" which, intentionally, were not identified. Today, my church asks ordinands to vow only that they will be "led, guided, and instructed" by the ten creeds, confessions, and catechisms in *The Book of Confessions*. The abandonment of rigid confessional subscription, as welcome as it was necessary, led to a progressive broadening of the range of acceptable theological perspectives. Theological diversity is now considered desirable; the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s constitution concludes its chapter on the unity of the church with a section on "Diversity and Inclusiveness" that includes in its long list of required representational categories, "different theological positions."⁴

In the wake of nearly three decades of divisive debates about the ordination of gay and lesbian persons, the PCUSA General Assembly commissioned a "Task Force on the Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church." Its charge was to deal with evident unrest in the church around christology, biblical authority and interpretation, ordination standards, and power. The 2006 report of the Task Force was admirable in many respects, yet it failed to settle any of the unrest. Its sections on christology and the Bible were unremarkable, setting forth broad generalities as indications of widespread agreement in the church. Its work on ordination standards focused on the possibility of ordaining gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons, and so only led to another round of political battles. And, tellingly, the task force neglected to deal with power at all. Because theological diversity was assumed to be the desirable norm within the agreed upon generalities, the Task Force report failed to address deeper theological difficulties in the church, of which disputes about christology, Scripture, ordination, and power are only symptoms.

Theological broadening of the Presbyterian Church has deep roots. The "Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy" of the early decades of the twentieth century was played out forcefully in the Presbyterian Church. The result was that attempts to enumerate essential theological tenets were pushed to the background while essential social tenets were given pride of place. The 1910 General Assembly provided insight into what was to come. The Assembly adopted a list of five essential theological tenets that were mere rewordings of the five Niagara fundamentals – inerrant Scripture, virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, bodily resurrection, and Jesus' miracles. The Assembly also adopted a version of the Federal Council of Churches' "Social Creed of the Churches," listing fourteen social pronouncements ranging from the equitable distribution of wealth, to reform of labor laws, to women's rights, to prison reform.⁵ While the five theological fundamentals were soon abandoned, the causes of the social creed were incorporated into the church's institutional structures, programs, and budgets.

The fate of the essential tenets and the social creed was captured in the motto, "theology divides, service unites." But it was not to be. Brad Longfield notes that, "the path the church finally took in an effort to maintain its witness to the world probably only served to undermine that witness. . . . Without clear theological boundaries, the church, in the years ahead, would find it more and more difficult to maintain an identity separate from the culture and offer a unique message and vision to the world it sought to serve."⁶ The severing of theology from morality

was just one instance of the American churches' separation of (private) faith from (public) life. Belief was consigned to the province of the individual while the church went about the business of shaping ecclesial life and working to shape American society. Inevitably, then, "service" – mission, ethics, morality – came to be the flashpoint of disagreement and discord while thin agreement on theological platitudes provided weak bonds of institutional communion.

A decade ago, David Yeago characterized denominations as "institutional vessels designed to enclose extreme religious plurality." In denominations where "diversity" is the order of the day, he wrote, "Every party within the church is thus reduced to a *club*, boosters of a favorite style or commodity, and therefore to a phenomenon that mainline denominations are equipped to manage."⁷ Yeago was writing about diverse interpretations of Scripture, but his point had wider implications. Yet the capacity of denominations to manage diversity is breaking down in precisely those areas – ethics and mission – that were thought to unite by providing a large umbrella under which a variety of churchly activities could be carried out. Mission divides because it requires us to make public choices about moral issues. Denominational mission divides because its requirement of public choice about moral issues is detached from shared commitment to the depth of the apostolic faith.

Church Votes

We see moral issues as real and potential church dividing issues throughout Scripture and in the life of the early church. In the first four centuries conversion was not only a matter of changed belief, but also of changed patterns of behavior and belonging. Catechumens may have struggled less to believe what Christians believed than to live as Christians taught. So it should not surprise us that moral issues are contentious and may become church dividing. The gospel is not about what we think, but how we live. Both Old and New Testaments impel us toward determinations of how we are to live before the living God. There is no distinction between kerygma and didache, between *theologia* and *paraenesis*. The animating thrust of Scripture is to display how faith acts, urging us to lead a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called (Eph. 4:1).

