On Knowing Humanity Journal

Creating a Christian faith-based approach to anthropology, incorporating insights from theology into ethnography and analysis, and allowing religiously committed anthropologists to speak freely of the ways in which their commitments inform their theory and practice. Raising new questions and lines of research on subjects such as: the significance of humanity's unique calling in nature for personhood and the construction of culture; the underlying reasons for humanity's destructive behavior toward self, others, and the environment; and the role that divine redemption and hope play in human lived experience and practice. Reincorporating teleology, in the sense of purpose, into scientific understanding, inviting dialogue between Christian anthropologists and anthropologists of all persuasions around a deeper understanding of the human condition, and encouraging the doing of anthropological research and writing through the eyes of faith.

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Diversity, Equity and Inclusion within the Missouri REALTORS®[1]

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In 2021, the Missouri REALTORS® organization took intentional steps toward improving and enhancing diversity and inclusion. These steps included forming a dedicated committee and holding a Diversity Summit. As a member of the organization who was also concerned with issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, I was surprised to learn of ongoing issues of discrimination and unequal treatment within the larger housing industry. I wanted to know how individual members within the organization perceived the issues as well as the actions taken by the organization. What I found was a diversity of perspective, experience, and proposed solutions. In the midst of those differences, I regularly witnessed an ethical commitment to fairness and service to everyone in the community. If that commitment continues to undergird the organization collectively, as well as the individuals serving within it, then I am optimistic. Given the fundamental human need of a *place* to exist, I am hopeful commitment will characterize the journey.

Winston Churchill said, "We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us" (Churchill 1943).

The places where we live our lives and spend our time shape us, our families, our communities, and our cultures. Where people live and how they came to live there has been influenced significantly by the industry built on the ownership and transfer of land and improvements such as houses and buildings, referenced collectively as real estate. The foundational nature of the human need for a *place* to live and work makes the essence of real estate a staple throughout history. Naturally, the industry itself has a long history too. My research examined how licensed real estate agents within the Missouri REALTORS® organization perceive issues of diversity, equity and inclusion as well as corrective efforts around those issues within the industry. It is particularly concerned with this moment in time, following the organizational actions of Missouri REALTORS® in 2021, which included the first Diversity Summit and the adoption of Policy 401 establishing a Diversity and Inclusion committee.

This article begins by providing the organizational context for Missouri REALTORS®, including a brief historical overview of discrimination in the housing industry and ending with a summary of a recent undercover investigation into discrimination by real estate agents. Before presenting the findings of my research, I will explain my methodology and describe my relationship to the industry in general as well as my interest in the topic.

Organizational Context

Throughout the history of the United States, who is allowed to live where has been a recurring issue, from the displacement and relocation of indigenous tribes to the laws, policies, and regulations dictating who could or could not live in a given location. These regulations, policies, and common practices built the setting within which the rest of life and history in the United States has taken place. That setting is part of what is commonly referred to as systemic racism. It continues to be systemic now, in part because even after discrimination was prohibited by law, segregated neighborhoods had already been established and real estate purchases had been denied, meaning neither homes and properties nor any gained equity could be passed down to future generations.

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[1] This research focused on individual members within the Missouri REALTORS® organization and does not represent the views of the organization, affiliates, or subsidiaries. The research was IRB approved.

Missouri REALTORS® is a part of the larger organization of the National Association of REALTORS® (NAR), the largest trade association in the United States. A trade association is an organization of businesses working together to advocate for and improve their industry and/or facilitate greater cooperation in business transactions and interactions. Although real estate agents compete to secure buyer and seller clients, some level of cooperation between agents is imperative to best serve those clients and customers. When working with buyers, agents need to have knowledge of and access to properties available for sale, and agents working with sellers need to be able to communicate effectively and efficiently with buyers.

Before NAR was formed in 1908, local cooperation was already taking shape in the form of real estate boards. NAR was founded by 120 individuals, 19 real estate boards, and one state association with the following stated objective: "to unite the real estate men of America for the purpose of effectively exerting a combined influence upon matters affecting real estate interests."[2] Membership in NAR typically begins at the local level and provides access to the multiple listing service (MLS) containing property information about homes currently available for sale or rent as well as the lockboxes which grant access to the homes themselves. The Missouri Real Estate Association, now Missouri REALTORS®, was founded on February 13, 1936.

This Moment in Time

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, "There comes a time when silence is betrayal" (King 1967, 2:32). Following the murder of George Floyd in May of 2020, frustrations over racial inequities in the United States reached a fever pitch. Pressure intensified for individuals and organizations to both take and articulate a position in an official statement. This resulted in a flood of statements from corporations, government agencies, and non-profit organizations. In addition to these statements, The Washington Post reported America's 50 biggest public companies and their foundations pledged more than $50 billion to addressing racial inequality, a list including Berkshire

Hathaway, a real estate brokerage franchise and holding company chaired by Warren Buffet (Tracey et al. 2021). Gary Keller, as CEO of Keller Williams, sent a letter to all agents saying, "Racism is wrong, and Keller Williams stands with the Black community and wholeheartedly supports equality" (Keller 2020). Actual activities arising from each statement and the respective organization varied. Keller Williams, for example, formed a task force to make recommendations for best practices and necessary actions for eliminating racial disparities within Keller Williams and the greater real estate industry.

Government agencies and nonprofits also responded. In the summer of 2021, Marcia Fudge, secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, pledged there would be three million new Black homeowners in the United States, an accomplishment that would raise the current Black homeownership rate from 42% to 57.5%—compared to the White homeownership rate of approximately 73% (Kamin 2021). This homeownership gap has been unchanged for more than 50 years. In November 2020, NAR President Charlie Oppler issued a public apology for the association's contribution to segregation and racial inequality through their policies as well as organizational opposition to corrective measures such as the Fair Housing Act of 1968. "What REALTORS® did was an outrage to our morals and our ideals" said Oppler, "It was a betrayal of our commitment to fairness and equality."[3]

Historical Background

So, what did REALTORS® do? The country's history of racial injustice and disparity is fairly easy to see and to track. Within the Association of REALTORS®, there are three primary areas in which discrimination occurred. First, as a matter of organizational policy, some state and local REALTORS® Associations excluded licensed agents based on race, ethnicity, and sex. Second, discriminatory practices in real estate brokerage practices effectively reduced the value of properties based on the ethnic or racial makeup of a neighborhood, resulting in stolen equity and

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[2] National Association of Realtors®. About NAR: History. https://www.nar.realtor/about-nar/history. Accessed 1/27/24.

[3] National Association of Realtors®. Nov. 19, 2020. NAR President Charlie Oppler Apologizes for Past Policies that Contributed to Racial Inequality. https://www.nar.realtor/magazine/real-estate-news/commentary/an-apology-from-the-national-association-of-realtors. Accessed 1/12/22.

generational wealth. These practices included steering buyers to the neighborhoods of similar racial, ethnic, or religious makeup as well as inciting sellers to sell because people of a particular race, ethnicity, or religion had moved into the neighborhood, warning that property values would decrease. This practice is known as blockbusting. Finally, the organization opposed the passage of Fair Housing Laws in the name of protecting individual rights regarding property ownership. Private property rights remain at the heart of REALTOR® advocacy work. However, that advocacy is now informed by the belief that excluding entire ethnic groups from the benefits of homeownership creates a domino effect of injustice. Not only are individuals barred from living in the home and community of their choosing at the moment of the offense, but also, they, along with their children and grandchildren, are robbed of the benefits of gained equity and generational wealth.

Joining the NAR begins by joining the local board, which typically covers a geographic area, such as a city, county, or larger region. In the early days, NAR, or the National Association of Real Estate Boards as it was known then, was only open to brokers and not salespersons (often commonly referred to as real estate agents). Many of those local or state associations prevented anyone but White men from membership. In its own voice, NAR admits, "Often their bylaws explicitly state that Blacks, women, Jews, and other groups were not allowed to join."[4] Black real estate brokers formed their own organization in 1937, calling it the National Association of Real Estate Brokers (NAREB), and female agents formed the Women's Council of REALTORS® (WCR) in 1938. NAR officially prohibited membership exclusion for Black brokers in 1961, and most local boards stopped banning women in the 1950's. In 1973, NAR expanded membership from just brokers to include salespersons, and the membership demographics began to shift dramatically. At the end of 1973, NAR had 118,000 members, 17% of which were female, and by the end of 1975, the rate of female membership was almost a third.[5]

When a real estate salesperson first obtains their license to sell real estate, most managers, brokers, and training programs encourage them to tell the people in their sphere of influence, their friends, families, and neighbors, that they are now in real estate. What happens when entire population demographics (racial, ethnic, religious, or otherwise) do not have people like them selling real estate? If access to the multiple list service, where currently available properties are listed, depends on membership in the local Association of REALTORS®, how might those communities and groups be excluded from the purchase of real estate as well as the subsequent gains in equity and generational wealth?

Those groups were further harmed by the practice of discriminatory brokerage practices. When agents actively guided buyers to neighborhoods already comprised of people "like them," real estate agents effectively segregated or perpetuated segregation in housing. In addition to steering, real estate agents and brokers also engaged in blockbusting. If a family of a different race, ethnicity, nationality, or religion moved into the neighborhood, agents warned other home-owners that property values would go down and current owners should sell. In some cases, the agents would purchase properties at below-market prices to assist in a quick sale and then resell them at higher prices to other families, often of the race, ethnicity, nationality, or religion that initially incited the warning. This self-fulfilling prophecy, driving values down, was only enhanced by lending and appraisal policies that valued homes and rated neighborhoods according to the racial, ethnic, and religious make-up.

One of the most notorious examples of housing discrimination is Levittown, New York, located on Long Island. A post-World War II housing shortage resulted in efforts to meet the demand, especially for service members returning home. One example of those efforts was the creation of a planned community, often cited as the first mass-produced suburb, Levittown. GIs and other home buyers flocked to purchase the shiny new homes, outfitted with state-of-the-art kitchens, which included a GE range, refrigerator, and washing machine. African American

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[4] National Association of Realtors.® March 9, 2018. From One Voice to Many: Despite Setbacks and Opposition, How a Growing Chorus Paved the Way to Fair Housing. P. 1. https://www.nar.realtor/sites/default/files/documents/March-2018-Fair-Housing-3-9-2018.pdf. Accessed 1/27/24.

[5] National Association of Realtors®. Women in Real Estate. https://www.nar.realtor/women-in-real-estate. Accessed 1/24/27.

veteran Eugene Burnett and his wife Bernice visited a model home and loved what they saw. When they approached the sales representative inquiring about the process to purchase a home, he responded, "Listen, it's not me, but the owners of the development have not, as yet, decided to sell these homes to Negroes [sic]" (Smith 2003).

Not only were non-White home buyers prohibited from purchasing in the initial offering, but their moving into these neighborhoods was actively opposed in the name of protecting property values. The Underwriting Manual produced by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) explicitly warned that the presence of even one or two non-white families could undermine real estate values, an issue of concern for builders and new homeowners alike. Government officials instituted a national appraisal system that factored race, ethnicity, and religion almost as heavily as property condition, particularly by encouraging inhabitants of a neighborhood to stay the same as was originally intended. For real estate agents, this often resulted in practices such as steering, which kept demographic makeups of neighborhood "stable," as well as blockbusting, which incited property owners to sell quickly because undesirable populations were moving into the neighborhood. Real estate agents typically earn money when properties are bought and sold, so encouraging people to buy and sell for any reason increases revenue. Doing so on the basis of race, ethnicity, and/or religion perpetuated housing segregation and negatively impacted property values, particularly for people who were out of the majority demographics of White and Christian.

Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Fair Housing Act into law in 1968, which prohibited discrimination concerning the sale, rental, and financing of housing based on race, color, religion, or national origin. It was later amended to include sex, handicap, and familial status.

NAR openly opposed fair housing laws, something they have since apologized for.[6] However, we might ask, just because the laws were passed, does it stand to reason that the problem was addressed back then and therefore solved?

