

ONLY ONE FOOT IN EXILE:
MARGINALIZATION WITHOUT DISPOSSESSION IN NORTH AMERICAN
CONGREGATIONS

Kathy Mowry

A mother lifted her toddler to her hip and held him close so that he could not see her tears as she turned her back on her home for the last time. A father touched the tiny parchment with words of the Shema on the doorpost as he closed the door on the home he had built for his bride. They joined their neighbors in the road carrying their few possessions. A Babylonian soldier roughly pulled an old man away from the fencepost to which he was clinging. The crowd began to move with heaviness in every step. And through the hours of that first day, they watched the things they loved grow more and more distant in their forced march to a new place. Their eyes were swollen from grief. Their long march was punctuated by wails. Occasionally an old woman collapsed in wild sorrow. They stole glances over their shoulder for one last glimpse of home. And then they could not see Jerusalem anymore at all. Empty. They were emptied. Stripped bare. Dispossessed.

Still they marched on. With dread clutching at their hearts and their throats, they watched Babylon grow on the horizon. There came an actual moment when they stepped all at once into the city gates. They heard the gates click into place behind them and knew beyond all doubt that they were in a strange new place. They felt it in their aching muscles and aching hearts that they were far from home.

In Babylon, the people of God were carried into exile only to learn that the one who did the carrying was not the enemy they thought, but the very God on whom they staked their lives (Jeremiah 29:4). They were carried away from their homes and traditions and cherished memories (and all of the idols they would not have acknowledged having) and into the helpless position of strangers in a strange land. In exile, dispossessed of their things and their power, they raised the question, "How can you sing the song of the Lord here?" (Psalm 137). The thought of singing those songs in that place was truly preposterous. But for this they had been sent -- to learn to sing the song of the Lord in the very place where they had landed.

Learning to sing the song of the Lord in exile is an odd combination of dispossession and finding ways to sing our ancient faith from a cruciform posture – without grasping onto powers other than that of self-giving love. Exile is a means of grace to allow this combination to come into existence. And the work of learning these things in exile takes time because our entire identity must be reconstructed whenever we are shedding idols.

The situation of congregations today in North America, however, is frankly not the same as that of the Israelites arriving in Babylon.

We have never made a clear departure; we have never been truly dispossessed or stripped bare. So as the church awakens in North America to the sudden realization that the world has

changed, to the awareness that we have been marginalized,¹ we are faced with temptations that the Hebrews in Babylon never had. We have only one foot in exile. Marginalization without dispossession leaves us with remedial work to do before the lessons of exile can be fully learned and the grace of exile experienced. Faced with marginalization in the culture and in our neighborhoods while we are still within hands' reach of our properties, memories, preferences, and unacknowledged idols, we tend to gravitate towards passionate griping and fierce gripping onto things we don't want to lose. If we are to speak of the church in North America being in a type of exile, we must realize that our experience of exile is only partial. Exile is a grace sent to break us of our frantic griping and gripping and lead us into deeper understandings of our calling as the people of God. However, we who have not been carted off to Babylon in ways that stripped us bare, must learn to choose dispossession on an ongoing basis if we do not want to miss the grace of this situation in which we have landed.

How have congregations come to be here? Why are we suddenly awakening in this place of marginalization? How is it that we have not noticed as the whole world has changed around us? For certainly, these changes have not happened overnight. It is important to our understanding of the exilic experience of North American churches to acknowledge just how much in the last decades we have focused on internal church factors, improving worship and small groups and any number of other internal features, while removing barriers to growth (which were also seen as internal). The church has muddled through developments of the last fifty or sixty years beginning with the first decline in church attendance in the mid-20th century. While I do not wish to paint the 20th century church growth movement and the subsequent focus on internal functions of the church as a fall narrative of the church² or to portray those who bought into it so fully as false disciples, I do want to acknowledge that it had a strong tendency to turn our gaze inward. For decades, we have focused on moving the furniture around, without looking out the window.³ As we have focused on the growth of churches, we have become

¹ While it is possible to say that the church is feeling marginalized in our culture or that congregations are experiencing marginalization in their communities, it is important to realize that this marginalization is still relative. Yes, we have lost our central place of influence and our voice is no longer desired at the table, but our feelings of being marginalized are nothing compared to the marginalization of the poor or those from certain ethnic groups, who understand marginalization in more profound ways. Even in our marginalization, many of congregations are made up of those with ethnic background and economic status that are accompanied by privilege. Perhaps this is why certain groups have strong negative reactions to the evangelical church in North America taking up the metaphor of exile.