What should surprise us, or perhaps appall us, is the way the churches deal with the moral disagreements that dominate ecclesial life. Alasdair MacIntyre gives voice to what we know all too well about North American society:

The most striking feature of contemporary moral utterance is that so much of it is used to express disagreements; and the most striking feature of the debates in which these disagreements are expressed is their interminable character. I do not mean by this just that such debates go on and on and on – although they do – but also that they apparently can find no terminus. There seems to be no rational way of securing moral agreement in our culture.⁸

Or in our churches. And perhaps there is no moral agreement in our churches because churchly moral utterance is too often little more than a vaguely religious version of society's conversation. Americans remain divided on the place of gay and lesbian persons in society, abortion,

affirmative action, immigration issues, access to health care, and a host of issues that are as moral as they are political. Church debates on these matters, especially in national church assemblies, merely place a religious patina on generalized social categories of rights, hospitality, inclusion, and justice . . . or authority, responsibilities, cohesion, and righteousness. In general, the most accurate indicator of the direction the church will move is the direction society is moving. And society's trajectory on issues of homosexuality was settled when "Will and Grace" became a top ten TV show. (Incidentally, the names "Will and Grace" were no accident.)

But moral issues continue to trouble the churches. Because seemingly interminable church debates contribute to denominational disaffection and mainline decline, denominations have come to rely on a time-honored way of providing the needed terminus: *voting*. Denominations, acting as good democratic institutions, give to representative church assemblies the responsibility of voting on legislative proposals designed to end debates on contested moral issues by enacting one side of the argument into church policy and ecclesiastical law. "One side" of the reductionist "two sides" is enacted because democratic voting procedures always reduce an issue to yes or no, up or down, in or out.

C.P. Snow observed that "The number 2 is a very dangerous number. Attempts to divide anything into two ought to be regarded with much suspicion."⁹ We in the church don't have to be told, for we are painfully aware of the dangers of dividing into two. The divisive issues of the past decades have been made intractable by their reduction to two opposing positions, positions on which we are expected to vote. Even our best intentioned discussions reinforce polar divisions by guaranteeing a voice to "both sides of the issue" . . . as if any issue worth discussing has only two sides. Our commitment to democratic polities presses us toward legislative dualisms on every matter, reductionist dualisms reduced to stark choice.

To make matters worse, having been reduced to two sides, issues are further diminished by means of slogans, most often "rights" and "justice" at one pole, and "biblical authority" and "traditional morality" at the other. All complexity and nuance is lost as church assemblies vote up or down on "justice," or "the Bible," without, of course ever asking, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*¹⁰ or, *Whose Community? Which Interpretation?*¹¹ Church assemblies do not ask because they have been called into session to do business, not theology. Moreover, they are gatherings of strangers. PCUSA general assemblies consist of over seven hundred commissioners, half ministers and half elders, ninety percent of whom have never been to a general assembly. They vote on hundreds of proposals, only a fraction of which they have studied, and then return home with no continuing responsibility for the actions they have taken.

The churches actually imagine that general assemblies, churchwide assemblies, and general conventions can decide complex moral issues by voting in a bipolar framework. Voting always produces winners and losers, but it can work reasonably well in political arenas where winning and losing is the assumed outcome, even the name of the game. Voting works best, however, in situations where differences are encompassed within broad consensus regarding aims, so that balloting is about the best means to achieve those aims. Voting does not work well in situations of intractable polarity (witness the United States Senate) or when fundamental

issues of faith and life are at stake. What have church votes produced besides narrow victories for one side or the other? The aftermath of voting is the absence of reception, and an ecclesial landscape littered with more legislative maneuvers, invocation of parliamentary rules, judicial appeals, trials in church courts, and the departure of ministers, congregations, and whole judicatories. All of this is followed by fierce, unseemly battles over property in civil courts.