Newsday conducted a three-year undercover investigation in Long Island, New York, effectively returning to Levittown, to test and evaluate whether real estate agents were treating potential buyers

equitably (Choi 2019). The findings shocked many, both in and out of the industry. The study utilized 25 trained undercover testers who tested 93 agents and netted 240 hours of secretly recorded meetings (legal in the state of New York). The recorded meetings took place from April 2016 through August 2017, and the findings were published in November of 2019. With the guidance of the Fair Housing Justice Center in Long Island, Newsday utilized a paired-testing approach where testers with similar financial profiles (employment, credit score, etc.) requested identical housing parameters. Two nationally recognized fair housing experts were tasked with evaluating the results: Fred Freiberg and Robert Schwemm. Freiberg had coordinated more than 12,000 fair housing tests, and Schwemm, a law professor, had written the book *Housing Discrimination: Law and Litigation,* often heralded as the definitive treatise on the matter (Schwemm 1990). Newsday compensated Freiberg for assistance in training and organizing the testing. Otherwise, both experts were unpaid for their test evaluations. They were given transcripts of the interactions and analysis of the listings, including maps of the neighborhoods and the respective average percentage of the White population according to census data. "An agent's actions were deemed worthy of citing only after both consultants independently saw evidence of fair housing violations in response to the information provided . . . While their opinions do not represent legal findings, their matching . . . judgments provided a measure of apparent disparate treatment by agents" (Choi 2019). The Newsday investigation revealed "widespread evidence of unequal treatment by real estate agents on Long Island" (ibid).

In test number 30, Black tester Johnie Mae Alston and White tester Cindy Parry gave the same housing parameters and financial profile to agent Anne Marie Queally Bechand. Queally Bechand asked each tester if they were prequalified with a lender, and both testers told her they had preliminary conversations but did not have a prequalification. This was her response to the Black tester:

> *Agent*: I won't take out anyone unless you have a prequalification letter, so I need to know you're prequalified for a mortgage.
>
> *Tester*: Oh, so that means I can't go out to see anything.

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[6] See footnote 3.

Agent: I won't do it. You can try another person, but I don't have the time to do that, because I need to know that you're serious, and that—I really need a prequalification letter.

The requirements for the White tester were starkly different. "What is your availability?," and, "When can you start looking at houses?"

The White tester toured homes that afternoon, while the Black tester was not shown any. In fact, the Black tester received no listings on any homes for sale while the White tester received 79 (Choi 2019). A policy not to show homes to buyers who are not prequalified is not the issue. At issue is the disparate treatment received by buyers shopping for the same type of house and providing the same financial information. Before hearing of the experiences of their White counterparts, many of the Newsday testers of color believed they had been treated well and served equally, describing the agents as friendly and polite. It was seeing the treatment side by side that revealed the service differential.

The results were not all bad, and the experts agreed that agents complied with fair housing in 52 cases. Still, Newsday's experts identified 34 cases suggesting fair housing violations which included steering and denial of equal service. They found unequal treatment against Asians 19% of the time, against Hispanics 39% of the time, and against Blacks 49% of the time (Choi 2019). Some may protest saying, Newsday's investigation took place in one specific area, and it does not represent all real estate agents. While that is certainly true, the magnitude of disparate treatment cannot be ignored. The history of discrimination in housing is clear, and the perpetuation of segregation in housing is statistically clear as well. The non-existence of problems in real estate brokerage would be the anomaly and not the other way around.

Methodology and My Moment in Time

I first obtained my real estate license in 2003, when I lived in Maryland, in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. In my pre-licensing classes and new agent training, the importance of fair dealing and adhering to the Fair Housing laws were routinely and repeatedly emphasized. "You will be tested," one trainer said. Fair Housing compliance was a matter of risk management as much as anything else. As a new agent with a personal interest in fairness and justice, I took it very seriously.

As a mother of four young children, the scheduling flexibility of real estate appealed to me. From 2003 to 2007, the East Coast's booming real estate market made it one of the better-paying part-time jobs. The mortgage crisis of 2008 changed the time requirements significantly, and I left the industry. Motherhood remained my primary focus, and I worked part-time in church ministry and in education, ranging from early childhood to higher education. In 2016, life circumstances dictated that I find full-time work quickly. During the years away from real estate, my interest in diversity, equity, and inclusion had grown. I had worked on multiple projects and initiatives in both professional and volunteer capacities. Despite an amazing opportunity to join the number one real estate team in the Joplin area, it still felt like a step backward from my primary passion. I was living in Missouri now, and the 2014 death of Michael Brown in the St. Louis area had reignited conversations around a persistent racial divide. In these polarizing times, I wanted to work toward unifying people across the lines that divided us, particularly the lines of race, ethnicity, and gender. I was ignorant of any need for that work in the real estate industry. Still, bills needed to be paid, so I returned to the industry that had been so good to me years ago.

While making my decision, a friend said, "Just think about the difference you could make in addressing discrimination, inequities, and injustices in housing!" I said nothing in response, partly because I was confused. If I had spoken it would have been something like, "What are you talking about?! They have already passed Fair Housing laws. It's done!" In retrospect, I wish I had said that to my friend, a person of color with more than a few stories of personal discrimination and injustices when it came to housing. I was a white Midwestern woman, and despite noble desires, I was woefully ignorant of how discriminatory practices had morphed more than they had ended. I received a basic introduction to the inequities still plaguing the industry nearly five years later when I attended the Missouri REALTORS® Diversity Summit.

At this point, I had a combined total of 11+ years in the industry. In addition to my ignorance of the inequities, I had also never participated in any meaningful way in the Association of REALTORS® at a local, state, or national level. When I heard about the Missouri REALTORS® Diversity Summit, I planned to attend because of my personal interests, which I

considered separate and distinct from my career field in real estate.

On the first day, a Missouri REALTOR® taught the required course for NAR's "At Home with Diversity" designation. The second day was a mixture of presenters, including a panel including the NAR Diversity Committee Chair, a Missouri REALTOR®, and representatives from the National Association of Real Estate Brokers (NAREB) who shared information about homeownership gaps and the difference in experience for people of color around housing and real estate.

Learning about the inequities and observing the intentional steps taken by Missouri REALTORS® organizationally made me wonder how other individual REALTORS® throughout Missouri perceived the issues and the actions. I had not realized the disparity was as significant as it was, and I did not know what the solution or the remedy might be. Yet this was a topic I ostensibly cared about. At this time, I was an Eastern University student in the Master of Arts in Theological and Cultural Anthropology program selecting my topic for the ethnography thesis. The subject seemed to find me. I wondered if other agents were as unaware as I was, and I wanted to begin my research by asking incredulously, "Did *you* know about this?" Instead, I took a different approach.

I attended the 2021 Fall Business Conference of Missouri REALTORS® in September, and then the 2022 Winter Business Conference in January 2022. At the fall conference, I attended meetings of output groups, committees, and the board of directors. I watched who the speakers, leaders, and influencers were. I listened in what meetings and in what contexts topics such as fair housing and homeownership gaps were discussed. I took notice of who was doing the talking. I also noted who tended to get quiet when topics such as diversity, equity, and inclusion came up. Based on the dynamics and interactions I observed within meetings and larger groups, I approached people individually, introducing myself and asking for a few minutes of their time. As part of that introduction, I told them about my research and asked if they would be willing to speak to me. I assured them conversations were confidential and their identity anonymous. With my words and my overall posture, I attempted to communicate curiosity and openness to various positions and perspectives. Using the conferences as a springboard, I scheduled one-on-one meetings where we could talk in their offices or over lunch or coffee. I also attended local meetings and social gatherings of REALTORS®.

Findings

Rural vs Urban Areas

One quickly emerging theme was an overall difference in perspective between rural boards and those located in more populated areas, which one story seemed to illustrate. At each conference, there is often an auction to benefit RPAC, the REALTOR® Political Action Committee. A member donated a gun engraved with Missouri REALTORS® in "REALTOR® blue" to be auctioned off. The gun was a popular item and brought a significant price. At the board of directors meeting later that week, a member from a more populated area spoke up, suggesting items associated with violence should not be included in the auction. After the individual finished speaking, a voice from the back, identified as someone from a more rural community, said, "Second amendment, bitch." Now, it would be as unfair and unreasonable to say every rural member would be in favor of a gun in the auction as it would be to suggest that every urban member would oppose it. Still, it was perceived internally as a split between city and country.

At a different business conference in an output group meeting, an individual from a rural association said their members did not understand why diversity was being "shoved down their throats." They did not believe they had "those issues" in their communities. Another attendee from a more urban area pointed out the population demographics of that person's community as evidence that there was likely a big problem, suggesting if there were few people of color living there, it was probably a choice resulting from a lack of sensitivity to the issues at hand. The topic was frequently reframed depending on who was talking. A rural member might say, "We don't have these issues because we don't have diversity" where an urban member would say, "You don't have diversity because you have not addressed these issues."

The claim of "not having any diversity" surfaced repeatedly. For example, in Joplin, Missouri, where I lived, the 2020 Census results showed the Black/African American percentage of the population to be 3.2% and two or more races to be 4.3%, while Indigenous groups represent 2.2%. Conversely, the White population is 86.5%. While there may be a statistically low percentage of nonWhite groups, saying

there is "no diversity" effectively erases those who live there. Joplin has multiple historically Black churches as well as Ewert Park, which was donated by attorney Paul Ewert and his wife for use by the Black community who were barred from other parks. Esteemed American scientist George Washington Carver was born in Newton County, Missouri, which includes part of Joplin, and the National Monument dedicated to him is located there. African American poet Langston Hughes was born in Joplin too. Not only is there visible diversity, but there is a rich history as well.

Still, when I heard comments such as, "We have no diversity here," I understood what they were describing: visible diversity was not as prevalent as it might have been in other areas. And a reasonable response would be exploring the reasons why. Missouri native and University of Arkansas graduate Kimberly Harper provides some insight in her book *White Man's Heaven: the Lynching and Expulsion of Blacks in the Southern Ozarks, 1894-1909* (2010). The Southern Ozarks encompass only part of Missouri, and the history of how people came to live in an area—or not live there, as it were—is relevant to the conversation. In my interviews with REALTORS® in Southwest Missouri, especially if the "no diversity here" line of thinking came up, I asked if they were familiar with the book or subject matter. No one I spoke to had heard of the book, the author, or the information contained therein.

Harper opens her book with a story of a midnight train arriving in Pittsburg, Kansas, from Joplin, Missouri. One couple, recounting their story to a reporter, told of being expelled from their home in Pierce City in 1901 after three black men were lynched. They had escaped to Joplin and now, less than two years later, were fleeing once again. An angry mob had lynched Thomas Gilyard, an African American man accused of shooting and killing a Joplin police officer (Harper 2010, xv-xvi). After lynching Gilyard, the mob targeted Black-owned businesses and residents. Joplin officials reported calls from neighboring Webb City and Galena, describing "a flood of Black refugees" (Harper 2010, 83). In a 1952 issue of *Ozarks Mountaineer,* Springfield Judge Tom Moore suggested there was not a more significant Black population because "they never had any," arguing that settlers before the Civil War did not bring slaves with them and because " . . . negroes [sic] do not like the hills any more than the hills apparently like them" (Harper 2010, 252). Harper theorizes an African

American Springfield resident would likely offer a different explanation.

In speaking with REALTORS® in Southwest Missouri, I often thought of Harper's work, especially if I heard, "We don't have diversity here" or "Not many [insert protected class] want to live here." Proactively addressing historical inequities and present-day discriminations in home and property ownership requires knowing the history of a neighborhood, a town, and a state. One agent I spoke with said of historical inequities, "That was in the past. No one alive today had anything to do with that." He then asked, "And even if you wanted to do something, how far back are you going to go? Should we give all the lands back to the tribes that used to live here?" The implied although unarticulated answer was, "No, of course not."