² William Cavanaugh (2016:160) helps me here with his wise posture concerning critique of historical moments in the church: "I wonder if we can take a theological approach to church history that does not immediately seek to judge every episode in terms of faithfulness and apostasy. I want to suggest that we can read the church's reaction. . . . as the church muddling through a wholly unanticipated set of circumstances and learning some lessons in the process."

³ I am indebted to Charles Van Engen, faculty emeritus at Fuller Theological Seminary, for this helpful image.

increasingly a preference-based people. We have shaped the church on consumerism. And while we have not been looking outside the window, change has crept up on us.

It is an established sociological observation that churches do not tend to grow quickly in number when they engage in the difficult Reign of God⁴ work of reconciliation between races and cultures and working for shalom or social justice in their neighborhoods.⁵ Our focus on numerical growth has led to a corresponding lack of focus on other kinds of growth which are less measurable but far more significant for being true embodiments of the Reign of God in the places where we are planted. My hunch is that these last decades have seen us focus more on growing congregations than on building for the Reign of God⁶, even though we would have said that these were the same thing. To equate the two is to domesticate the Reign of God. Our internal and numerical-growth-oriented focus has led us to value possession and achievement and to lose any place in our ecclesiology for dispossession. We cling to our holy places without clinging to the neighborhoods they inhabit. We define church as the people gathered in the sanctuary rather than as a public embodiment or display people serving in the city commons for the life of the world.⁷

⁴ I am using the language of Reign of God here instead of “Kingdom” for a couple of reasons. Beyond the gender issue involved in Kingdom language, there is also the reality that Kingdom language has been domesticated in our familiar usage. We talk about Kingdom in ways that equate church growth or living purely with right values. The Kingdom which Jesus announced was the Reign of God setting things to right in the whole created order. It was the end of empire-thinking with its resulting oppressions and the announcing of a new pervasive ethic of Jubilee (Luke 4), the end of grasping and the introduction of self-giving love. It is breaking in here and now in embodied fashion, and is not reserved for some future disembodied place.

⁵ This observation was first made by Donald McGavran (1970) in churches in India. It was a descriptive sociological observation. It was later made prescriptive in the church growth movement as the Homogeneous Unit Principle (HUP). It largely proves true in congregations. Growth in sheer numbers does happen more quickly when there are not barriers to be crossed. However, in the people of God our call is often to strive for what is sociologically “impossible.” The Reign of God is not a homogeneous unit, and the growth to which we are called is far more embodied—and more difficult-- than numerical growth alone.

⁶ N.T. Wright (2008) makes a helpful distinction between building the Kingdom and building *for* the Kingdom. It is only God who brings the Reign of God or builds the Reign of God. Wright shows that building *for* the Kingdom includes any work that contributes to the eventual renewal of all creation. Works of beauty and justice in the community are ways that the church builds for the Reign of God.

⁷ Michael Goheen (2011) develops the concept of the people of God as a “display people” or a “preview of coming attractions.” I am, here, also borrowing language from James Davison Hunter (2010) who suggests that the “city commons” is the place of public witness by the church.

Now in our state of surprised marginalization, as congregations awaken to exile, the fight or flight part of our brains is activated. With flight no longer possible, fighting for our possessions and power can become a primary focus – even as we seek to reach out to a hurting world. In what follows, I would like to name several tendencies and deficits of congregations awakening in partial exile and to suggest the initial shape of a way forward.