An odd feature of the churches' hyper-democratic method of decision-making is that they act in virtual isolation from one another. Even churches in so-called "full communion" continue to vote on theological statements, moral positions, ordered ministries, and more without consultation, let alone the concurrence of their sister churches. The Groupe des Dombes' latest document, *"One Teacher": Doctrinal Authority in the Church*, notes that the churches cannot simply adopt every form of democratic debate. In addressing both Catholics and the churches of the Reformation, *"One Teacher"* asks "that all churches agree to share in the debate regarding problems of faith and morals which are raised in a new way, acting together to take decisions in common whenever possible, and accepting the gospel principle of mutual correction."¹² When the same moral issue faces the churches it is a denial of their expressed desire for unity in Christ that they act as independent moral agents.

There are no easy answers to the question of how decision-making beyond the forced choice majority voting might occur in the church, but I am struck by a brief account in Stanley Hauerwas's wonderful memoir, *Hannah's Child*. While at Notre Dame, Hauerwas was a member of a Methodist church whose pastor wanted to move the congregation to weekly celebration of the Eucharist. After considerable study, the church board met to discuss the matter. The board seemed to be on board, so Hauerwas moved that it be put to a vote. The pastor, who had been quiet up till then, suddenly declared, "You will not vote on this issue." Hauerwas was startled; wasn't this just what the pastor had worked for? But the pastor reminded the board that the Eucharist is about the unity of the church. If the celebration of the Eucharist were determined by a majority vote, unity would be betrayed. Anyone in the congregation who had reservations needed to be heard first, and if there was strong dissent, the church would have to wait.¹³

I am less impressed by the details of the story than by its spirit. All too often, when a majority vote determines the matter, the unity of the church is betrayed. Presbyterian votes on contended moral issues often fall within the 52%-48% range. Can it be said that the *church* has decided anything when half of the church dissents? The solution does not lie in so-called "consensus methods of decision-making" or in "super majorities," for these only perpetuate the notion that legislation is the appropriate means of settling matters of faith and morals in the church. Decisions to change or not to change significant elements of the church's faith and life take time (an un-American concept).

The story of the Presbyterian Church's decision to ordain women to ministry is instructive. Presbyterians have a three-fold ordained ministry: deacons, elders, and ministers of the Word and Sacrament. The church authorized the ordination of women as deacons in 1910, as elders in 1930, and as ministers in 1956. The decision to ordain women as ministers was taken after years of study and discussion, and although it was not without opposition, it was approved

overwhelmingly by the General Assembly and, more important, received the required ratification from the presbyteries by a vote of 205-35. Women's ordination to all of the church's ordered ministries was received by the church. It did not become a divisive issue until the 1970's when the church ruled that a man who could not participate in the ordination of a woman could not himself be ordained.

At its 2010 biennial meeting, the PCUSA General Assembly had before it an overture from the Presbytery of Miami Valley that called the church to acknowledge that there is no unity of conscience regarding ordination standards in the church, and that appealed to the church to refrain from legislative efforts to resolve the controversy. The overture called for the church to "fast" from legislation, and to seek instead the mind of Christ over a period of years. The spirit of the proposal was faithful, but it came too late and was doomed to defeat. Instead, the Assembly voted to send to the presbyteries – for the fourth time! – a proposed amendment to the constitution that would remove a barrier to the ordination of self-affirmed, practicing gay, lesbian, and transgender persons. What then is to be done?

Withdrawal?

Presbyterians have experienced formal schism three times in the twentieth century: the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in the 1930's, the Presbyterian Church in America in the 1960's and 1970's, and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in the 1980's. Schism occurs when one part of the church goes its own way without regard for the whole. But what happens when the part that goes its own way without regard for the whole is the part that is in charge? Schism is never the only possibility. David Yeago contends that as a result of actions taken by the 2009 Churchwide Assembly the ELCA is now in a state of "impaired communion" – not abolished communion, but communion that is nevertheless diminished, weakened, and damaged. "The question before us as a denomination," he writes, "is whether it is possible to endure this impairment without breaking communion altogether, either by public splits or by large numbers of congregations . . . going practically into a kind of 'internal exile.'"¹⁴

Since 2005, more than ninety congregations have left the PCUSA to become part of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. Many more congregations are waiting to see what happens as a result of actions by the General Assembly. Still other congregations have "defected in place," not withdrawing but not sharing actively in the life of the whole church. I can only speak knowledgeably about my own Presbyterian Church, but "impaired communion" has characterized its life for decades. Our impaired communion is less the loss of formal structures of communion than the emptying of those structures, draining them of relationships of mutual responsibility for one another and accountability to one another for the shape of our faith and life. Our internal injuries have gone untreated for too long, and so infection spreads throughout the body. In the face of impaired communion, are the only options schism, internal exile, or defection in place?