Long Ago and Far Away

The idea that conversations around injustices and inequities are about a far-away time and place was common, expressed in a general sentiment of "those things don't happen anymore." When accounts were given of when they had happened, they were often characterized as isolated events, and when or if those isolated events happen, the unchallenged thinking still seemed to be that it was happening in far-away places. One agent expressed his belief that the South was still "very racist" while also telling me that there was no significant racism in the community where he lived. However, an agent of color who practiced real estate in the same community as he had a different perspective. This agent recounted the story of meeting a couple before he was licensed to sell real estate about five years ago. This couple was considering a move to this community, and during their conversation with the would-be agent, Mrs. buyer asked if she could share a bit about their experience so far. The as-yet unlicensed individual said yes, and they all took a seat. The woman described the encounter with the real estate agent who had been showing them property. As the agent drove them from one house to another, they passed through a predominantly minority neighborhood. Tears began to stream down the woman's face as she shared that the other agent had said: "She told us, 'You don't want to live in this part of town. This is n****r town.'"

Now a licensed agent, this individual told me, "This is still happening. It's not all in the past. The Klan traded their hooded sheets for business suits."

Population Correlations

I was frequently questioned about whether a lack of visible diversity in a local board's membership was correlated with the overall population demographic breakdowns. Again, my answer would involve the need to explore *why* a community or area is largely homogenous. Was there a systematic expulsion? Were there deed restrictions, explicitly excluding non-white owners and residents? Or did a town have "Sundown laws," prohibiting African American individuals to be in the town when the sun went down. James Lowen explores this practice in his book *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (2018), where he considers not only the history and sociological causes of sundown laws, but also the present and future of these towns. It is also possible to find reasons for current demographics in other historical data collections. For instance, the Equal Justice Initiative had a multi-year investigation to document lynchings throughout the United States. Exploring their findings, including the map they created, can help explain how current demographics came to be.[7]

Exploring the histories as well as the underlying attitudes and causes of the make-up of a neighborhood, town, region, or state is important work. Census projections predict the United States will have no majority race or ethnicity by the year 2045 (Frey 2018). If there are stark differences in certain communities or regions, we must be careful not to satisfy ourselves with explanations such as, "Members of the [insert protected class here] don't like [this area]." Seeking out the history and experiences of people who lie outside of the majority is an important first step.

Regarding the correlation of the population and visible diversity in their local real estate board, there are other factors to consider. Going back to the example of Joplin, if 86.5% of a population is White, then it follows that most agents would also be White. At times there seemed to be an air of defensiveness. Some agents seemed to hear an implication of wrongdoing if their local board or association of REALTORS® lacked visible diversity. To be clear, current population demographics and percentages are what they are. Wanting to see them change or wishing they were different does not effectively change anything. It was never my intention to shame or accuse any REALTOR®, individually or collectively. In fact,

frequently, I found myself wanting to offer reassurance, easing any discomfort and/or anxiety. The negative reactions of others often caused a similar discomfort in me. But I hoped there would be value in allowing discomfort to remain, in service to the larger questions. An unwillingness to tolerate uncomfortable emotions or topics short-circuits the process of learning and growing, at times fostering a fragility that results in an inability to hear hard things, including data, stories, and experiences. As James Baldwin once said, "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced" (Baldwin 1962).

Serving Everyone in the Community

Another issue to explore is whether current REALTORS® are serving and speaking to everyone in the community, across any lines that might divide them, such as language, neighborhoods, or something else. Though some questioned measurement or evaluation methods, there was a consensus that the matter needed to be explored and the industry as a whole needed to always be improving. Part of continuous improvement is evaluating how—and whether—brokers and real estate brokerages are recruiting agents from all population demographics. Ensuring recruiting efforts are inclusive to everyone in the community could go a long way to not only diversifying the Association of REALTORS® at all levels but also enhancing the overall service to the entire community and its people. One broker in a more rural area said she believed her company and her agents would be better if there was greater visible diversity as well as a diversity of experience and thought. She also admitted she was not sure how to accomplish that. It seemed offensive to target a specific population group.

The manager of another brokerage office shared a story of a specific challenge they had experienced. "We had someone come into the office with a picture of a house they were interested in seeing. They didn't speak English, and we didn't speak anything but [English]. The receptionist thought they were speaking Spanish, and there was an agent in the office who spoke Spanish fluently." The manager gave an embarrassed chuckle as she described the bilingual agent coming to the front, hearing the visitor speak a

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[7] For more information, visit https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/. Accessed 1/27/24.

few words, and then informing the office staff that the language being spoken was not Spanish.

"We didn't even know what language this individual was speaking. And they were coming into our office, looking for help in securing real estate. We realized we needed to do a better job preparing for anyone in our community who might need our services." This office took two clear steps in that direction, purchasing a dedicated tablet and software to aid in translation as well as a one-page document listing different languages so that an individual could point to theirs.

"We want to serve all of our community, and having experienced the frustration of not being able to do so for a person who was standing in front of us asking for assistance motivated us to do better."

Formal vs Informal Efforts

Calls for improvement in any industry, especially around issues of diversity and inclusion, frequently include more education or additional regulations. In conversations with some agents as well as within meetings at business conferences, I heard the same. Advocates for change wanted more classes and education as well as additional policies and regulations to enforce greater fairness and equity. Still, among these agents there was also a concern that diversity, equity, and inclusion might become merely a class to take or a box to check. One agent described serving on a planning committee meeting when someone pointed to a workshop topic and a speaker belonging to a protected class and said, "We have diversity covered." "I couldn't believe it. I knew 'checklist mentality' existed. I was just stunned to hear it spoken so . . . blatantly."

One African American agent described the tension between evaluating diversity in terms of classes, policies, and numbers versus effecting meaningful change with a deep embrace of diversity and inclusion. She also described attending her first Missouri REALTORS® Business Conference, saying, "I counted the Black people in the room. And it didn't take long."

Instead of classes, education or additional policies and regulations, some agents advocated for relationship building, believing that to be the best way

to address and remedy inequities. Multiple REALTORS® described getting to know agents from different backgrounds with different opinions. One agent recounted having her perception of the world broadened and her opinions challenged through relationships with people who lived, thought, and believed differently than she did. With incredulity, she described debating and discussing differences of opinions over drinks at a Missouri REALTORS® event and still being able to be friends and be friendly to each other. In polarizing times, the ability to sit together, have a drink, and maybe even share a laugh can seem radical.

The current climate in the United States following the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, George Floyd, Michael Brown, Philando Castile, Freddie Gray, Sandra Blan, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and so many others center much of the conversations about inequity around race, ethnicity, and color. But there are other matters to address. Diversity, equity, and inclusion conversations within the real estate industry naturally gravitate toward the protected classes as laid out in the federal Fair Housing laws, the NAR Code of Ethics,[8] and Missouri law. Those protected classes prohibit discrimination based on race, color, ethnicity, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), religion, disability, familial status, or ancestry.

Some agents expressed concern over being asked to endorse behavior they believed to be inconsistent with their religious beliefs. This came up in more veiled statements. In one conversation, an agent said, "As an industry we need to do better in serving all the community." He added a caveat in the form of a question: "But what are they asking me to do?" There was not a concern explicitly stated, so I asked for clarification. He spoke of his belief regarding "what God has clearly spoken on." Not wanting to assume, I asked, "Are you speaking of matters related to LGBTQ+ concerns?" "Yes," was the definitive answer to my explicit question. He went on to say that professionalism was not the issue for him, and he reiterated that everyone deserved professional real estate service and illustrated his point with an example: "I don't think it's right when people live together before they are married, but I would still help them

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[8] National Association of Realtors®. January 1, 2022. Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice of the National Association of Realtors®. https://cdn.nar.realtor/sites/default/files/documents/2022-COE-Standards-of-Practice-2021-12-15.pdf. Accessed 1/12/22.

secure housing when asked." Rather, his concern was being asked to personally affirm and approve of something against his conscience and religious convictions.

Another agent separately corroborated this concern from a slightly different vantage point. Part of her business included property management and assisting property owners in renting out investment properties, managing the collection of rents and payment of expenses. She said some of her religious clients expressed concerns about renting to individuals from the LGBTQ+ community. She implied this was something she personally wrestled with earlier on in her career because of how she had grown up. Her involvement at the state level with Missouri REALTORS® challenged her thinking.

"I see it differently now. It just doesn't make business sense. Why would we want to limit our customer . . . our client pool? If an owner says, 'We don't really want to rent to . . . *them*.' That doesn't make sense. If they have a good job and great credit, why wouldn't you want *them*?" For this agent, what changed her mind was a question from a fellow Missouri REALTOR®: "Does it really matter if a same-sex couple lives two doors down?" "What if someone has an answer to that?," I asked? "What if it does matter to them?" "Well, I won't keep them as a client. First of all, that's not a directive I can legally or ethically obey. Secondly, even if I could obey it, I wouldn't."

Obey may seem like an out-of-place word for those outside of the real estate industry. Laws of agency provide the context here. Agents operate with a fiduciary responsibility to their buyer or seller clients. Fiduciary refers to trust and involves a commitment to act in the best interest of those being served. Fiduciary duties include confidentiality, accounting, loyalty, disclosure, and obedience. At the same time, real estate agents are bound to laws, regulations, and policies as set out by the federal, state, and local governing authorities as well as the ethical obligations of membership in the Association of REALTORS®. While an agent owes obedience to a client, they may not obey a directive if it violates a higher law or regulation. Determining how to respond when they are instructed explicitly or by implication to violate a Fair Housing law is a situation for which agents must prepare. Handling situations where an agent is being directed to do something they are not legally permitted to do creates a practical situation agents have to navigate, and cultural values and norms play a part.

Being Nice

Multiple times, a cultural value of "being nice" came up alongside a fear of speaking up and potentially "rocking the boat." In one gathering of about 12 real estate agents discussing inequity in the industry, agents were hesitant to speak and express themselves. At times, there seemed to be more disclaimers and preemptive apologies for possibly offending than there were substantive statements. Many agents fear saying the wrong thing or being misunderstood. To be fair, these are complex issues. Navigating any sort of middle ground between extremes is to risk being misunderstood. Agents described a reluctance to say what they think or bring up questions they did not know how to answer. Topics of diversity and inclusion often center around aspects of one's core sense of identity, which are understandably emotionally charged. So how can we talk about questions and ideas in order to get them out in the open?

As a Midwesterner who was raised to be nice, I understood the dynamic being described. Personally, I choose to believe that people are doing the best they can with what they have. I think it can be fairly argued that people learn best when their defenses are down, and, conversely, accusations often trigger shame which may shut down an openness to hear hard things. So, the question becomes, is it better to tip-toe through a minefield in order to effect meaningful change? Or shall we walk with purpose and risk setting off bombs in service of greater clarity? One agent of color told me, "Sometimes I feel like I'm riding on a runaway train, and I'm leaning out the window, holding a sheet, as if that might slow it down."

Another agent described it as trying to put out a raging forest fire as part of a bucket brigade. But instead of buckets, they are passing Dixie® cups. Sometimes it seems like the bigger issue is not injustices and inequities that happened or even continue to happen as much as it is accusations of intentions or motivations. Rather than discuss events and the potential harm they could inflict, the focus becomes, "What are you saying? Are you calling me racist?" It can seem like being *called* a racist is a worse offense than being, saying, or doing something that is racist.

Seething Silence

I expected more open hostility than I encountered, especially considering how contentious and adversarial social media and online comment sections can get. Because agents spoke on the condition of anonymity and confidentiality, I expected to encounter more of those stronger sentiments. They were rare. I was grateful for the few such interactions I had. They seemed to get at the heart of issues simmering under the surface but not coming out in real life exchanges. In a small gathering of agents, one agent spoke openly of her opinion that special interest groups, such as the National Association of Real Estate Brokers (founded for Black real estate professionals), the Asian Real Estate Association of America, the National Association of Hispanic Real Estate Professionals, were racist. "You couldn't have a National Association of White REALTORS®. So why is it ok to have these other ones?"