Tendencies of Marginalized Congregations

In a study I have done elsewhere,⁸ I identified congregations who self-identified as making a move from a kind of niche in the market mentality to a re-embracing of parish. As I conducted qualitative interviews with highly-motivated church members who expressed passionate desire to reach their neighborhoods, I noted tendencies which can characterize a possession-oriented people who find themselves in only a partial form of exile. While these were urban congregations in significantly changing neighborhoods, they reveal some of the typical reactions of congregations now experiencing changes in a wide variety of settings. These are simply the congregations who faced the changes first.

Holding on for Dear Life

As the world begins to spin, it is not unusual for congregations in North America to cling to whatever they can find to bring balance. Even those who express a desire on one level to reach out and incorporate people not like them from the neighborhood hold tightly to the status quo in ways that seem to them justifiable.

At times this takes the form of preservation of their building or church-related possessions. This seems especially true where the congregation has sweat equity in the building of the facility. In one congregation, a former pastor single-handedly found affordable ways to build their building and developed in parishioners a high value on preservation of that for which they had worked so hard. This pastor wore coveralls over his suit so that he could work on the building before and after the service. He taught his people to lay the hymnals on their spine so that the pull of gravity would not shorten the life of the books. The pastor is long gone, but parishioners still honor him and his values in their fastidious care of the building and hymn books. Is it surprising to say that this congregation struggles with welcoming a changing population who don't share these values?

In another congregation, a parishioner stubbornly resisted the painting of paneling in the sanctuary. Why? Because he helped to install it in the first place.

In other congregations, it was the removal of the pews which caused people to balk and walk. If the pews must be replaced with more flexible furnishings to create multipurpose spaces, how does a people let go when they have mapped their spiritual lives by those pews? (“I was sitting on the right side, second row, when the Holy Spirit spoke to me.”)

⁸ Mowry (2011).

In many congregations, stewardship and preservation of buildings and memory-laden material possessions have come to be synonymous. It is difficult to truly steward possessions for the life of the world when we are trying to hold onto them too tightly.

Sometimes the desire for stability shows up in an overwhelming concern for decorum or proper behavior in the church building, and especially in the sanctuary. Congregations may express a great desire to reach others, but draw the line at allowing others to demonstrate behaviors they do not deem respectful. Will people be allowed to eat in the sanctuary? Will they be allowed to bring in a skateboard? Will there be guidelines for dress? What if the youth coming in from the neighborhood do not know how to act properly in church? The following quotes from members in various congregations illustrate this concern:

Mostly I get frustrated because the kids are jumping up and down and moving around and their parents aren't there. So we have to instill the rules in the middle of the worship.

At what point do you draw these lines and what does that look like? At what point, for the sake of the congregation and the Kingdom . . . do you say, "Enough is enough. No more." We'll accommodate a certain level of rowdiness and disruptive (behavior), but at what time do you draw the line and say, "Knock it off"? At what place do you . . . say go home? You know, because what is disruptive for us is different for them.

How much do we tolerate just to keep them coming?⁹

This concern over behavior is an issue of determining the boundaries to hospitality, and hospitality must have boundaries to be hospitality. This issue of behavior is a real one, which must be acknowledged. "Our responses on this issue can result in burnout, the destruction of potential resources both human and material, guilt over drawing a line, conflict among members who perceive the line differently, or redemption of a space by appropriate boundaries or of a person by disciplinary boundaries."¹⁰ For the sake of our current discussion, however, one thing must be clear. *In the partial exile in which we find ourselves, it is possible for our holy places, the items dedicated to our worship, and even our preferred modes of behavior in worship settings to become idols.*

Fear for our own Survival

As a congregation experiences the anxiety of having one foot in exile, the desire for survival can become all-consuming. When the grown children of the congregation have moved to new suburbs, and many of our friends have left taking their tithes with them, and this beloved

⁹ Mowry (2011: 136-137)

