CHAPTER EIGHT

Hermeneutics of A Christ-Formed Contrast Community

I. Ideological Contestation

The public square is a hotly-contested space. Take the analogy of shortwave radio stations – a cacophony of voices greet us when we initially try to tune in to the station we have in mind. Competing airwaves collide with one another in the crowded air space. Naturally, it is the station with the most frequent and most powerful broadcasts that catches the most attention and succeeds in influencing listeners who tune in to listen to its message. Similarly, Christian public proclamation must compete with a myriad of other voices in the public square in order to get a hearing from listeners and persuade them that the gospel is both true and relevant to the pressing issues of life. "Compete" is the appropriate description since the failure of Christians to challenge alternative voices will give the impression that the Christian message is not worthy of serious consideration. J.G. Machen rightly observed that "We may preach with all the fervor of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here or there, if we permit the whole collective thought

of the nation or of the world to be controlled by ideas which, by the relentless force of logic, prevents Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion."[1]

To put the matter in sociological terms, Christian public proclamation faces inevitable contestation with prevailing ideologies[2] competing for supremacy over the hearts and minds of people. In particular, Christian proclamation must fulfill two pre-requisites if its message is to be accepted by its listeners. First, the message must be shared with an authenticity that bears the imprint of Christ which, after all, is what makes the Christian message different from other messages. Second, the message must address the genuine concerns of contemporary listeners. I am here referring to the classic problem of "identity-relevance" in Christian proclamation.

Walter Brueggemann helpfully unpacks the challenge of contestation of ideologies with his analysis of an Old Testament event in which King Sennacherib of Assyria challenged King Hezekiah during the siege of Jerusalem in 700 BC (2 Kings 18). Brueggemann concludes that the church is unavoidably involved in two conversations at the "wall" – the boundary between the Church and the world.

> Christians should be nurtured to be bilingual, to know how to speak the language on the wall in the presence of the imperial negotiators, but also how to speak the language behind the wall in the community of faith, where a different set of assumptions, a different perception of the world, a different epistemology are at work. The conversation on the wall is crucial, because the Assyrians are real dialogue partners who must be taken seriously. They will not go away. But unless there is another conversation behind the wall in another language about another agenda, Judah on the wall will only submit

1 J. Gresham Machen, "Christianity and Culture," in *What is Christianity? And Other Addresses*. Ed. Ned Stonehouse, (Eerdmans, 1951), p. 166.

2 By ideology, I mean an integrated social theory which legitimizes a social-political program that usually reflects the ideas and interests of the ruling class or social group.

> to and echo imperial perceptions of reality. When imperial perceptions of reality prevail, everything is already conceded. If the conversation with the empire at the wall is either the only conversation or the decisive one, Israel will decide that Yahweh is indeed like all the other impotent gods and consequently will endorse imperial policies as non-negotiable realities. The ground for any alternative will have been forfeited.[3]

Thankfully, the church no longer faces an aggressive and well-armed army bent on its destruction. Indeed, in countries that officially support democratic pluralism, Christians can take for granted that they have access to the public arena that is premised on freedom, equality and diversity. That is to say, plural society[4] and the ideals of democratic pluralism have become the contemporary ethos for sharing the gospel in the public sphere.

However, there is a tendency for a more powerful social group whether defined in cultural, racial or religious terms, to dominate weaker social groups. There is just no level playing ground in the public arena – he who shouts the loudest and is backed by powers of intimidation wins the day. To be sure, there is no direct assault on the weaker voices but in reality these voices are deliberately isolated and weakened, and eventually assimilated into the voice of the dominant community. Democracy retains its form, but in reality the weaker group is manipulated and intimated into passivity and submission to the dictates of the dominant elite.

Steward Clegg, drawing on the insights of Antonio Gramsci, explains how hegemony can even elicit the *active* consent of dominated groups by 1) taking systematic account of popular interests and

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3 Walter Brueggemann, *Interpretation and Obedience* (Fortress Press, 1991), p. 44.