There was a palpable tension in the room. Making that kind of statement out loud seemed to violate the rules. It is certainly not politically correct. After she finished speaking, another participant spoke up on another subject, changing the course of the discussion. Not wanting to miss the opportunity to explore a line of thinking I suspected was more widespread than a lone voice might suggest, I turned the conversation back to the individual expressing the opinion about those special interest groups and asked her to say more about that. "It's like Black Entertainment Television. You can't have a Network for White Entertainment. You mentioned the Women's Council of REAL-TORS®. Can men belong to that?"

Even though the tension remained palpable, and participants seemed uncomfortable, there were several who later acknowledged they understood where she was coming from. Whether or not they shared the sentiment and were, perhaps, unwilling to voice it, they still did not know the answer. Why is it ok to have these groups? Are they perpetuating the divisions that had caused historical inequities and potentially creating new inequities?

There is an old saying, "As the twig is bent so grows the tree." Inequities and injustices in history, even if they are now prohibited, often continue to bear fruit. This is like the butterfly effect, which theorizes that small things have far-reaching ramifications. And to be clear, these historical inequities are hardly small.

These organizations exist to proactively correct and advocate for groups that have experienced discrimination historically with lasting effects. According to NAREB's website, their vision is "to foster the expansion of inter-generational wealth creation by Black households through promotion and retention of elevating levels of real property ownership investment sustained by NAREB's enduring commitment to preservation and fulfillment of the Realtist credo, 'Democracy in Housing'." [9] Given the extreme injustices that existed in the past as well as the current inequities that persist today, promoting Black property ownership and inter-generational wealth—something denied the African American community historically—seems a proactive, corrective measure.

Waking Up

"I didn't realize how bad things were."

A common theme I heard, particularly from White agents, was a sense of waking up. One agent who had lived in St. Louis their whole life described the time and events surrounding the 2014 death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. This agent listed significant relationships with people of color in their own life and said, "I should have known. But I didn't."

This resonated with me, although I would have preferred not to talk about it. The death of any young person is a tragedy. That I understood. I did not understand the racial undertones of the shooting. For the sake of context, 20 years earlier while I was in college, OJ Simpson had been charged with the murder of Nicole Brown and Ron Goldman, and a little over a year later, in 1995, he was acquitted. On the news, I saw looks of relief and moments of celebration from some in the Black community and I did not understand it. At that time, my world and close relationships were largely homogenous, so I saw nameless faces on the news, without any complexity or nuance. After the death of Michael Brown, I saw outrage and grief but not from nameless faces.

From 2003 to 2012, I lived in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. Upon first moving to Maryland, I lived in Prince George's county, a county with a less than 15% White population. One of my first nights in Maryland, my family and I went to the grocery story. As far as I could tell, we were the only White people in the store. I was startled by my own feelings of fear and discomfort. Before that experience, if you had

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[9] National Association of Realtors®. About NAR. https://www.nareb.com/mission-statement/. Accessed 1/27/24.

asked me to imagine how I might feel if I was the only White person in the room, I would have told you without the slightest hesitation that it would not bother me at all. Yet here I was, and the reality of my experience did not match my imagination or my aspiration. It was like someone held up a mirror to my insides and shined a light on places in me I did not know existed, revealing things I wished did not exist. Although my upbringing was almost entirely White, Midwestern, by this time in 2014, I had regularly experienced and lived in visibly diverse settings. I had many friendships and relationships with people who did not look like me, did not think like me, and did not grow up like I did or where I did.

Additionally, over the last twenty years, social media had joined the landscape of traditional news media. During the aftermath of Michael Brown's death, I watched as my social media feed seemed to divide largely along racial lines. Once upon a time I would have been satisfied with an explanation along the lines of, "That's horrible, but you have to obey an officer's instructions." The thing is my friends across the racial line were not suggesting that an officer's instructions should not be heeded. They were saying—and seeing—something I did not—perhaps could not—see or understand. I only knew I was missing something. I found myself wrestling with two questions leading to my own waking up moment: 1) what am I missing and 2) what if I'm wrong? When faced with a feeling of hopelessness in others, and when it surfaced in me, I wanted a way to unsee what I had seen to whatever degree I could grasp it and then claim ignorance.

Measuring Success

In each setting and conversation, I asked how to measure results. How would we know if progress was being made toward the end of greater inclusion in the real estate industry and homeownership? Unfortunately, no clear answer emerged. For some, it was to watch the numbers. An increase in homeownership among historically marginalized people and communities would indicate meaningful change as would an increase in the wealth and net worth of people of color. I mentioned initiatives such as the 3by30 initiative sponsored by The Black Homeownership Collaborative which lays out a "7-point plan to create 3 million net new Black homeowners by 2030" (3by30.org). Many agents I spoke to were unaware of the initiative.

One agent who has actively advocated for greater diversity, equity, and inclusion at the local, state, and national levels seemed to struggle to answer this question of how to measure results. "I don't know . . . The numbers would have to get better or tell the story of things getting better. But I really think seeing an increase in the willingness to have these conversations and listening to other people's stories would indicate success, but I'm not sure how you measure that."

Another agent acknowledged that the situation feels overwhelming, but emphasized the need to keep trying, to keep talking, and to keep listening. She said, "Opting out is not something I can do. You're talking about my kids and their lives . . . and the world they're going to live in. I'll never shut up."

An agent of color had this to say:

I think meaningful change will show itself in areas like education and the criminal justice system. Economic realities such as home-ownership or net worth don't exist in isolation. Lower income levels, lower net worth, not benefitting from increased equity over the years impact education and the ability to go to college. And an inability to go to college can significantly impact the ability to get the kind of work that generates the income that makes homeownership possible. I haven't even talked about mass incarceration.

This isn't one issue with one cause that has one solution. These are complex and inter-connected. I'm glad people are trying do something, but it feels . . . well, it feels pretty insignificant in the grand scheme of things. You're talking about increasing Black homeownership . . . are we addressing more foundational issues though?

As she talked, I sensed my own perspective being challenged. I thought of the story of Marie Antoinette, the Queen of France during the French Revolution who famously said in response to hearing French peasants had no bread to eat, "Then let them eat cake."

Conclusion

The issues are complex, as must be our response. Perhaps the most complete response to the diversity issue is a diversity of the responses themselves. I believe we need those who will walk with purpose into the minefield and speak plainly about the injustices and inequities. We need policies and regulations, and

we need the classes and trainings. We need those who will host the dinner parties and gatherings where relationships are built and conversations can be had, where differences in opinions and perspectives can be expressed and explored in the context of relationships. We need those who will study the issues, present the findings, teach the classes, and lead the initiatives.

I am a proud member and benefactor of the Missouri REALTORS® and the National Association of REALTORS®. My research was born out of a desire to see a fairer, more inclusive world marked by justice and opportunities for all. My intention is to work toward that end in my community as part of the Association of REALTORS® at the local, state, and national levels. The National Association of REALTORS® is governed primarily by the Code of Ethics, first adopted in 1913. Over the years, the essence has stayed the same: to deal with clients, customers, fellow agents, and the public with competence, fairness, and high integrity, based on the Golden Rule. Regardless of any disagreements on the nature of the problem or possible solutions, Missouri REALTORS® frequently spoke of fairness for all and a commitment to serve the community and everyone in it. It is that ethical commitment undergirding Missouri REALTORS® that gives me hope for the future.

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Whose Vision, Which Morality? Missiological Implications of Competing Local Moralities[1]

Donald Grigorenko

This article explores moral diversity considered ethnographically and presents implications for cross-cultural service. It is drawn from an ethnographic study done in a Nepali village which identified the primary moral values of community peace, cooperation, and solidarity. These values were discovered to be in tension with the modern Western moral values of personal independence and advancement found in a modern consumer economy, education, democracy and in Western initiated development projects. From these observations, four implications are presented for missionaries working among communalistic people groups. These implications are, the missionary must understand the local moral order, second, the missionary must be aware of the possible presence of conflicting moral visions, third, with a changing moral vision comes a changing set of virtues and moral practices, and finally, development ministries will have an, often unconsidered, impact on the local moral order.

Introduction

Cultural diversity entails moral diversity. Richard Shweder goes so far as to define culture as "a reality lit up by a morally enforceable conceptual scheme" (1998, 157). Cultural realities are given "force" through rewards and punishments for conformity to or departure from moral expectations. It is the moral order of a society that determines what common features of a culture are taken most seriously. Understanding the moral order of another culture is critical to understanding that culture as a whole. Moral orders differ from culture to culture, and those who are from another culture must attend to the morality of their host culture if they are to relate and communicate effectively and credibly.

This paper is drawn from a study completed in 2004 in a Nepali village in Kathmandu Valley. The purpose of that study was to understand the local moral order of this village and draw missiological implications and applications. This article will report that understanding and then draw implications for those living and serving in this village. The village will be referred to as *Shantigaun* and was principally populated by high caste Hindus. Its population, including the immediate surrounding area, was about 2800 people, most of whom were from the Chhetri caste and divided into four clans.

The method of this study included ethnographic interviews and participant observation. Interviews were conducted with adult males of the village and interview questions explored stories and characteristics of the virtuous and the vicious man. Questions also sought incidences of anger and conflict, since anger is often driven by moral conviction. Drawing on early interviews, later interviews explored accounts of moral decline in the village. From these discussions and

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[1] The title of this paper is a variation of Alasdair MacIntyre's title, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1988). The title of his first chapter is "Rival Justices, Competing Rationalities." MacIntyre argues that the ethical and moral questions of our day are eliciting a wide diversity of incompatible judgments grounded in rival traditions of thought and practice. Where MacIntyre considered rival Western justices and rationalities historically, I will consider rival local moral orders ethnographically.

observations, the moral vision of the Chhetris of Shantigaun became clear.

Peace and Solidarity

A key word in the moral vocabulary of the Chhetris of Shantigaun is *shanti* (peace). Places are peaceful, villages are peaceful, and families are peaceful. *Shanti* is a common name given to girls. The action of a virtuous man contributes to and maintains peace. The opposite of *shanti* is not simply conflict but includes the ideas of being loud and making a commotion, a lack of harmony, and causing trouble (*dukkha*), worries (*pir*), and difficulties (*marka*). Thus, *shanti* is a more inclusive than the English word "peace" in American usage. The behaviors of a moral man leading to the *shanti* of the village are helping, cooperation, contributing to the benefit of the whole village, as well as personal control and respect. Peace involves every family in the village being tranquil and having their basic needs met. Actions that lead to the disruption of *shanti* are often described as immoral (*anaitik*) and corrupt (*bikrit*).

Peace is at the center of the moral vision of Shantigaun. Negatively this peace is described as an absence of conflict, trouble, and catastrophe. Positively, it is achieved when each person fulfills his or her responsibility and place in the community—young people respect elders; wives obey husbands; households fulfill their duties to the other households, and the people of the village together fulfill their responsibilities to the gods. Peace is embodied in a matrix of relationships in the village. Fighting among the members of the community is wrong because it is loud and disruptive of the relationships that constitute peace. Drunkenness is described as morally reprehensible because it causes conflicts which disturb the community.

Actions contributing to the peace of the community are those that keep the whole community in view. It is not enough that a person remains individually truthful, sexually pure, or good to his family. He must be an active participant in contributing to the good of the village. Of the ways that villagers may contribute to the benefit of the whole community, helping and cooperative activities were often mentioned. Helping other individuals and families is a mark of a good, moral man. A moral man helps and will not turn a blind eye to the personal needs of others in the village. One informant tells of the instruction he received from his father on helping:

He taught us not to say, "We don't have." If I had a hundred rupees and somebody asked for fifty, he told us to give them at least ten or fifteen. But he didn't want us to leave them empty handed. He wanted us to help everybody.

The moral man is a contributor and that contribution has the community in view.

Contributing to the good of the whole village is chiefly seen in cooperative efforts. The labor of one family, in most cases, is not sufficient to plant, weed or harvest rice during the short window of time in which these tasks must be completed. Consequently, each farming family must depend on labor from other families to accomplish these tasks in time. My host family requested fifteen people, both male and female, to come to their fields and participate in a *ropai*. *Ropai* is a noun literally meaning "a planting" from the verb *ropnu* "to plant." But the word in this context refers to an institutionalized cooperative effort of planting rice. Informants spoke frequently about how the good or moral man participates in cooperative efforts such as the *ropai*.