¹⁰ Mowry (2011:137)

building where we have invested so much for so long is suffering from deferred maintenance, what is there left to ensure that the legacy of our life work in this place survives? Congregations who seek to reach out to a changing neighborhood from this driving force for survival tend to become busy with a flurry of activity aimed at bringing back the life of the place. While they may do a multitude of service projects in the neighborhood, they often express afterwards the frustration that they have done all of these things for the people of the neighborhood, only to find that their neighbors do not reciprocate by showing up on Sunday morning. A survival-focused people have no idea how to pour themselves out for the *shalom* of the community if there are no visible results in the form of increased attendance. Anxiety over scarcity in numbers, volunteers, or finances pulls us into blind pragmatism, which cannot choose the foolish, useless beauty of the Reign of God. Anxiety leads us to focus on scorecards¹¹ to provide us with measurable results that, when achieved, work as well as any tranquilizer to calm our raw nerves. A people who have been marginalized without being dispossessed cling—not only to buildings or to proper behavior—but to measurable results.

Unequipped for Exile

Anxiety over survival and a frantic clutching to possessions and power tend to characterize congregations who realize they have been marginalized. In addition to these two presenting symptoms, there are also several deficiencies that tend to show up in congregations experiencing partial exile. These include a lack of a theology of place or a commitment to parish, atrophied muscles of eschatological imagination, and missing practices of dispossession.

Theology of Place and Commitment to Parish

For decades in North America, most congregations in the Church of the Nazarene and similar traditions have followed a “niche in the market” approach to church growth. We have designed ministries for those with whom we have affinities in order to increase our numbers. When neighborhoods changed, we moved, often building in places where people were more like us. When we haven’t been able to move, we have tried to attract people like us to drive from a larger metropolitan area to be with us. *We have not had a robust theology of place calling us to be “sent” into neighborhoods for the shalom of real places.*

Over the years, we have built whole systems perpetuating these dis-placed congregational models. These systems allow for larger scale in churches, but large scale in churches in many cases has caused us to be increasingly disconnected from the neighborhoods in which we sit and more and more dependent on experts to do the work of the people of God. Systems tend to move against the organic, spontaneous, and unique. When systems come into being, uniqueness is

¹¹ The original scorecard of the church growth movement was measuring Sunday morning worship attendance and conversion growth in number of new members (McGavran 1970). As we have been less able to score well on this scorecard, some like Reggie McNeal (2009) have suggested new scorecards. How many people did we feed this week? How many people did we help in the community?

seen as a negative or even fatal flaw.¹² It seems to me that exile opens the possibility that we move away from large-scale-enabling systems to contextual expressions of the church that are smaller, simpler, less wealthy, more diverse, and more connected to neighborhoods.

In recent days, some of our tribe have begun rediscovering neighborhoods and re-committing to a parish model for congregations and more organic expressions of church. As we become further marginalized, it will be increasingly important for us to reclaim places filled with people not like us. From our position on the margins, we must identify neighborhoods where we are called to be embodiments of the Gospel. When we awaken in a world that is not to our choosing, we are to begin to invest in that world, to seek its shalom. This means putting down roots in a real place, raising our families there, and making its challenges our own so that together with others we become a demonstration of how the Reign of God might burst into that place.

It will be important to disassociate the need to sell a building from the need to remove a church from a neighborhood. If we must sell a property we can no longer afford in a neighborhood, why would we assume the church no longer needs to be in that neighborhood? Can we imagine the church being there without the building? We have abandoned neighborhoods that need a Gospel presence with regularity because dispossession was necessary, when dispossession actually might have swung open the doors for a new thing God wanted to do in that place. A dual commitment to parish and to practices of dispossession would radically transform the shape of our lives lived on behalf of the world.

Eschatological Imagination

A major presenting symptom of marginalization without dispossession is an inability to imagine in fresh ways how the Reign of God might burst into the places where we are. Anxiety all by itself can constrict imagination, but as I observe congregations, I also have the sense that their imagination has been colonized or held captive. In some cases, congregations are tied to an image of success rooted in their past, in the glory days of their congregation. In some cases, their imaginations are stunted by seeking to copy others, including notable mega-churches, who do not work in contexts anything like that of the copying congregation.