4 For three types of "pluralism" see Raymond Plant's entry, "Pluralism" in *Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. James Childress and John Macquarie (Westminster, 1986), David Nicholls, *Three Varieties of Pluralism* (Macmillan, 1974) and Robert Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics* (Yale UP, 1989).

demands; 2) making compromises on secondary issues to maintain support and alliances in an inherently unstable political system (whilst maintaining essential interests); 3) organizing support for national goals which serve the fundamental long-term interests of the dominant group; and 4) providing moral, intellectual and political leadership in order to reproduce and form the collective will or national popular outlook.[5]

Michel Foucault likewise emphasizes that knowledge is not a timeless abstraction. Knowledge is "material" and linked to power relations. Real change is achieved through change in power relationships in social restructuring and redistribution of wealth and political power. Reinhold Niebuhr observes that "There is as yet no evidence that a privileged class, which yields advantage after advantage peacefully, will finally yield the very basis of its special position in society without conflict…it will be tempted in the moment of crisis to resort to violence to maintain itself."[6] As such, those who want to see social change must be prepared for a long haul struggle.

But it is often the case that the church lacks social-political power to effect change. Indeed, a church under ideological siege and political hegemony easily loses the confidence to proclaim the gospel publicly. More tragically, such churches in turn rationalize their sense of impotence by adopting a spirituality that is inward looking and escapist in nature. It is therefore vitally important for such churches both to understand the dynamics of political hegemony and to adopt counter-ideological measures so as to attain a measure of self-confidence that is necessary for public proclamation of the gospel.

Walter Brueggemann in his book, *Interpretation and Obedience*, suggests a helpful biblical model on how the minority church

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5 Stewart Clegg, *Frameworks of Power* (SAGE, 1989), p. 160.
6 Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (Scribner, 1932), p. 210.

may maintain its independence from ideological dominance and political hegemony. The church must challenge the imperial rhetoric with its own "sectarian" conversation that refuses to accept the hegemonic power's efforts to define the identity and values of the community at large. That is to say, the church refuses to be assimilated into this dominant social consciousness. The task of the church is to identify the threat of hegemonic power that pretends to look after the welfare of the weaker community when in reality it is imposing injustices onto the weaker community. Finally, the church should articulate a creative imaginative proposal for an alternative ordering of a just society.

II. Hermeneutics of a Contrast Community

Sociologists like Peter Berger have pointed to the necessity of "plausibility structures" or social-cultural institutions and processes to authenticate and reaffirm belief systems among members of a belief community.[7] In this regard the church, as a community of moral and spiritual formation, plays an indispensable role in nurturing the Christological identity of the Christian community through its own political discourse centred on Jesus as its normative role model. It is precisely because the church's self-understanding and social identity are defined by the story of Christ that it is able to mount an independent critique of the ideology of wider society and resist conformity to the world. However, the story of Christ cannot be told in isolation from

7 An excellent explanation of "plausibility structure" is found in Os Guinness, *The Gravedigger Files* (IVP, 1983), p. 35: "...the degree to which a belief (or disbelief) seems convincing is directly related to its "plausibility structure" – that is, the group or community which provides the social and psychological support for the belief. If the support's structure is strong, it is easy to believe; if the support's structure is weak, it is difficult to believe. The question of whether the group's belief is actually true or not may never become an issue."

the present experience of the church in wider society.[8] Hence, it must be emphasized that in regard to moral formation, priority should be assigned to the community over the individual since it is the church that nurtures the relational capacities of its members and shapes the moral sensibilities and identities of its members.[9]

First, the church is a source of moral development where members identify with the moral traditions it upholds. Furthermore, communities have their own dramas. I become a part of a community insofar as I adopt its drama as part of my own drama. In the process I come to share the most fundamental convictions and viewpoints of the community and internalize its way of life. I also accept the specific role entrusted to me as a member of the community. My moral identity becomes a function of my social location and role relations within the community. In this regard, although moral reasoning remains an important skill, nevertheless, the ability to fulfill my role expectation is even more fundamental.