How should those who are angry or threatened or grieving or dismayed by the condition of the churches respond? Withdrawal in any form is an odd response from those who believe

their own convictions to be consistent with historic Christian faith and life. Withdrawal may even be a faithless response from those who are charged to “preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching” (2 Tim 4:2). There is no refuge to be found in a popularized invisible/visible church distinction, as if withdrawal from the actual church is justified by the unity of all Christians in the invisible church. Platonic notions of an ideal church that no one can see, accompanied by abandonment of the pale shadow of church that we can see, has no place in Scripture. Calvin noted that Scripture sometimes speaks of “church” as that which is actually in God’s presence and sometimes as all those we see who now profess Christ. But he goes on to say, “Just as we must believe, therefore, that the former church, invisible to us, is visible to the eyes of God alone, so we are commanded to revere and keep communion with the latter.”¹⁵ Communion with the actual church, with quite visible people and communities, cannot be dismissed as inconsequential because we are “all one in Christ.”

The Power of the Powerless

The question is pointed: how can Christians live with integrity in a church they believe lacks a clear sense of what it means to live faithfully, as redeemed people, before God, and that lacks the resolve to engage in continuous, deep exploration of the Faith? I suppose I should turn to Scripture at this point, but I have found some insight from an unexpected source: Václav Havel, playwright, essayist, dissident, resister, prisoner, and then, improbably, last president of Czechoslovakia and first president of the Czech Republic.

Havel endured for decades under a repressive regime that lived within a lie and expected every citizen to live within the same lie. Havel and others struggled with a question that had daily consequences – How does one live freely within a system that suppresses freedom? For Havel, the answer lies in the difference between acceding to life within the lie and determining to live within truth. His 1975 essay, “The Power of the Powerless” is remarkable for the clarity of its vision, focusing on the strength of those who find themselves in opposition to prevailing social and political structures. What is the character of the established system, and what is the shape of resistance?

“Living within the lie can constitute the system only if it is universal,” wrote Havel. “The principle must embrace and permeate everything. There are no terms whatsoever on which it can coexist with living within the truth, and therefore everyone who steps out of line *denies it in principle and threatens it in its entirety.*”¹⁶ Havel understands that in order for the lie to have power, it must be so commonly acknowledged that it is simply “the way things are.” But if some refuse to acknowledge the lie, if some confront the lie with truth, the lie cannot be established as customary reality. Havel illustrates his conviction by imagining a simple greengrocer who regularly follows the instructions of the state by displaying in his shop window a poster announcing the Marxist slogan, “Workers of the world, unite!” The grocer does not think about his action; he simply goes along with a seemingly trivial expression of the way things are in order to get along in a society that expects acquiescence.

Havel asks us to imagine that one day something in the greengrocer changes and he stops displaying the required slogan that he had imagined would ingratiate him to the system. He then carries his minor resistance further by ceasing to vote in the state's show elections and by expressing himself honestly at authorized political meetings. He even finds the strength to risk solidarity with other resisters. "In this revolt the greengrocer steps out of living within the lie. He rejects the ritual and breaks the rules of the game. . . . His revolt is an attempt to *live within the truth*."¹⁷ What is the significance of the small act of an ordinary greengrocer, especially in light of the fact that his defiance will not go unpunished? Havel simply notes that "as long as appearance is not confronted with reality, it does not seem to be appearance. As long as living a lie is not confronted with living the truth, the perspective needed to expose its mendacity is lacking. As soon as the alternative appears, however, it threatens the very existence of appearance and living a lie . . ." ¹⁸

Before going further with Václav Havel, we must acknowledge that the Presbyterian, Lutheran, Episcopal, and other churches are not totalitarian regimes. Their lives are not characterized by comprehensive "living within the lie," and their ecclesial systems do not suppress dissent. Soviet-dominated Czechoslovakia is not an analog to mainline churches, and the current situation within the churches does not correspond to the plight of dissenting citizens confronted by the real and present danger of harsh repression and punishment. Nevertheless, with these necessary disclaimers having been made and with necessary shifts in perspective having been made possible, Havel's analysis and strategies provide insights that are relevant to the current ecclesial situation in American Christianity.