Sometimes a business model of the church seems to have squeezed out the possibility of imagining the Reign of God. We are practiced at planning logically toward goals, but in our “all

¹²By way of example, once the church growth movement became an established system, C. Peter Wagner (1979) began to describe changing neighborhoods as fatal illnesses for the churches that served there, because changing ethnicity meant that church growth would be slowed. He named this terminal disease for congregations, “ethnikitis.” Churches were advised to run before they contracted a fatal case. In exile, though, it becomes clear that the real disease is “systemitits” (and maybe even systemically-enforced xenophobia) which keeps us from being able to creatively and organically respond in the places where we have awakened to exile.

grown up” state, we have forgotten how to simply allow the Spirit to imagine through us what God might want to breathe into our communities.

In courses that I teach on the topic of church and community, I often assign an exercise of eschatological imagination. I ask students to examine passages such as Isaiah 11, Revelation 21, or Psalm 96. With images of lions lying down with lambs and swords turned into ploughshares and all things being made new fresh in their minds, I ask them to prayerfully imagine what the Reign of God might look like if it came in the places or communities their congregations inhabit. Who would be together at the table? What walls might be torn down? Who would have a voice that doesn’t have one now? Who would give up power, and who would flourish as a result? Which slaves would be freed? What would we grow with the new ploughshares we obtain? I ask them to wildly imagine looking specifically at their communities and then to portray their imagining in some kind of work of art that might inspire their congregation— a poem, a painting, a story, etc.

In doing this exercise with undergraduates and with graduate students who are currently pastoring, I have noticed an overwhelming pattern. Undergraduate students will paint me pictures of the walls removed from a church building and all the colors of the community’s diversity streaming through the building like a wind of the Spirit, write me stories about what the potluck will look like when all the nations in the community are joining together in the church’s kitchen and fellowship hall, rewrite the words to a hymn with a vivid portrayal of what God wants to do in the community. Graduate students who have been pastoring for a while will misunderstand the assignment. They will write me action plans – five steps toward how the church might move forward in the neighborhood--and even these plans will be limited to the resources on hand. Some graduate students who are pastoring, even on a second and third chance to do the assignment, cannot bring themselves to imagine a fresh new thing. The instructions of the assignment seem to be a foreign language that bewilders them. What is it in current pastoral practice and pastoral preparation that so reduces our ability to imagine eschatologically? This same inability to imagine shows up in anxious congregations, where congregants tell me they have tried “everything possible” in the neighborhood, as if all of the possibilities are already known to them, and they have exhausted them all.

We will have trouble experiencing the full grace of our partial exile while our imaginations are rusty and tied down to images and practices that are not life-giving where we are. How do we break the shackles that have left us unable to do imaginative Reign of God work from the margins?

Missing Practices of Dispossession

Our ecclesiological practice has been largely devoid of voluntary dispossession; it has rather been associated with accomplishment and acquisition. The negative response of some Christian congregations to refugees locally and around the world in recent months has been revealing. You know you’ve not experienced exilic dispossession when you are fearful to welcome the truly dispossessed of the world for fear that somehow welcoming others will lead to your own dispossession. The same is true in the ways we have extended fellowship to those of

different ethnic backgrounds. We have often been paternalistic or acted as “hosts”¹³ because to truly share worship services, buildings, and leadership would mean that we would lose something. To truly become multi-cultural fellowships both within a congregation and in the internationalization of a denomination, dispossession is a necessary practice.

Now in our time of marginalization, congregations in North America need to find ways to practice themselves into dispossession for the sake of the Kingdom. What practices help congregations to do this continually? How do we build the understanding that everything other than our defining Story must be laid at the altar because that is the very nature of our defining Story?