Lesslie Newbigin calls for a "hermeneutic of community" to undergird Christian proclamation and notes that "the Church can be a sign of the Kingdom insofar as it follows Jesus in steadfastly challenging the powers of evil in the life of the world by accepting total solidarity with those who are victims of those powers; insofar as, by accepting in its own life the weight of the world's wrongs it exposes and judges the wrongdoers in the act of saving both them and their victims."[10] Newbigin adds, "Without the hermeneutic of such a

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8 This is highlighted by Alasdair Macintyre who points out that the story of my life "is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity. I am born with a past; and to try to cut myself off from that past, in the individualistic mode, is to deform my present relationships. The possession of an historical identity and the possession of a social identity coincide." In Alasdair Macintyre, *After Virtue* (Uni. NotreDame Press, 1984), p. 204.

9 James B. Nelson, *Moral Nexus: Ethics of Christian Identity and Community* (Westminster, 1971), pp. 94-99. See also Bruce C. Birch and Larry L. Rasmussen, *Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life.* 2nd. ed. (Augsburg, 1989), p. 132.

10 Lesslie Newbigin, *Sign of the Kingdom* (Eerdmans, 1980), p. 51.

living community, the message of the Kingdom can only become – once again – an ideology and a programme; it will not be a gospel."[11] The community is the concrete carrier of the message. Conversely, the message shapes the ongoing life of the community. Proclamation and social praxis are the inseparable twin thrusts of mission.[12]

Still, whether the church should prioritize proclamation or social transformation depends on local circumstances. Graham Gray in his paper presented at the consultation in Pasadena (1988) suggests a fine balance between proclamation and praxis in mission.

> Mission is not a matter of putting in order of priority *evangelism*, *social action* or *signs and wonders*, but of an openness to the whole agenda of the Kingdom, including its priority concern for the poor. Such mission requires personal experience of the power and leading of the Holy Spirit...The Gospel of Good News concerning the Kingdom, and the Kingdom is God's rule over the totality of life. Every human need therefore can be used by the Spirit of God as a beach-head for the manifestation of his kingly power.[13]

The term "beach-head" is particularly relevant for Christians who find themselves as a minority. Under such circumstances Christian social action seems ineffectual, if not futile. Perhaps in such a situation priority should be given not to reshaping the power structures of civil community but to building the church as an educational and contrast community. That such a move may amount to an abdication from social responsibility is possible, but it may also be taken as only a provisional agenda with strategic long term goals in mind. This strategic move allows the church to maintain its social services, that

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11 Newbigin, *Sign of the Kingdom,* p.19.

12 "Praxis" here means "the willed action by which a theory or philosophy becomes a social actuality." Aristotle used the term *poiesis* to describe the production of useful or beautiful artifacts. But for him *praxis* meant the purposeful activity and reflective ethical action directed towards the right ordering of society. It is in this sense that the term *praxis* or 'practice' is used in this chapter.

13 Graham Gray, "A Theology of the Kingdom" in *Transformation* 5, Issue 4 (1988), p. 29.

is, to alleviate human needs, even though its social action – to change power structures – is provisionally assigned a subsidiary place in the social engagement of the church. Energy is then concentrated toward building a Christian community which increasingly manifests the values of the kingdom so that it becomes a more attractive alternative to the dominant pattern of life in society.

The existence of such a contrast community, however, does not guarantee a hearing from the world. Nor should it be assumed that a church that is galvanized for social witness will automatically be successful in bringing about social transformation. The need for a contrast community is all the more urgent given the fact that in contemporary society, social ideals of justice and equality are no longer the distinctive concerns of Christians. However, if such Christian social ideals move beyond the abstract and are displayed in a community that restores human wholeness and mediates peace between conflicting neighbors, then the Christian proclamation will be clear and unmistakable, and immensely attractive. Lesslie Newbigin, who describes "the community as the hermeneutic of the Gospel," explains further.

> How is it possible for the Church truly to represent the reign of God in the world in the way Jesus did?...How is it possible that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it. I am, of course, not denying the importance of the many activities by which we seek to challenge public life with the gospel – evangelistic campaigns, distribution of Bibles and Christian literature, conferences, and even books such as this one. But I am saying that these are all secondary, and that they have power to accomplish their purpose only as they are rooted in and lead back to a believing community.[14]

14 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 226-227.