Our churches are characterized by illusions about the character of their (diverse) faith, illusions about their assertions of (democratic) power, and illusions about the premium they place on expressions of (institutional) harmony. These misapprehensions are not limited to matters of morality. They are pervasive throughout the life of the church. Our churches deceive themselves by making a virtue of wildly diverse theological positions on basic Christian belief, by imagining that the mechanisms of parliamentary procedure ensure faithful determination of faith and practice, and by equating cheerful or grudging acquiescence with genuine unity. Ecclesial self-deceit finds expression in the naïve expectation that all within the church will celebrate diversity, treasure the processes of governance, and happily support the current state of the church's faith and life (all, of course, in the name of "mission").

So, while our situation is not the same as Havel's, and our question is not the same as Havel's, his question informs our own. Our question is how we can live *with integrity* in churches if we believe they lack a clear sense of the Faith, and thus lack a clear sense of what it means to live faithfully, as redeemed people, before God.

Havel's greengrocer is a simple illustration of the refusal to live within the lie, but the greengrocer alone does not present an exemplary strategy. In order for the greengrocer's refusal to be other than quixotic, he must first be joined to other "greengrocers." Havel understands that "living within the truth covers a vast territory whose outer limits are vague and difficult to map, a territory full of modest expressions of human volition, the vast majority of which will remain

anonymous and whose political impact will probably never be felt.”¹⁹ One trusts that many pastors will preach and teach truthfully, many elders will labor to ensure congregational fidelity, many deacons will lead in ministries of compassion and justice, and many members will pray, study, and serve. But while individual living – and individual congregational living – in greater integrity is necessary, it is not adequate to the apostolic call to use the gifts we have been given “for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God” (Eph. 4:12-13).

Havel takes us beyond the greengrocer: “The point where living within the truth ceases to be a mere negation of living with a lie and becomes articulate in a particular way, is the point at which something is born that might be called ‘the independent spiritual, social, and political life of society’.”²⁰ For Havel, the “independent life of society” is a communal environment in which living within the truth becomes articulate and apparent. Public dissent, and formal opposition may emerge, but “the original and most important sphere of activity, one that predetermines all the others, is simply an attempt to create and support the ‘independent life of society’ as an articulated expression of ‘living within the truth.’ In other words, serving truth consistently, purposefully and articulately, and organizing this service.”²¹ Living within the truth is a *social* reality, not merely an individual stance.

What would it mean, within our churches, to *serve truth consistently, purposefully and articulately*, and equally important, to *organize this service*? Negation – opposing or seeking to reverse some recent actions of church assemblies – may well be necessary, but it is only a minor part of serving truth. Consistent, purposeful, and articulate serving of the truth entails renewed determination to proclaim and teach the Faith in worship, in groups, in sessions vestries and councils, in congregations, in dioceses and presbyteries, in national expressions of the church, through spoken words, publications and other media, and consistent action. The church’s expression of Havel’s *independent life of society* that lives within the truth requires more than the effort of individual pastors and congregations; it requires *organizing this service*.

Organizing this service entails the creation of a different culture within the church. “When those who have decided to live within the truth,” says Havel, “begin to create what I have called the independent life of society, this independent life begins, of itself, to become structured in a certain way.”²² What is this structuring like? Havel begins with a term borrowed from nonconformist music and art – “second culture.” For him, second culture refers to a broad ranging expression of independent and suppressed culture in the humanities, social sciences, and philosophical thought, as well as the arts. The second culture is a way of being that does not accede to “the way things are.” It resists prevailing patterns and expressions by creating new arrangements and articulations. A second culture resists the predominant culture by way of innovation rather than negation.