We cannot speak of dispossessive practices without speaking of lament. Lament is a vitally important practice of the people of God which must be recovered in exile. The people of God are to gather and pour out their grief, loss, frustration, and even anger at change before a God who is big enough to take in all of our pain and endue us with freedom and hope to move forward. In exile, the people lament. We do not gloss over the loss and pain of change, but when we are stripped bare, even voluntarily, we pour it out to the God who practiced radical self-emptying for us and who teaches us to do the same. (It is important to note that lament is an internal practice of the people of God, not one to be conducted on social media.)

In addition to lament, some congregations have found ways to hold loosely to their things simply by careful formative language. One church has a saying that is repeated at board meetings and during times of change, “There are no sacred walls in this church.” Over time, such phrases build a shared understanding that will help us let go.

Other congregations have found a way to be open to change when they recall the premium value they have historically placed on cross-cultural missions, in which the missionary is highly regarded precisely for living in a dispossessive fashion. If a missionary can give up everything in a radical self-emptying to learn another language and culture and witness to the Gospel there, why could their congregation not make a few changes like painting the paneling and letting the pews go? An older member in one church, who recognized this discrepancy in the value structure of his congregation, went from being the bulwark against change to the leading advocate of the very changes he had resisted. In a denomination that has always valued cross-cultural missions, this seems an important connection for congregations to make in their new state of marginalization.

Topping the chart of dispossessive practices, however, is a critical decision that congregations must make in exile. Those churches in my study who were able to open themselves to a new imagination were precisely the churches who made the decision that the survival of their congregation was not the critical factor. They didn’t need to survive their work in embracing and blessing their neighborhood; they just needed to faithfully bear witness to the

¹³ In biblical hospitality, God is always the host. For further discussion, see Mowry 1994.

Reign of God in the place they had been given. One pastor tells the story of leading his people to give up survival as a goal.

I waited about eight months before I did this, but we sat down on a Sunday afternoon upstairs . . . and I told them that we're dying and that . . . if we don't do things dramatically differently we will die. Then I told them even if we do things dramatically differently we may still die, but we've got the opportunity to trust that we serve the Lord of the Resurrection. . . . There's this powerful temptation to say, "Everything's going to be fine and God's just going to swoop in here and bless us," but the reality is that you've got to be truthful and that is the hardest thing. But once you take that step, it's as if you've lifted a huge burden off of everyone's shoulders and people can begin to flourish again.¹⁴

A congregation must decide that survival is not their major objective if they are to be freed to begin to sing the song of the Lord from the margins.

But once the decision about survival is made, we need further practices of doxology to lead us to offer ourselves for the life of the world. It is in doxology or the offering of all that we are and have to death and resurrection that congregations find the dispossession of exile turned from loss into offering. Alexander Schmemmann¹⁵ gives us a beautiful portrayal of Orthodox Eucharistic practice in which the congregation understands itself to ascend to the Kingdom and experience that Kingdom in such a way that they are scripted to give themselves freely between Sundays for the life of the world. In similar fashion, in a situation in which the church in Chile found itself silenced and, therefore, complicit in a situation of unspeakable torture to the Chilean people because of the church's dependence on the government for power and a place of influence, the church found freedom to act with courage in exile because they realized that in the Eucharist each week, they stood about the body and blood of a martyr. It was this realization surrounding the Eucharist which helped them know how to dispossess themselves of power and the benefits of their silent complicity with the state in order to live faithfully in exile.¹⁶ We need to develop similar formative practice that powerfully makes us so aware of Resurrection that we turn back to the world not frantically trying to revitalize our congregation for its survival but offering the very life of the congregation up in doxology and the hope of resurrection.

I find the image of the congregation as field hospital particularly instructive here.¹⁷ As we do our work in a field hospital for a hurting world, we do not concern ourselves with which side people are on nor what their cholesterol level is. We enter into the fray and heal hurts because we serve a God who gave of God's self to heal.

¹⁴ Mowry (2011:106-107).

¹⁵ Schmemmann (1963).

¹⁶ Cavanaugh (1998).