Funerals are taken very seriously because it is believed that a properly conducted funeral has a significant bearing on the successful transmigration of the deceased to his or her next life. Therefore, village responsibility in funerals is not optional, and each member lives with the expectation that, at the time of his or her death, everything will be conducted completely and properly by the villagers.

Cooperation is also required at the local religious festival. The village worships two local deities every two years and every household must send one member to help prepare the shrine. Households that do not are punished. Participation and contribution in this festival takes priority even over one's regular employment:

If I need to go to office and have not told anybody, in such a case I will have to pay a fine, or send someone as my replacement, or I have to take leave from the office. If everyone goes on with his own work, who will work in the temple? We should not miss this kind of important work for any reason.

Cooperation is mandatory, and to not contribute to this cooperation has consequences.

Hindu religious practice, especially in urban areas, is largely a personal and individual affair with each person seeking to gain personal merit toward a better

reincarnation in the next life. Yet in smaller Hindu communities one's participation or lack of participation in communal religious rites and festivals is viewed as having consequences for the prosperity of the whole village. If one person or household refuses to participate in a village religious celebration in which all are required, he or she may be blamed for future village troubles and catastrophes such as landslides or disease epidemics.

It is morally reprehensible for a villager to not cooperate for the good of the village. One informant was asked what happens when someone refuses to participate in a *ropai* or other cooperative effort, "It does not normally happen. It is a matter of morality." But villagers do sometimes transgress the moral expectations of the community by not participating in cooperative activities, and in that event, the community as a whole takes action. "If one asked for someone to work in their field and they would not go, no one would go and eat with that family, and if someone died, they would not go to their funeral processions." Offenders are shunned by the village. Others do not eat with them, they do not help them during planting and harvesting so they must hire laborers from outside the village, and significantly, other villagers will not participate in their funeral rites. This last action extends the consequences of non-participation in cooperative efforts into the next life.

Modernity and its Discontents

The moral vision of Shantigaun is embodied in a matrix of relationships marked by cooperation and solidarity. But all is not well in Shantigaun. Informants often talked of a moral decline in the village which threatened to supplant the moral vision of peace and solidarity with another, rival vision of the good life. They used phrases such as, "But nowadays people have changed," "The bad people seem to be increasing day by day," and "[Good] people are rarely seen these days." One informant said, "It has become almost like a foreign country even here!" Without romanticizing the past, informants expressed that there was a time when the moral order was better maintained than it is presently. Analyzing this talk of decline revealed that villagers placed the blame for this decline at the feet modernity. Three features of modernity surfaced which account for this decline: a consumer economy, democracy, and education.

In the last twenty years a greater number of consumer goods have become available in Nepal's cities and the desire for these goods has further fueled a desire for cash. By contrast, in the village there is little cash to be gained. One informant describes the lure and the frustration that city life has for the villager: "There is entertainment in Kathmandu; the villager wants to go there, but he cannot participate in it. There is no opportunity available to him because of his home situation." That "home situation" refers to an agrarian life in which economic exchange is weighted toward goods and services and not cash required in the cities.

The village economy, with its barter of goods and the cooperative exchange of labor, leaves the villager powerless in the cash economy of the city. Another interlocutor states, "There is no way that the desires, expectations, and wants of a son can be fulfilled in his household." The village way of life thwarts any opportunity to satisfy these wants. People, especially young people, are discontent with village life and what it does not offer them. Exposure to new clothing styles, motorcycles, movies, restaurants, and electronics in the modern urban consumer marketplace, coupled with the absence of the villager's purchasing power, incites this discontent. And this discontent leads to moral corruption. "The economy of Nepal is going down. Everyone has to earn money. And the common thinking is that everyone should be in a well-off family. So, the desire for status and money has increased corruption (*bikriti*)." The discontent that leads to corruption is paralleled by a shift in values away from what is offered by village life to what is offered by city life.

In contrast to the discontentment awakened by the new consumer economy, a good man is content. One informant told this moral story to illustrate the folly of wanting what is out of reach:

> There was an ascetic who dreamed of living as other people. [In his dream] he wanted to get married and have a son. After getting married and having a son he said to himself, "My son needs milk so I will buy a cow. I will sell some of the milk and will earn money. When I get money, I will buy a horse. I will learn to ride the horse. Now I have a son, a wife, a cow, and a horse. Then I will buy an elephant." . . . Then the ascetic tripped on his begging stick and broke it. His entire dream was gone. That is why we should not go beyond means.

The one good thing the beggar had was lost when he dreamed of having what he could not get. The villager, discontented by his powerlessness in a consumer

marketplace, exchanges the shared goal of peace in community with its associated virtues of helpfulness and a cooperative spirit, for that of the acquisitive individual and the competitive pursuit of what he does not have.

In a modern consumer economy, one works to improve one's personal condition, status, and power. Work increases one's purchasing power in an economy where the accumulation of more goods is better. In the city one is surrounded by strangers on whom he cannot depend. One is an individual, independent entity that must exercise greater self-sufficiency. Traditionally in Shantigaun work was done to meet one's basic needs and to help others, and the village as a whole. To pursue the personal improvement of one's lot with no concern for the needs of others or the village is to be greedy, discontent, and morally deficient.

To be a consumer one must have cash, and to gain cash one must be employed. To be employed, family members must venture to the city. In Shantigaun, it was common for one member of a family to have a wage-earning job in the city, and in some families two or three members went to the city daily to work. Thus, an additional impact of this participation in the urban consumer economy is that a portion of the village population is removed from the village community to the city for much of each day and week.

The moral vision of peace and solidarity of the past presupposed a genuine material interdependence of the members of the community for success and survival. On the other hand, success in the consumer marketplace is in no way dependent on the once important village. Consequently, the virtues necessary for cooperation and helping required of a farmer in the village and which traditionally define the good man are being deemphasized. Making money in the city depends on one's own personal education, training, and work savvy; it is inherently individualistic. Further, there are simply fewer people available in the village who can participate in cooperative activities. Thus, cooperative efforts have become increasingly difficult to accomplish, and the genuine interdependence characteristic of the community in the past is breaking down. Community solidarity marked by a mutual dependence was becoming a characteristic of the past. One informant stated,

> Now people depend on themselves more than others. Formerly, I depended on you because I took half from you. I lived on your help. Now no one is dependent on anyone. One is able to exist through his own ability. Formerly we had to depend on others. In its absence, no one has peace and tranquility.

Another informant states emphatically that presently, "People try to meet their needs somehow by themselves," and another, "Before people used to share their problems, but nowadays they don't." Modern life with its accent on the individual and his or her independence has eroded a moral order that was built around communal virtues.

The recent, rapid, and forceful arrival of consumerism in Nepal has aroused a different vision of happiness for many Shantigaun Chhetris, a vision that is in many respects the antithesis of the traditional vision of peace and solidarity. Traditionally, the morally good man is the one who contributed to that vision. "I consider him a good man who is committed to his family and to his village." The bad man is one who does not contribute to this vision and obstructs its accomplishment through non-participation and making trouble that disrupts the community. The modern consumer economy is drawing many people, especially the young, from meaningful contribution to this vision.

A second accounting that village members often give for moral decline is politics, or more specifically, democracy. In April of 1990 a popular revolution ended the partyless monarchy, and a new constitution was drawn up that allowed greater authority to an elected representative body. The political road since 1990 has been rough. Parties have multiplied, political corruption has increased, and a Maoist insurgency has at times controlled much of the rural areas of the country at the cost of 10,000 lives.

Many Nepalis expressed exasperation with politics over the last decade. Following the 1990 revolution many hoped that greater freedom would result in speedier development and greater equity. This has not been the case. In my conversations with Nepalis prior to leaving the country in 1996, many expressed that the country was better off with the previous partyless system under the king.

Political activity is one of the clearest examples of the influence of Western modernity in Nepal. Democracy, with its foundational concepts of equality, freedom, rights and choice, introduced many ideas to Nepal that are incongruent with native ideas of rule and authority. Although Buddhism maintains some notions of equality, Hinduism affirms a hierarchy of

being that divides humanity into qualitatively different groups by caste. Hinduism tends toward passivity and encourages each person to fulfill his or her lot in life and not pursue personal betterment. Choice is a very foreign idea to many Nepalis. Historically a person did not choose his or her own rulers, spouse, living location or occupation. After the revolution of 1990 the concept of choice received careful thought by many Nepalis. Not only were citizens given the freedom to choose their political leaders, but the freedom to choose was applied to other areas of life. One Nepali told me that since they can now choose their rulers, they should be able to choose their spouses.

Political involvement has been forced upon the residents of Shantigaun. Many of the development projects initiated by the government, NGOs, and INGOs are decided upon within the elected political machinery. If a district or ward wants a piece of the development pie, they must politically compete with other districts and wards. Therefore, most families in Shantigaun are politically engaged and aligned with some political group. One man stated, "Personally I don't like politics, but a person cannot remain aloof from politics. Directly or indirectly, he is involved in politics, but I don't like it." One's neighbors in the village are politically active, pushing their causes and projects, and this demands that others do the same if they are not to be carried along by a vocal minority whose aims may be dissimilar.

Politics is most often connected with the moral decline of Shantigaun at the juncture of increased conflict. "Now in this multiparty system every village has political conflicts." Democracy, as it has touched Shantigaun is divisive and party association has fragmented communities and threatened village solidarity.

Political candidates and party representatives visit villages with the goal of winning supporters. Party platforms are established in opposition to other parties. One gets the sense that the primary purpose of some parties is to keep other parties from gaining the upper hand. One informant stated, "No one wants others to prosper. Politics came and has caused fighting between brothers." Shantigaun traditionally sought peace and communal solidarity, but "when democracy was declared in 1990 people joined different parties and these parties polarized [the people]." For the residents of Shantigaun democracy is divisive and consequently morally corrupting.

The moral decline is not only demonstrated by the introduction of conflict and political polarization, but also by the fact that these competing allegiances threaten the cooperative efforts of the village. One informant, describing a bad man expressed,

> When we make a road he will say, "It is not good." We ask him why it is not good and he would say "I will lose my land." But the real reason is that it is not his [political] party. His party is doing something else so he opposes building the road.

Political loyalty is a hindrance to cooperation in Shantigaun.

Cooperative efforts bring the villagers together for a common local cause and cement their oneness as a community. Party loyalties have made these efforts very difficult to orchestrate. A villager who helps in a cooperative project proposed by a person of a rival political group adds to the influence and clout of that party over his own. What one group proposes the others will oppose with a rival plan, "If a representative of a party brings in a proposal to solve the drinking water problem, then a different political party proposes the construction of a school. Why should I cooperate in a project proposed by a different party?" The solidarity of the village is lost.

Democracy in Nepal has allowed greater freedom, a voice for the oppressed, and fewer human rights violations. But multiparty politics proved to be divisive in Nepal and when overlaid upon a culture with a moral vision of peace and solidarity, that vision is rendered inoperative.

Education received significant attention from Shantigaun Chhetris when accounting for moral decline in the village. On the one hand, informants acknowledged the need and value of education for Nepal's development, while, on the other, they grieved the effects education was having on village tradition and morality.

Education in Nepal is modern and one feature of Nepali education that expresses this modernity is its universal availability. Historically, those who could read and write were high caste Brahmins, Buddhist monks, and government officials. Education was largely religious and conducted in the home or in small religious institutions in villages such as monasteries. Education was not an option for most. Now in government as well as private schools many castes may be represented in a single classroom, thus enforcing modern values of equality and personal rights.

Education is also individual. Throughout the rigorous examining process, an individual succeeds or fails alone (in principle) without support from one's community. But further, the curriculum is secular and weighted toward math, science and technology. Education in developing nations is, understandably, intended to contribute to development.

Modern education implemented in the developing world is typically out of step with local values, and this is indeed the case in Shantigaun. In addition to being market-oriented, secular, individual, and universally available, it further removes students from the local context, thus weakening the enculturation to community values they might have received in the village.