At this time, a second culture within the church could be built by those who understand that the most important task is creating space within which a new community of persons can engage in thinking the Faith, preaching and teaching the Faith, praying the Faith, and living the Faith. This culture will require that many “greengrocers” attend to the Faith as a calling that is

higher than managerial effort, programmatic accomplishment, or congregational success. It is a culture characterized by pastors who become “teachers of the Faith” in more than name . . . congregational governance that spends more time in study and discernment of the spiritual welfare of the congregation than in fiduciary management . . . deacons who live out biblical ministries of compassion and justice . . . and members who worship, study, serve, and share faithfulness. This culture also requires substantial patterns of mutual affirmation (and admonition) that support the sustained effort of many.

Second cultures are dynamic, pressing toward new expressions that raise “organizing this service” to more intense levels of engagement. “Second cultures,” the milieu of independent thought and expression, are where what Havel calls “parallel structures” emerge. Parallel structures are not simply duplicate ecclesiastical institutions, much less separated churches. They are, according to Havel, “an area where a different life can be lived, a life that is in harmony with its own aims and which in turn structures itself in harmony with those aims.”²³ Parallel structures give recognizable, shared form to the second culture.

The institutions of prevailing ecclesial systems must be met by parallel structural possibilities. The creation of parallel structures should not be confused with the creation of shadow institutions. In recent years, Presbyterian institutions have not served us well. Creating mirror images of those institutions in the hope that organizational/managerial approaches to Christian faith and life can be done better and more faithfully misses an opportunity to embody a new way of living the gospel. Within the church, genuinely parallel structures might include intentional networks of ministers and congregations, collaborative educational efforts, covenanted spiritual disciplines of Scripture and prayer, alternative ecumenical relations, focused mission initiatives, and more. Parallel structural possibilities might also include judicatory realignments and even the creation of non-geographic presbyteries, synods, and dioceses. But method is not the point. Whatever the shape of parallel structures, they will only be worthwhile if they *live* differently from current church institutions, avoiding the bourgeois values and bureaucratic procedures that too often characterize church life.

The essential point is that *concrete possibilities* with discernable *structural form* must emerge from *alternative culture* lest *integrity* be little more than private righteousness. Parallel structures are the most articulate expressions of living within the truth, for parallel structures necessarily imply a parallel *polis*, that is, a *community* that thinks, talks, and acts in mutuality. None of this should be mistaken for “sectarianism,” however. Václav Havel insists that, “it would be quite wrong to understand the parallel structures . . . as a retreat into a ghetto and as an act of isolation, addressing itself only to those who had decided on such a course, and who are indifferent to the rest. It would be wrong, in short, to consider it an essentially group solution that has nothing to do with the general situation.”²⁴ Havel’s contention – one that should resonate with Christians who face ecclesial choices – is that withdrawal only serves to separate “living within the truth” from its proper point of departure which is “concern for others.” Withdrawal – whether formal or private – is “just another more sophisticated version of ‘living within a lie’.”²⁵

The responsibility of any person, congregation, second culture, and parallel structure within the church is responsibility for the whole church. Havel understands what we in the church imperfectly grasp: “the parallel *polis* points beyond itself and only makes sense as an act of deepening one’s responsibility to and for the whole, as a way of discovering the most appropriate *locus* for this responsibility, not as an escape from it.”²⁶ A parallel *polis* within the church must not become a mode of distance from our denominations, but rather a deepening of responsibility for them by the living out of truthful witness within and for the whole church.

The task before those who desire to live within the truth is to create a “second culture,” expressed in “parallel structures,” as the shape of a “parallel *polis*.” This means something different from loose alliances, programmatic organizations, missional associations, and focused mission groups, although it may include them. What is needed is a committed, organized, ecclesial *polis* that gives shape to discernable arrangements of mutual responsibility and accountability embodying enduring relationships of communion that summon the whole church into the joy of living within the truth. Only a parallel *polis* that emerges from an alternative culture shaped by renewed and deepened fidelity to the gospel will display the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.