¹⁷ Cavanaugh (2016) develops this metaphor of field hospital, which was first introduced by Pope Francis in an interview in 2013.

Like any good hospital, the church attempts to heal all those looking for healing, Christian or not.

The church, though is not just a hospital, but a field hospital. Unlike a stationery institution that occupies a certain territory and defends it against encroachment, a field hospital is mobile, an event more than an institution. A field hospital is unconcerned about defending its own prerogatives, and instead goes outside of itself to respond to an emergency. As a body, it is visible, but it does not claim its own territory; its event-like character creates spaces of healing.¹⁸

While in the scope of this paper, I cannot fully develop what such dispossessive practice will look like in congregations, I do believe there are some critical movements which will enable us to be the church during this time. We must find ways to communicate these to our people until paradigm shifts begin to occur.

1. We live not for the preservation or numerical growth of our congregations, but for the Reign of God. This is a profound shift. For many the congregation has been seen almost as the ultimate end. It is possible to grow a congregation numerically in ways that increasingly become a poor representation of the Reign of God.
2. Our vocation on behalf of the world in which we have awakened will be publically lived out in the city commons rather than the sanctuary. The sanctuary or the gathering of the people of God is essential for shaping our counter-cultural calling, but the new location of public ministry for us is standing alongside others who are working for the common good of a place. The Israelites in Babylon were told how to have a public ministry in their new strange home (Jeremiah 29). The instructions were not to gather as many Babylonians as possible into their worship services, but to settle in, be a part of community life, and seek the shalom of Babylon itself.
3. We are not victims, but offerings to the world. It is not us *vs.* them, but it is us *for* them. We freely offer ourselves, our stuff, and the whole experience of dispossession and transience for the life of the places where we are. In doing this, congregations must take our examples of faithfulness from the martyrs rather than the successful growers of large congregations.
4. Congregations in exile need resurrection, not revitalization. The difference is huge. We do not need to try to do CPR on tired models and systems, but to allow ourselves to be broken open for the world in dispossessive ways that trust in resurrection.

What will it mean to learn to sing the song of the Lord in the partial exile of the North American church? I believe the song will have lyrics that lead us to dispossession and doxology. Can we move from being “Frozen” to being able to sing “Let it Go”? It seems to me that some good words for us to learn to sing again might be these that were penned centuries ago.

*Let goods and kindred go.
This mortal life also.*

¹⁸ Cavanaugh (2016:3)

*The body they may kill
God's truth abideth still.
(God's) Kingdom is forever.¹⁹*

May such a song enable congregations across North America to unclench the fists that have been holding tightly to our own preservation and to spread our arms in a cruciform position of generosity to the world that is now outside our windows.

Sources

- Cavanaugh, William T. 1998. *Torture and Eucharist*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Cavanaugh, William T.. 2016. *Field Hospital: The Church's Engagement with a Wounded World*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Goheen, Michael. 2011. *Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story*. Baker.
- Hunter, James Davison. 2010. *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- McGavran, Donald. 1970. *Understanding Church Growth*. Third, 1990 ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- McNeal, Reggie. 2009. *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Mowry, Kathryn. 1994. Do Good Fences Make Good Neighbors? Toward a Theology of Welcome for the Urban Church. In *God So Loves the City: Seeking a Theology for Urban Mission*, ed. C. Van Engen and J. Tierms. Monrovia, CA: MARC.
- Mowry, Kathryn. 2011. *Trusting in Resurrection: Eschatological Imagination for Congregations Engaging Transitional Neighborhoods*. Pasadena: Fuller Theological Seminary.
- Schmemmann, Alexander. 1963. *For the Life of the World*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.
- Stone, Bryan. 2007. *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness*. Grand Rapids: Brazos.
- Wagner, C. Peter. 1979. *Your Church Can be Healthy*. Nashville: Abingdon. .
- Wright, N. T. 2008. *Surprised by Hope*. New York: HarperOne.

¹⁹ Martin Luther penned the original of this hymn in 1524. Translated from the German.