As the people of God who live "between the times", Christian mission for the church will always be marked by a tension between promise and fulfillment, spirituality and social responsibility. It is all too easy for Christians to dissolve this tension either by being too pragmatic or idealistic. There are Christians who want to choose between evangelism and social responsibility, worship and work, prayer and righteous action. But those facing such temptations do well to remember the counsel of Karl Barth: "Thus to pray the prayer does not excuse them from provisionally rebelling and battling the disorder in the human thoughts and words and works."[15]

Prayer and righteous action must both be upheld by the Christian community if it is to succeed in discharging God's mission in our society. The unity of theory and social practice, faith and action first seen in the life of Jesus is again to be the goal for his community. Barth's dictum is instructive. "Because it is a matter of knowledge, speech must come first. But because it is a matter of active knowledge, the element of action must not be lacking." That is to say, truth as transformation always involves truth as disclosure; speaking the truth is never separable, although distinguishable, from doing the truth.

All temptation to retreat into self-isolation or some kind of "sacred space" must be avoided. The church's action is always *extra muros*, one of critical solidarity. The community cannot evade its social responsibility by merely dwelling on abstract issues of knowledge in serene contemplation. It cannot rest contented as a mere spectator, however impartial it may try to be. It must be in active engagement with the controversies and conflicts of wider society. It is summoned and commissioned to promote social transformation, in a manner parallel to God's active intervention for man's welfare in Jesus Christ. Christian faith is the source of social praxis and social praxis is the goal of Christian faith.

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15 Karl Barth, *The Christian Life* (Eerdmans, 1981), p. 213.

III. The Church in the World and for the World

Dietrich Bonhoeffer shares the insight of Karl Barth with his rejection of the "two-spheres thinking" which dichotomizes the present order from the eternal order of God. Bonhoeffer explains that only the ultimate determines the penultimate things; nevertheless, there are penultimate things that need to be done in fulfillment of our responsibility for this world which God has created. Penultimate things (and here Bonhoeffer gives the example of feeding the hungry man) prepares the way for the ultimate. "We speak of the penultimate things for the sake of those who have not even attained these penultimate things, those for whom no one performs this service, for whom no one has prepared the way, and who must now be afforded help, so that the word of God, the ultimate, grace, can come to them."[16]

> Ethical thinking in terms of spheres, then, is invalidated by faith in the revelation of the ultimate reality in Jesus Christ, and this means that there is no real possibility of being a Christian outside the reality of the world and that there is no real worldly existence outside the reality of Jesus Christ. There is no place to which the Christian can withdraw from the world, whether it be outwardly or in the sphere of the inner life.[17]

Bonhoeffer concludes, "Christ the reality of God has entered into the reality of the world. Consequently, that which is Christian is to be found only in that which is of the world, the "supernatural" only in the natural, the holy only in the profane, and the revelation only in the rational."[18]

One misunderstanding among some Christians is to contrast natural life (perceived to be pervasively sinful) with the life to come (which is perfectly good). Bonhoeffer suggests that a better point of

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16 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (MacMillan, 1995), p. 138.
17 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 200.
18 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 198.

comparison would be between "natural life" and "unnatural or sinful life". The "natural life" is that which after the fall maintains an open and eschatological orientation to the coming of Christ. In contrast, "unnatural life" closes itself to any reference to Christ. "Formally the natural is determined through God's will to preserve it and through its being directed towards Christ. In its formal aspect, therefore, the natural can be discerned only in its relation to Jesus Christ Himself. As for its contents, the natural is the form of the preserved life itself, the form which embraces the entire human race."[19]

The assumption here is that the fallen world remains preserved by the grace of Christ. That is, the world though fallen is given relative freedom of natural life. Christian faith seeks to preserve the integrity of natural life. However, it insists that natural life ultimately find its justification in Christ. "Only through the incarnation of Christ do we have the right to call others to the natural life and to live the natural life ourselves."[20] Consequently, Christian action must be grounded in reality in recognition that the world is loved, judged and reconciled in Christ. Precisely, because the world is created through Christ, and Christ embraces the whole of reality, the link between the two cannot be severed.