Welch argues that the influence of globalization through education has resulted in the weakening of collective values. He states, "Perhaps the most impressive effect of globalization in education is its divisive economic impact, while the principal effects of post-modernity tend towards a commodification of culture and an individualized detachment from collective values" (2001, 485). The influence of education in Shantigaun cannot be separated from other features of modernity. Education is related to employment and the removal of members of the community from the village to jobs in the city. It is related to politics and the critical thinking required of the democratic process that is new to Nepal.

Most Shantigaun Chhetri informants affirmed the positive value of education and would not suggest that education be done away with. Indeed, some looked back at a time of no education and described it as a time of limitation, social oppression, suffering, and hard labor. Ironically, education is seen as good because it has brought economic prosperity and independence:

> Formerly people were uneducated and imitated the steps of others. Before we had to depend on others. I was uneducated. I had nothing even for clothing. I had no earning. You had everything. So, if you described black as white, it was right. It was because I was uneducated, and nothing mattered. I had financial plight because of lack of education. Now education has shown the light and they are well off. Why should I depend on you anymore? I can earn some money and do

everything. Education has shown me the way. So even if I choose to walk my own way, it is all right.

This is a telling statement. The communalism and its associated values that characterized traditional life in Shantigaun seems to have been bracketed. Education has challenged dependent relationships, and in their place, households have learned the ability to manage their own crises without assistance, and this shift is assessed as a change to be celebrated.

The collective values that go along with the traditional vision of solidarity grew out of the genuine material need of villagers to help one another in order to survive. Virtues of helping and cooperation were important because villagers depended on one another. With the social changes furthered by education and the related economic and political changes, these virtues are rendered more and more irrelevant due to the lack of a justifying social context which previously accented them as crucial to village survival. Thus, the virtues of helping and cooperation are threatened to become moral relics of the past reflected upon in language of "how it used to be." There is a sense of loss at the hands of modern education in Shantigaun, yet education is regarded as a good and necessary thing. It has brought the community from ignorance, blind obedience, and domination to independence and freedom.

Os Guinness described modernity recently as "the great solvent."[2] The erosive effects of modernity in Shantigaun are evident. The response of the Shantigaun Chhetris to this erosion was varied. As the above quote illustrates, some welcome the change and are ready to abandon the traditions of the past. In one conversation on the religious practices of doing fasts and rituals for the salvation of deceased fathers and grandfathers, a young man broke in and said, "This is an old saying. This is only superstition." This assessment is becoming more common among young people who see these traditional practices as irrelevant to modern life. It had been common to interpret crisis and trouble in individual households and in the village as the action of an angry household or village deity. But young people interpret their world differently looking to closer-at-hand material and human explanations of problems.

Others respond by adjusting tradition to modernity. One informant compared Hinduism to "a loose bird

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[2] Personal conversation February 2009.

in an open environment." The community should accommodate a new modern world. One informant stated, "Modern Chhetris should be able to live in an open environment with a broader outlook and become modern." Another said that change is necessary if the community is to avoid the fate of the dinosaurs. But he went on to state that change should be slow, and it should be slow in order to avoid disturbing others; giving trouble to others. Here is the vision of peace and solidarity. As values change there should be no upsetting campaign for a cause, no upfront challenge to the traditional ways. Instead, change should be in slow, peaceful increments.

One way that villagers adjust to modernity is to selectively practice their tradition and separate traditional social practices from morality. Villagers compartmentalize different arenas of life, separating them into distinct areas with differing obligations. This compartmentalization is itself a feature of modernity. Traditional practices and even religion are negotiable and may undergo significant changes, but more importantly, these have ceased to be the standard, or at least the primary standard, by which one is assessed as good or bad.

And there are those that grieve the moral decline in the village. They identify the consumerism, political process, and education as culpable in this decline and condemn them. For them the price paid for participation in modernity is too great.

A global web of modern strands exists in which Nepal and Shantigaun Chhetris have become active participants. These strands take the form of satellite TV, educational curriculums, international aid agencies, consumer products, and democratic process.

Participation in this global web has introduced a rival vision of the good life which threatens the traditional communal virtues of helping and cooperation which have traditionally defined the good person.

The Missionary among the Moralities

Four challenges to the mission task surface from a context of competing moralities. First, the Christian missionary must understand the local moral playing field in order to establish cultural credibility. Pursuing this understanding must be part of the task of doing mission. The missionary is to communicate a moral message and encourage moral transformation. A moral message, if it is to be given a hearing, must come through a messenger of moral credibility. To gain that credibility, the missionary must *morally* be all things to all people within the boundaries of a biblical ethic. He or she must, "commend [him or herself] to everyone's conscience before God" (2 Corinthians 4:2). Wayne Dye (1976) and Robert Priest (1994) have contributed to this discussion, and I draw on their thinking here.

The human conscience is a created ability to render moral assessments. The conscience works to accuse or defend a person's action as well as inform a person's assessments of the actions of others. All people of all cultures have this ability. But the conscience is formed. It may be weak or strong (1 Corinthians 8:7-12),[3] rendered insensitive (1 Timothy 4:1-3),[4] and the consciences of different people may come to different assessments (1 Corinthians 10:27-33). [5] The conscience is informed and formed by truth or by falsehood or simply by what one is accustomed to;

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[3] 1 Corinthians 8:7-12 (ESV): [7] However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. [8] Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. [9] But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. [10] For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? [11] And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. [12] Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

[4] 1 Tim 4:1-3 (ESV): [1] Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, [2] through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, [3] who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

[5] 1 Corinthians 10:27-30 (ESV): [27] If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. [28] But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience—[29] I do not mean your conscience, but his. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience? [30] If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks?

culture plays a significant role in shaping one's conscience. Priest explains,

> Humans enter the world in a curiously unfinished condition. They must be taught what they should and should not do. Guardians of morality (most notably parents) in every culture expend great energy in teaching and instilling correct moral sentiments and values in their children. Such norms, sentiments, and judgments become internalized in conscience—which in turn serves to constrain behavior. . . . Conscience is shaped by meaning, norms, ideals, and values which are themselves culturally variable. (1994, 295)

If conscience is the clay, then culture, society and family are the hands that form it.

Shantigaun Chhetris are traditionally a communalistic people. The health and stability of the whole have a higher priority than the moral condition of the members of the village considered individually. A moral man is one who contributes to the betterment of the whole. The conscience of the Shantigaun Chhetri has been shaped by the vision of peace and solidarity which considers important the acts of helping and cooperating. Traditionally, he experiences the condemnation of his conscience when he turns a blind eye to the needs of the village and he condemns others for doing the same.

A cross-cultural missionary living in Shantigaun must conform to the communalism of the village expressed through the values of helping and cooperating. But the missionary may be from a culture that values individual responsibility and self-reliance. Stewart and Bennett describe American culture and its independence and self-reliance:

> Americans talk fondly of "pulling themselves up by their bootstraps" to become "self-made men" (and women) . . . . Although rugged self-reliance lives on mainly in the movies, Americans abroad are often quick to . . . fault the foreigner who shows no desire to be self-reliant. (1991, 136)

The foreigner and the host culture are playing by different moral values that grow out of differing moral visions. One is playing basketball and the other is playing football and each is crying foul for the play of the other.

Recognizing that the conscience of the missionary and that of the cultural native may differ, Dye states that, "Behavior that I think natural may violate his conscience; things that violate my conscience may not be an issue for him" (1976, 34). Priest then draws the implication, stating that, "In an intercultural situation each interactant will thus tend to condemn the other morally for behavior about which the other has no conscience" (1994, 297). For Shantigaun Chhetris participating in a web of dependent relationships is viewed as a moral ideal. To be self-reliant and shun helping brings condemnation and isolation. Living a quiet life and minding one's own business is not enough to gain moral credibility.

Further, the missionary is tempted to identify his moral sensibilities with those of the scriptures, and not recognize how those sensibilities might find their source not only in the Bible, but also in his or her home culture. Thus, the missionary may not be able to separate what is scriptural from what is cultural. The missionary learned to express biblical injunctions in ways that are culturally appropriate in his or her home culture, but these applications may not be appropriate in another culture. The special problem confronting the missionary is the tendency to condemn native behavior as a violation of *a biblical norm* when the native behavior may not be that at all. Consequently, he may condemn behaviors affirmed as right and moral by the native conscience and these behaviors may be valid cultural expressions of biblical norms.

Shantigaun Chhetris, consistent with their vision of peace and solidarity, give moral priority to behaviors of helping and cooperation. The Bible also exhorts believers to create a genuine caring community and to serve those both within the community of faith and without. Unity among believers is expressed in the Bible as an important priority. However, more individualistic cultures such as those of the West do not give priority to these biblical commands. Therefore, a danger for the missionary who is seeking moral credibility may be to see the helping and cooperative activities of the village as quaint cultural practices, and to fail to see their moral significance as well as their importance. To avoid condemnation as well as to relate and speak with moral credibility, the missionary must adapt to the moral context within which he or she seeks to serve (2 Corinthians 4:1-2; 5:11).

A second challenge to the mission task is an implication of ministering in the context of contested moralities. Thus far we have considered the importance of the missionary "fitting in" with the moral context of his or her host culture. But that moral

ground may be a battlefield on which rival moral visions are at war. Because of social changes, traditional values may have been challenged for good or ill by a new set of practices that have given rise to different values which are incompatible with the old. In just two generations, Nepalis have been drawn into a consumer economy, divided by politics marked by democracy and universally available education, surrounded by a foreign news and entertainment media, and encountered an international presence in the form of tourism. As a result, traditional life is fading. Consequently, a further challenge is that this adaptation is to a changing culture under the pressures of modernity. Adaptation to a new host culture is adaptation to a moving target.

One entailment to these rapid changes is that a variety of symbolic meanings may be ascribed to the foreign missionary by the host culture. Middle aged and older informants saw the changes toward modernity as a decline and not an advance. "If it goes on declining like this it may become a very big problem." Further, some informants claimed that Western influence was to blame for this moral shift. One informant stated, "People learned lots of things from the Western world. And from these things corruption (*bikriti*) entered here." In this context the missionary must ask, "What do I, as an outsider, represent to the different groups in this society?" Before he or she says a word or establishes a lifestyle among Shantigaun Chhetris, the missionary has a symbolic meaning which may help or hinder him or her in the accomplishment of the missionary task (Lee 1990, 337). In Shantigaun the missionary will be assigned different meanings by different groups in the village. To those who value the traditional moral vision of peace and solidarity, the missionary may be seen as an influence toward further moral decline and consequently an enemy. For others in the community, the missionary may represent nontraditional modern values which they have embraced in part or in whole. The missionary may be wealthy compared to those he or she is seeking to serve, and therefore represent a species of prosperity and economic power that some cultural natives desire. The missionary may represent political positions or personal freedoms that stand in contrast to those held by an older generation. The symbolic meaning of the missionary is contested. He or she must recognize that there are preconceived meanings that will be assigned to him or her and proceed with care knowing that an identification with one group in the community may be interpreted as taking "sides," which may alienate the missionary from another group.

A third challenge for the missionary to consider is the changing understanding of the virtues of a good man and the implication of this change upon the communication of the gospel. The traditional Shantigaun Chhetri moral vision of peace and solidarity expressed itself in practices of helping and cooperation. These practices in turn gave rise to a set of associated virtues such as generosity, sacrifice, humility, etc. These virtues grow out of the real material dependence of the members of the community upon one another. Under the influence of modernity, a new set of practices and virtues have been introduced which are contrary to the old practices and virtues associated with dependence.