The point of it all is not merely to think differently, but to live differently. The aim is not to critique the illusions of others, but to display an alternate way of performing the gospel. What all of this means concretely will only become clear as persons in the churches commit themselves to live within the truth by seeking to embody a “second culture” that nurtures “parallel structures” that build a “parallel *polis*” – all for the sake of the full gospel and the life of the whole church.

Do I expect something like this to happen? I cannot speak about other churches, but I do not expect it in my own church. At least I do not expect that it will emerge from the efforts of Presbyterian ministers and congregations. Too many ministers have become self-referentially managerial and entrepreneurial. Too many congregations have become ecclesial islands with little concern for the spiritual health of the wider church. Our internal injuries have become chronic disabilities. And yet, perhaps the Spirit will create “greengrocers” among us, and perhaps they will discover one another, creating an independent life that produces a second culture that leads to parallel structures that bear witness to and on behalf of the whole church.

Having begun with a John Updike novel, I close with one of Søren Kierkegaard’s parables:

When in a written examination the youth are allotted four hours to develop a theme, then it is neither here nor there if an individual student happens to finish before the time is up, or uses the entire time. Here, therefore, the task is one thing, the time another. But when the time itself is the task, it becomes a fault to finish before the time has transpired. Suppose a man were assigned the task of entertaining himself for an entire day, and he finishes this task of self-entertainment as early as noon: then his celerity would not be

meritorious. So also when life constitutes the task. To be finished with life before life has finished with one, is precisely not to have finished the task.²⁷

- ¹ “Calvin’s Reply to Sadoletto” in *A Reformation Debate*, John C. Olin, ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000) p. 87.
- ² Calvin, “Letter to Cranmer” (1552) in *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, Henry Beveridge & Jules Bonnet, eds. Vol 5., p. 355
- ³ Calvin, “Letter to the Reformed Churches of France” (1560) in *Tracts and Letters*, vol 7., p 168-170.
- ⁴ Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Book of Order* (Louisville KY: Office of the General Assembly, 2009) G-4.0403
- ⁵ For the texts of the two actions see *The Presbyterian Enterprise: Sources of American Presbyterian History*, Maurice W. Armstrong, Lefferts A Loetscher, & Charles A. Anderson, eds. (Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001) p. 278-282.
- ⁶ Bradley J. Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) p. 230.
- ⁷ David Yeago, “The Spirit, the Church, and the Scriptures: Biblical Inspiration and Interpretation Revisited” in James J. Buckley & David S. Yeago, eds. (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2001)
- ⁸ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* 2nd ed. (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) p. 6.
- ⁹ C.P. Snow, *The Two Cultures and a Second Look*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: The University Press, 1964) p. 9
- ¹⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988)
- ¹¹ Merold Westphal, *Whose Community? Which Interpretation?* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2009).
- ¹² Le Groupe des Dombes, “One Teacher”: *Doctrinal Authority in the Church* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2010) p. 143.
- ¹³ Stanley Hauerwas, *Hannah’s Child: A Theologian’s Memoir* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2010) p. 141.
- ¹⁴ David Yeago, “Facing Reality in the ELCA” <http://lutheranspersisting.wordpress.com/david-yeago-facing-reality-in-the-elca/> February 6, 2010.
- ¹⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John T. McNeill, ed., Ford Lewis battles, trans. (Philadelphia PA: The Westminster Press, 1960) 4.1.7., p. 1022.
- ¹⁶ Václav Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” in *Václav Havel: Living in Truth*, Jan Vladislav, ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1986) p. 56.
- ¹⁷ “The Power of the Powerless,” p. 55.
- ¹⁸ “The Power of the Powerless,” p. 56.
- ¹⁹ “The Power of the Powerless,” p. 85.
- ²⁰ “The Power of the Powerless,” p. 85.
- ²¹ “The Power of the Powerless,” p. 87.
- ²² “The Power of the Powerless,” p. 100f.
- ²³ “The Power of the Powerless,” p. 102.
- ²⁴ “The Power of the Powerless,” p. 103.
- ²⁵ “The Power of the Powerless,” p. 103.

²⁶ “The Power of the Powerless,” p. 104.

²⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, in Thomas C. Oden, ed. *Parables of Kierkegaard* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978) p. 85.