The reconciliation of the world to God does not mean the world ceases to be the world, and every action that seeks to confuse the world with the kingdom of God is a denial of both Christ and the world. Let the world be the world. The Christian task is not to turn the world into the kingdom of God. Recognition of the world as it is also means accepting the creaturely limits of Christian action. We find ourselves already situated in a place and time not of our own choosing. We humbly and gratefully accept that our responsibility for the world is limited.

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19 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, pp. 145-146.
20 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 145.

There can be no platonic form of the church disconnected from the realities of life in the world. The church exists as an organized community in the world. With its ongoing sacred rituals and "secret disciplines", pastoral organization and some measure of godliness evident, hopefully, even skeptics may recognize God's presence in the church. The question is, how can God be present in larger society, beyond the sacred space called "church"? Failure in addressing this question properly can result in two extremes.

Some Christians adopt the path of Manichaeism which sees the world outside the church as under the permanent bondage of evil and beyond redemption. The natural instinct for such Christians is to abandon the world and withdraw into their own religious ghetto. On the other hand, some other Christians end up becoming triumphalistic. For them, Christ is already victorious and seated in the heavens. Celebratory worship overshadows other aspects of life for this group of Christians. But unless the faith of these Christians brings about actual transformation in the world, one wonders if their triumph is only pyrrhic in nature for what is proffered is only a 'spiritual' victory with no relation to concrete realities.

Both these extremes represent a distortion of Christ's work of reconciliation – the first group chooses to remain at the moment of crucifixion, while the second group preempts God's reconciliation process by leaping prematurely to the resurrection. We need to adopt a theology that maintains the dialectical tension between the cross and the resurrection – one that provides a balance between negation and affirmation, between withdrawal from and engagement with the world.

The option of withdrawal does not arise because Christ had already won back the world by his incarnation, his death and resurrection. The church is only required to detach itself from the world of sin,

not from the world of things. The task of the church is to exist as a concrete summon to the world. The church should not resort to "spirituality" as an excuse for withdrawing from participating in the affairs of the world. The church is urged to live the life of its secular calling precisely to prove that it is possible to be in the world and yet not of the world.

Indeed the church occupies a definite space in the world that is demarcated by public worship, organizational structure and pastoral life. The church begins by ensuring that the life of its community is itself an ordered community. The church functions as the embodiment of God's reconciling grace that is offered to the world as a model for restored individual wholeness and social justice. It would be incorrect to suggest that such a vision of restoration of social structures is a covert program to restore so-called Christendom. The church is seeking no more social space than what is necessary to bear witness to Jesus Christ and his reconciliation of the world to God. The primary task (both logically and temporally) of the church is to exhibit a life that summons individuals and peoples to faith in and obedience to Jesus Christ.

What distinguishes the church from the world is not a sacred space separated physically from the world, but rather a set of communal relationships that embody the reality of God's acceptance of man expressed in fellowship with one another. As such, the church does not pursue its calling in isolation from the daily life of the wider community. Hence, the task of the Christian is to live out that life in terms of his secular calling. In the words of Bonhoeffer, "He *may* live a 'secular' life (as one who has been freed from false religious obligations and inhibitions). To be a Christian does not mean to be religious in a particular way, to make something of oneself (a sinner, a penitent, or a saint) on the basis of some method or other, but to be a man – not the type of man, but the man that Christ creates in us. It

is not the religious act that makes the Christian, but participation in the sufferings of God in the secular life."[21]

The primary social task of the church is to be itself – that is, a people who have been formed by a story that provides them with the skills for negotiating the dangers of this existence, trusting in God's promise of redemption.[22] To safeguard its identity, the church must resist two temptations:

1) Accepting the terms on which the state allows the church an undisturbed existence so long as it remains isolated from the concerns of society: The result would be that the church ends up legitimizing the status quo. Charles West reminds the church that it is under the lordship of Christ and is called to be the church for the world, not the servant of one of the world's powers.[23]

Bonhoeffer could not be clearer in insisting that the individual Christian's duty to obey the state is presumed until the state directly compels him to offend against the divine commandment, that is to say, until the state openly violates its divine commission to enforce social justice and protect the freedom and dignity of the individual and forcefully suppresses the gospel. At this point, Christians must choose to disobey for conscience's sake and in obedience to the Great Commission. Christians will also work with citizens of all religious persuasions to call on the government to go beyond tolerating religious diversity and to accept differences of opinions in all matters of public policy. Indeed, it calls on the government to find ways to institutionalize dissent against itself that includes allowing the possibility of transfer of political power through peaceful democratic means.