In contrast to previous generations, young people now attend school to be "successful." Success has been redefined in terms of employment, income, economic power and independence. Competitive school practices that continue into competitive professional life teach that success is an individual affair. The student and employee succeed on their own because they are smart or more accurately, more clever (*chaluk*), than others. The virtues arising out of this new context are individualistic. The good man is personally disciplined in his studies and professional life. He is able to take advantage of relationships to secure good employment. He is competitive. He is single-minded in his pursuit to personal success in school and job. And, significantly, the *telos* of one's life has changed. In a communal society the common good took precedence; in individualistic societies one's personal good is the priority. MacIntyre states, "Cooperative activities presuppose some degree of *shared* understanding of present and future possibilities" (1999, 74, emphasis added). In the individualism of modernity, shared possibilities have been marginalized as irrelevant, and individual possibilities are rendered a practical necessity to attaining one's personal good. The community good is no longer the prioritized good it once was.

A fourth challenge concerns the impact of development ministries upon the local moral order. With the acceleration of mission participation in humanitarian aid and development from the last quarter of the twentieth century, little attention has been given to the impact of development on the local culture. Ayres describes this inattention:

Developmentalism, it is argued, delineates development as a process and an outcome that is evolutionary in its frame of reference that denies historicity, that is universalist, and that is Eurocentric or West-centric. In short, it ignores the pervasive influence of local historical and cultural factors that affect the development process. (Ayres 2000, 447)

The focus of development has been on strategies that will better the physical condition of a population. Education has been an important part of these strategies. Universally available education in Nepal is a recent occurrence and has been largely structured by foreign aid organizations with the goal of helping Nepal develop. The difficulty with this is that the local cultures are not given serious consideration in the curriculum or its execution. Even more foundational to the vision of development, as Ayers points out, is that it is West-centric; what constitutes development remains assumed and uncontested.

Christian mission efforts should explore development without developmentalism. Mission efforts seeking to improve the physical condition of groups should give careful consideration to the impact these efforts may have on local values and morality. A comparable situation was addressed by Harriet Hill who provided an account of the decline of the sexual morality of the Adioukrou in Africa. She identified several contributors to this decline, and one of them was urban based education (Hill 1990, 331). Modern education is individual, and so weakens the value of corporate solidarity. Further, modern education brings forward the goal of enabling independent participation in a consumer economy and with it the incongruity of participation in community cooperative efforts. Have Christian educational efforts uncritically accepted Western secular development models? Developmentalism is an ideology that begs for careful scrutiny from the light of a biblical worldview. This is not a suggestion that the church abandon wholistic ministries. Acting Christianly examines the motive, the act itself, its means, and its end, including considering unintended ends or consequences.

Conclusion

To act morally is to act humanly. But diverse cultures do not follow the same moral script. In a new host culture, the missionary may walk onto a stage in which the actors are using a different moral script that follows a different story line, grounded in a different moral vision, along with consequent values and expected behaviors. His or her mission task is to relate and serve with credibility on this stage. To do so the missionary needs to understand the moral script of his or her host culture along with its values and behaviors. This investigation of the moral world of Shantigaun Chhetris has sought to do just that.

Traditionally, the moral priorities of Shantigaun Chhatris are peace (*shanti*) and cooperation. Peace is at the center of the moral vision of Shantigaun Chhatris and cooperation is a contributor to that peace. Being a moral priority means that peace and cooperation are controlling values for the community. There are other moral values held by the community but these stand at the top of a moral hierarchy. Other moral values must bow to *shanti*. This study also revealed that the traditional moral priorities of Shantigaun Chhetris are threatened by modern life that characterizes the city. Modern life in the city demands independence, personal advancement, democracy, and personal power in a cash-based economy. Shantigaun is a community of contested moralities.

It is in this context of contested moralities that the missionary must make informed decisions about adapting life and service. With what moral script will the missionary seek to identify? What adaptations to life and service should be made? How will he or she communicate a gospel of hope in the midst of moral change and confusion? What are the implications of wholistic ministries for local values and virtues? These are questions that arise when rival moralities meet.

The demand upon the missionary is to navigate moral waters that hide rocks and reefs that might shipwreck life and ministry in a host culture that is not his own. The apostle Paul navigated such waters. In 1 Corinthians 9:19-27 Paul stated that he became all things to all people in order to win some. For Paul this meant crossing moral boundaries well established in his own culture. To eat what Gentiles ate, and to eat with them, was for the strict Jew morally abhorrent. The moral script of the faithful Jew was self-evident needing no justification. Ritual purity was a controlling moral priority that needed no explanation. Enculturation naturalizes these boundaries. Moral boundaries are "felt" in one's soul. It is the mature laborer that is free to become as one without the law to win those without the law. Paul was careful to state that this did not mean moral license. He was under the law of Christ; he would do nothing to offend his Savior.

The Christian missionary is called upon to exercise just this freedom that comes from the gospel. But as for Paul, it is a freedom exercised with knowledge. Paul knew the moral landscape of the cultural world in which he labored. The missionary is called to also pursue that knowledge with intentionality.

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NEWS & OPINIONS

Missing Out:
What's Going On With Male Friendships?
Review and Discussion of Male Friendships
in the 21ˢᵗ Century—Change and Stasis

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Abstract

Significant literature now exists which strongly suggests men in Western countries are shedding orthodox masculinity tropes in favor of greater male friendship intimacies and bonding. Inclusive Masculinity Theory (IMT) has emerged to explain and give direction to these sociocultural changes, suggesting men are gaining emotional and health benefits from greater inclusion of diverse masculinities, homosocial bonding, *bro*-bud closeness, platonic touch, all without the former fear of being labeled homosexual. However, there is also significant and concurrent literature which suggests men remain lacking in friendships and are lonely; conditions reported to worsen over the time periods studied and despite seeming advances made in male-male homosociability. In fact, this other literature suggests men not only and increasingly lack friendships, but that such lack worsens health outcomes, many self-reporting the effects of emotional and touch isolation from other men.

This discussion article reviews unobtrusive sources: research reports, published articles, online posts and materials, to assess and discuss trends indicated, and unravel their seeming contradictions. Additionally, this discussion article asks if Christian males fare any better—given the faith's emphasis on love (*agape, philia)* and mutuality.

Review of findings allow for trends to be understood in light of *generational change*, under-scoring that both conditions—social changes to male homosociability as well as stasis in male-male

stereotypic relationships—can be true: younger generations embracing novel changes, while middle- and older generations not doing so. Overall, data confirm that *men in all generational cohorts lose friends over time*, especially intimate friendships, and this is concerning. Reviewing available literature on Christian male friendships, findings suggest how cultural norms and beliefs can work to undermine male friendship formation and intimacy between men of this faith as well.

Introduction

As a discipline, anthropology has forever involved itself with men—talking *about* men; men talking *to* men; men *doing* to men; and men *doing* to women. More broadly, there has been historical Anthro-pological interest in exploring masculinity as a category to be examined, men engendered and as engendering subjects (Guttman 1997, 385). Of late, attention has focused on those distinct ways in which masculinity is being defined *in the plural*, underscoring vast changes which, especially in Western and westernized cultures, have come to signify how the concept of manhood has altered (Anderson 2009; Anderson and McCormack 2014, 2016). We now explore *masculinities* as these relate to notions of male identity, sexuality, 'manhood', 'manliness', androgyny, and queerness, all within the context of a multigendered social puzzle.

Recent social science explorations place emphasis on how novel conceptions of masculinity in the West are altering hegemonic masculinity, focusing on how

its troubling has required—if not encouraged—dynamic changes to such traits as the homophobia historically surrounding homosexuality, and its consequent homohysteria (Becker and Weiner 2016; Anderson 2009; Anderson and McCormack 2014). Reported are changes in the meaning of masculinity, what masculine performance entails, all altering male social roles in the process.[1] We recognize intersectionalities that impact such changes, men now stated to turn more inwardly to focus on their own intersectioned identitiy vs. their relationships to women, or even to other men (Anderson and McCormack 2014, 2016; Becker 2009, 2014; Becker and Weiner 2016).

There has also been a shift from documenting non-Western traditional cultures of manhood (that interest is now in decline), to detailing how such male subcultures are influenced by the assimilation of novel concepts of men/masculinities from the West; from causative forces of war, diasporas, immigrations; and via cultural integration.[2] We now challenge any ubiquitous, universal male imagery world-wide, assumed to have been residing in an archetypal, "deep structure" of masculinity, cross-culturally seeded and historically pervasive.[3] We favor documenting the somewhat still ambiguous and fluid nature of masculinity in the now, even situating it apart from particular spatial and temporal contexts—some insisting there is now no unitary, universal "male point of view" or masculinity itself any more (Matthews 2016; Rosin 2010).

We add to these new emphases data coming from sister sciences like neurobiology and psychobiology to ferret out any underlying understandings of—for example—cooperative vs. competitive behavior, nurturance and the role of male hormones; even neuroanatomical patterns which could be influential connections underlying what we now understand to be the biosocial dimensions of being a man (Feldman 2017).

Some of the transformations afoot were predicted by anthropologists exploring men and manhood two-three decades back: Herdt wrote of "the egalitarian mode [that was] likely to be a cultural import of modernization" (1993, xxxii), as he spoke about the changing men in New Guinea; and Keesing of men in Melanesia, who noted "potential regional reactions to Westernization" (1982, 16); underscoring what Brandes also noted in Spain, where "social norms among males under the age of twenty- to twenty-five years seem to be departing abruptly from those held by their parents" (1980, 11). All well and good.

But do current social-scientific studies of men really suggest these are significantly changing—particularly Western men—so much that there are diminishing patterns of male superiority, dominance, homophobia and homohysteria; such, sufficient to make the modern Western male more apt to be homosociable? And again, particular to our interest—*more homosociable with each other*? Moreover, have novel theories of "inclusive masculinity" (**IM**) (Anderson, 2009; Anderson and McCormack 2014, 2016) accurately predicted trends toward greater "horizontal homosociality" (cf. Hammaren and Johanssen 2014, 9), or foretold the truth of these 'significant departures' from orthodox masculinity?

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[1] Ron Becker (2009) suggests the homohysteria and paranoia associated with the fear of being labeled homosexual is being replaced by an emerging 'post-closet logic,' in large part due to the visibility and cultural acceptance of gay identification. Becker (2014) further contends this enables a more secure sexual identity for heterosexual men, generating a "stable boundary" for their heterosexual identity and allowing for alterations in how they engage with other men without the fear of being labeled homosexual. In other words, by some outing and labeling themselves gay, one can presume that anyone who does *not self-identify as gay is securely straight.*

[2] Emphasis on the West, western men here and elsewhere in this article, does not intend to diminish significant work being done in *non*-Western cultures, such as the work of Inhorn (2012), Inhorn and Isidoros (2018) on Arab men; Miranova-Banjac (2019) viewing male friendships from an Eastern/Confucian perspective; Ho et al. (2021) exploring androgyny in Asia; Cao (2018, 2021) on male friendships in contemporary China; and Guttman's (2003) overview of contemporary masculinities in Latin America.

[3] This view, however, has been historically challenged by ethnologists, who rightly contend that the variegation of manhood cross-culturally is plentiful and long-standing. In many traditional, non-Western cultures, males have held instrumental roles in what in the West has considered 'female roles and tasks': that of childrearing, infant care, housekeeping, cooking, etc. As well, it can be the male who 'preens', self-decorates and cosmetologizes; and in whom one finds most interest and time spent on self-presentation. All this, without here mentioning gender crossovers of "third-gender," "two-spirit" peoples, Hijras, all documented ethnohistorically and in the present. See Matthew Guttman, "Trafficking Men" (1997).

I raise questions in this discussion article as a means of examining what, in particular, have all these alleged changes to masculinity factually offered up for Western *male friendships and bonding,* given that there has been a parallel wealth of investigations, articles and position papers written on the current epidemic of "male loneliness"; men lacking male friendships—a "friendship crisis"—and, most significant, men lacking *intimacy* with male friends (Anthony 2022; Cox 2021a, 2021b; *Friendship Report* 2022; Hill 2014, 2015; Holcombe 2022; Greene 2017; Wong 2019, to name a few).

Likewise, there are myriad studies which evidence this lack generating male-male touch deprivation (Greene 2017); a void of physical-emotional trust and support which such relationships can offer men (as these do women), and which when absent are detrimental to emotional and physical health (Greene 2021; Suttie 2023).