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21 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison* (SCM, 1971), pp. 361, cf. *Cost of Discipleship* (Macmillan, 1963), pp. 297-298.
22 Philip Wogaman. *Christian Perspectives on Politics* (SCM, 1988), p. 127.
23 Charles West, "Christian Witness to Political Power and Authority," in *Missiology* 9 (1981), p. 436.

The church should affirm that no human form of government is perfect and that all political authorities are necessarily under constant scrutiny in terms of whether the policies and processes which they implement impede or promote justice and freedom. Structures created by human beings are in constant danger of becoming self-perpetuating and self-serving, and hence of becoming idols – in a truly biblical sense.

The church must deal with the full reality of politics, government and civil society in the contemporary world. Public policies must be supported by rational public arguments that go beyond offering simplistic quotations of Bible verses. The church's approach to civic responsibility balances both justice and peace. Pursuing justice without peace only perpetuates social conflict. Accepting peace without justice amounts to capitulation to hegemonic power. Politics must be judged on moral terms derived from a transcendent authority, that is, God.

2) Subjecting the gospel to "righteous anger", lending itself as an instrument of political and ideological struggle: Christianity affirms that only God has absolute claim on human beings. This recognition is crucial for our struggle for social justice. It encourages us not to fall into despair when we feel frustrated by the recalcitrance of oppressive authorities and overwhelmed by their threats. Ultimately, it is the free grace of God that transcends all human goodness and shortcomings that serves as an adequate foundation for social justice. An awareness that we are merely witnesses to God's providence and not makers of history helps to safeguard us from becoming self-righteous. Charles West's counsel should keep our activism in perspective.

> The church must project Christ's Lordship into the search for a proper structure of justice and peace in society, which is also the business of political authorities. It must do so holistically, not taking refuge in the false

> purity either of nonpolitical projects or a romanticized oppressed people. It must do so in a secular way, recognizing the involvement of every religious project in the mixed motives and misused powers of human life, the need of correction, and the limits of political coercion in the establishment of true humanity. The life of the community of faith with Christ Himself should keep things in proper perspective.[24]

The church must engage government and civil society in a "secular" manner, that is, with an engagement that is rooted in historical realities and concrete political institutions. It may draw from resources which have been developed by Christian thinkers in the past. Such resources include the "Principle of Subsidiarity" theory proposed in Pope Pius XI's encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) and the works of Reformed philosophers like Johannes Althusius (1563-1638). Of particular significance for contemporary plural societies is the theory of "Principled Pluralism" developed by Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd.

Christian engagement therefore includes influencing wider society to adopt social policies and social structures that foster justice and peace. However, such social engagement does not take place in a vacuum. Underlying wider society is a culture with its own system of truth claims and moral obligations legitimized by established cultural symbols and tradition. Culture is not neutral as it is a form of power and social influence. As such, the cultural influence of a social agent is proportional to the "symbolic capital" possessed by agent. James Hunter explains the concept of "symbolic capital".

> Like money, accumulated symbolic capital translates into a kind of power and influence. But influence of what kind? It starts as credibility, an authority one possesses which puts one in a position to be listened to and taken seriously.

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24 West, "Christian Witness to Political Power and Authority," p. 439.

> It ends as the power to define reality itself. As Pierre Bourdieu puts it, it is the power of "legitimate naming."[25]

It is therefore necessary for Christians to set up an alternative network of institutions which produces all kinds of "symbolic capital" expressed through public policy and legal declarations, educational resources, literature, the arts and other similar cultural resources to gain a hearing from wider society. This will strengthen Christian initiatives to bring change in diverse areas such as the media, the entertainment industry, education, and professional societies, etc. Hunter has identified possible areas for Christian engagement in the culture matrix.[26]

The Christian contrast community should not be reduced to some form of sacred ecclesiastical space insulated from the world; it is rather a network of social institutions dispersed throughout wider society. Hunter argues "(along with many others) that *the key actor in history is not individual genius but rather the network* and the new institutions that are created out of those networks. And the more "dense" the network – that is, the more active and interactive the network – the more influential it could be. This is where the stuff of culture and cultural change is produced."[27] This Christian network does not displace so much as complements the existing "mainstream" institutions where Christian employees working in these institutions witness through word and deed, thereby projecting a "faithful presence" into the world. Hunter elaborates,

> This, in short, is the foundation of a theology of faithful presence. It can be summarized in two essential lessons for our time. The first is *that incarnation is the only adequate reply to the challenges of dissolution; the erosion of trust*

25 James Hunter, *To Change the World* (Oxford UP, 2010), p. 36.
26 Hunter, *To Change the World*, p. 90.
27 Hunter, *To Change the World*, p. 38,

THE CULTURE MATRIX

THE TRUE	THE GOOD	THE BEAUTIFUL
(Knowledge – What is)	*(Morality – What should be)*	*(Aesthetics – What can be imagined)*
Theoretical	***Abstract***	***High Brow***
○ Academic think tanks ○ Elite research universities (in the social sciences and humanities) ○ Elite opinion magazines and journals ○ Elite NYC and 1st tier book university publisher	○ Academic philosophy & moral psychology ○ Law schools and schools of public policy	○ Visual arts ○ Literature and poetry ○ Classical & orchestral music ○ Theatre & dance ○ Museums
↓	↓	↓
High-end Educational	***Activist***	***Upper Middle Brow***
○ First & second tier colleges ○ High-end journalism ○ **Seminaries & divinity schools** ○ Elite private schools	○ Public policy think tanks ○ **Special interest groups** ○ **Innovative churches, synagogues & faith based ministries of mercy** ○ **Moral education activism**	○ Public television ○ Public museums ○ Film ○ Jazz & specialty music ○ High-end advertising agencies
↓	↓	↓
Practical Everyday	***Grass Roots***	***Low Brow***
○ Journalism (print & electronic) ○ The Internet ○ **Mass-market book publishing** ○ **Churches, synagogues & teaching ministries** ○ Public education ○ **Christian schools**	○ Local activist organizations ○ School boards ○ **"How-to" publishing** ○ **Youth organizations & ministries faith-based ministries of mercy** ○ **Moral education**	○ Prime-time television ○ Mass market movies ○ **Popular music** ○ **Mass advertising agencies** ○ **Cable television** ○ **Mass circulation magazines**

The bolded areas signify the institutional space in which the cultural economy of Christianity is strongest

Source: James Hunter, To Change the World, p. 90.

> *between word and world and the problems that attend it.* From this follows the second: *it is the way the Word became incarnate in Jesus Christ and the purposes to which the incarnation was directed that are the only adequate reply to challenge of difference.* For the Christian, if there is a possibility for human flourishing in a world such as ours, it begins when God's word of love becomes flesh in us, is embodied in us, is enacted through us and in doing so, a trust is forged between the word spoken and the reality to which it speaks; to the words we speak and the realities to which we, the church, point. In all, presence and place matter decisively.[28]

The theology of "faithful presence" would ensure that the contrast community is not regarded as an end in itself; it should eventually induce positive changes to prevailing culture. Needless to say, the idea of the faithful presence of a contrast community rejects any dichotomy between the church and wider society.

The challenge for the Christian community is to pool together its intellectual and social capital to sustain its social engagement by nurturing and sending into the world, witnesses of courage and integrity to testify to the life-affirming truth of Christ. It is appropriate to end with the challenging words of Albert Camus, "[Christians] should get away from abstraction and confront the blood-stained face history has taken on today. The grouping we need is a grouping of men resolved to speak out clearly and pay up personally."[29] The world may hate the guts of a church which is prepared to take up the cross of Christ for the sake of the world and in obedience to the gospel, but it will not be able to deny the reality of Christ's presence in the church. However, whether the world chooses to accept or reject the witness of the Christ-formed contrast community is ultimately a matter between the world and God.

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28 Hunter, *To Change the World*, p. 241.
29 Albert Camus, "The Unbeliever and Christians," in *Resistance, Rebellion and Death* (Alfred Knopf, 1961), p. 71.