The necessary question then becomes: If there have been substantive changes, why then have friendship development and "male bonding" [4] seemingly not benefitted *more men,* enabling deeper friendships, given the presumptive diversification of what it means to be a man today?

This article examines such questions via a review of published unobtrusive sources—research reports, papers, articles—and social media quotes which include descriptive data and thick descriptions. In particular and where possible, results of data-rich reports are compared and analyzed to draw conclusions or clarify seeming contradictions. It is understood that some data in evidence are not generalizable, and consequently this exploration is limited; however, its primary goal is to bring into sharper focus and discussion current sociocultural changes evidenced in the world of male social relations in the West.

Using the same methods, I also explore how these trends interact with men in the Christian faith. A long-standing requisite for the church of Jesus Christ is to be in loving community, Jesus himself calling on his apostles to be as brothers, love as brothers, be *friends.* Apostle Paul calls on the church to "stir up one another to love one another" (Heb 10:24); "to leave the prison of aloneness" (Fromm 1956, 9) and enter into close, meaningful relationships—and for this article's specific focus—Christian male to male. Thus, this exploration also examines the types of love and affections which are referred to by the Greek terms *agape, philia, eros,* in relationship to the special engagement two men may develop and sustain for one another in the Christian faith. Are Christian men faring any better than those reported in the general population—as a result of this doctrinal mandate to *love* and *be loved* by one's brother?

The State of Western Men's Affairs

Masculinity is "In Transition"

Much of 20th century research on men focused on sociocultural issues and problems surrounding masculinity. It emphasized male privilege, and the costs of such for both men but especially women; it focused on issues of hegemony, homophobia, male violence, and on the exclusion of homosexual men in male peer groups. It also maintained focus on the subordination—some said oppression—and continued exclusion of women as equals (cf. Lorber 1994; Connell 1995; Kimmel 1994; Plummer 1999.)

In this new century and by the early 2000's, studies were documenting how younger generations (Millennials and Gen Z) [5] were demonstrating distinctives in male norms, attitudes, and behaviors, such as increased inclusion of gay men within heterosexual male peer groups, and in their friendship networks. Changes pointed to relational shifts in adolescent and young adult male *sociability*—these becoming more inclusive of gender differences, sexual orientation

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[4] We should note that Lionel Tiger (1984, 208) coined the term "male bonding" not as a description of male camaraderie, as much as an attempt to show the link between "inherent drives on the part of men to show solidarity for one another" (as opposed to the drive that "bonds" men to women). Tiger conceived then of a developed trait "over millennia," with "biological roots" connected to those necessary alliances for group defense and hunting (135). Today, we find absolutely that there are biohormonal markers to male bonding, and these may well be epigenetic traits with those 'long roots' Tiger envisioned (see Feldman, 2017.)

[5] Throughout this article and with reference to other studies, the standardized chronological start- and end-points for generations follows Pew Research Center's (2019) definitions, which defines Gen Z as those born after 1996; Millennials as 1981–1996; Generation X as 1965–1980; Baby Boomers, 1946–1964; and the Silent Generation, 1928–1945. See also Michael Dimock (2019).

differences, and gender identifications (Anderson 2002, 2005, 2008). Such shifts spoke to a change in social and cultural male dynamics, ones not predicated on a traditional avoidance of gay men, or on sustaining male stoicism, etc. In a word, a movement away from culturally inherited and performed tropes of hegemonic masculinity.

By 2009, Eric Anderson proposed a theoretical model which he titled "Inclusive Masculinity Theory" (IMT), inductively developed through review of published reports and grounded analyses. [6] Mark McCormack (2011, 2012) expanded the theory to account for changes coming from educational and social settings, coinage of novel terms and language use, and the 'breakthrough' of gay jocks of note who 'came out' and won social acceptance. McCormack thus included in the theory change influences from the many social contexts and institutions which were also changing, thus providing a needed backdrop. Since then, Anderson and McCormack have 'teamed up' to generate other studies in support of and for revisions of IM theory. Going forward, the theory has had numerous expansions and clarifications by other researchers and scholars, as well as gaining critics. Its impact has not remained theoretical, however: it has entered the social imaginary as more factual and representational of current changes than as a theory itself (Connor et al. 2021).

IM theory contends changes evident in men's gendered behaviors represent a fundamental shift in the practice of masculinity (Anderson 2009). Moreover, what results is not one *altered* masculinity, but "masculin*ities,*" given the more inclusive tolerance of social differences. While the theory recognizes that *covert* homophobia and heteronormativity still exist, the emphasis is on the effects of the reduction of *overt*

homophobia and homohysteria in changing masculine stereotypes (Anderson and McCormack 2016, 3).

Most data used to both develop and refine IMT have come from the U.S. and the U.K. Subsequent other reports from the U.S. and the U.K. confirm sociocultural changes predicted in IMT occurring in these countries: the decline in negative attitudes toward and acceptance of gay persons; changes in what is coded feminine, masculine; acceptance of homosexuality and bisexuality as legitimate sexual orientations; legal changes to gender and sex regulations; and greater social intolerance for sexual/gender bullying and violence (McCormack and Anderson 2014a, 2014b; Connor et al. 2021).

Overreliance on two countries' data makes the theory not *generalizable* to the degree its tenets become available for cross-cultural comparisons: the theory is grounded on culture-specific—Western culture-specific—data and assumptions. Yet given the focus here on Western males' roles and their relationships with other males, the theory is available as a theoretical background to exploring questions asked earlier: Are stated change outcomes factually occurring in Western men as the theory and current studies seem to suggest? (We later get to alternative reports of few/no changes, 'no friendships' and the deleterious results of such.)

Western Masculinities in Flux

In the U.S., Gen Z (18-26) has emerged as the generation that wants people to speak their truth, however distinct it is (Gil 2022a; *The Generations Defined* 2019). 'Authenticity' seems to be the glue here. Advocating for what one believes, and in concert, what others believe—side by side and *authentically*—is part of the emergent cultural discourse (*Authenticity*

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[6] This article has little room to expound on IMT. The 'heart' of IMT lies in its efforts to first bring clarity to what sustains hegemonic masculinity, it being *homohysteria*—defined as the fear of being socially perceived as gay. Behind that is the cultural discourse of what constitutes the masculine and what constitutes the feminine, centering on heterosexuality as not only normative, but a requisite for being either a man or a woman. Sexual orientation (i.e., being a heterosexual male) takes center stage in propelling a masculinity that becomes 'hysterical' with regards to being socially perceived as anything else. IMT sees homohysteria as a central variable because it connects social conditions which police men's behaviors—e.g., homophobia—with the broader cultural requisites that restrict men to the archetypal form of masculinity, i.e., culturally exalted, hierarchically stratified and demanding appropriate distances (emotional, and certainly physical) man to man. IMT contends that the driver of changes in men are the improving attitudes toward homosexuality in the broader society, lessening homohysteria, enabling structural changes in the law, and social condemnation/rejection of overt forms of homophobia. Broader change agents via social institutions, economics, gender ideology itself, are not dismissed by IMT; rather, these form the backdrop upon which younger men both experience generational attitude shifts as well as participate in the larger cultural catalyzation of the changes via their male relationships. (For a full explanation of IMT, see Anderson 2009; and Anderson and McCormack 2016).

and Gen Z 2021). Thus, reports on Gen Z show a wave of friendship-seeking (highest since 2019), the kind the show *Friends* popularized, and the kind this generation lacked during their growing up years of too-many-activities, few friends, followed by the isolationism of the COVID pandemic. Virtual friends were one thing; but friends like in *Friends* showed how *the real deal* actually worked: And they fell in love (Gillette 2019).

One study which allows for intergenerational and sex/gender comparisons, showed Gen Z in Western countries swinging the pendulum toward seeking live friends vs. the thousands of 'friends' made online. Males are reported to be ". . . looking for more closeness and intimacy within smaller groups. [Here,] 'love' plays a stronger role in platonic relationships than we ever knew before" (*The Friendship Report* 2021, 5).

Another study using data from the U.K. reiterates, "men are becoming more aware of, and comfortable with their need for social connection and intimacy within their male friendships, not just rapport during activities, or having similarities. Men want *emotional* connections, platonic love" (Greif 2010, 146).[7] This shift includes talking about their feelings and sharing their problems, and not thinking this is *weird.* (Some Millennial and to a larger degree Gen X males are reported to have kept alive the idea that intimate talk is a strange thing for men to do: "*That's what women do, not men.*" (Chandler 2006, 2).

The shifts also include greater physical closeness between male friends—a kind of one-on-one *nonsexual* social intimacy where platonic friends are capable of self-same impromptu hugs, forms of hold, touch; wherein and during which emotional disclosures and caring for the other are possible.[8] One writes,

> The other night I watched a movie with my best friend—we lay on the floor among tossed pillows. His young kids took the sofa beyond. We ate popcorn from the same bowl and had an eventual

popcorn throw-swallow duel. I gave a hug to my bro, the winner; told him I loved him. Later I observed that our fathers would've *never* had their buddy over to loll about the carpet with them, share hugs, feelings, laughter, all while watching a movie together. (Beaulieu 2017, 1)

This "homosocial tactility" (Anderson and McCormick 2014) among married friends is catching on; but is mostly reported among collegiates in the UK, where young, athletic men in bonding relationships with their "best buds" take opportunity for cuddling and "spooning" in dorm spaces as well as in frat houses, and in social spaces like pubs (Anderson and McCormack 2014, 220-1; Ohm and Wechselblatt 2021, 1). The report does not signal private spaces as a factor mediating these overt expressions of homosociability, nor does it imply any leanings toward homosexuality. In these younger crowds, such are very much public displays of contemporary same-self affection.

Compared to counterparts in the U.K., "American young men demonstrate decreased levels of emotional and physical intimacy, and express greater apprehension related to social and cultural influences in how they interact with their peers. [American] men are [also] desiring emotional investment and intimacy with their same-sex peers, but call into question the potential social ramifications . . ." (Ohm and Wech-selblatt 2021, 1; *vide* McCormack and Anderson 2014b). Young American males, despite also living in the midst of social change and hybridizing masculinities, appear more troubled by the necessary social negotiations challenging normative construc-tions of masculinity (Becker and Weiner 2016, 332). Nevertheless, and for younger generations overall, experiencing deeper male bonds is now a possible

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[7] As a matter of course, women have enjoyed and sustained intimate female friendships, platonic love, without question. Important to note is female socialization into friendship alliances, which begins early with girl-girl play, "telling secrets" to each other, and conversation as a means of bonding and building friendships—all founded on ideals of self-sameness. See Deborah Tannen (2017). In all this, a man's socialization differs remarkably.

[8] In contextualizing this 'novel' socio-emotional and physical connection, it does well to remember that by the turn of the 19th century, men had been enjoying this kind of platonic intimacy for a long time—well documented since the 1800's via photography and the myriad, emotive writings of men to their intimate male friends. We lost all that in the 20th century, for reasons explained in Gil (2022b).

pursuit, at the least without feeling much social stigma from their peers when doing so.[9]

Resulting Bromances

In "Privileging the Bromance," Robinson et al. (2017) reaffirm younger men having "increasingly intimate, emotive, and trusting *bromances*" (1).[10] These bromances highlight novel levels of male-male bonding. Beaulieu (2017) underscores the majority of men in bromances he interviewed (mean age range 21-34) placed a higher emotional value on their close male friendships—their "bud," "true friend," their "*bro-bud*"—than they did their romantic relationships with a woman; and did so in every measure of intimacy *short of sex* (Beaulieu 2017, 1).[11] These bromances are stated to be less contentious than their relationship(s) with women. Since the sexual is not involved, men stated there was "no worry about saying the wrong thing and starting a fight." "Besides," these said, "men do not keep grudges like women." (I note how a good amount of sexism creeps into these differentiations.) "Men can share their vibe" they said, "without having to explain it" (2).

These reports suggest younger men, even some Millennial and GenXers, are finding in these male-male relationships a deep, abiding sense of trust, love, vulnerability, all allowing for sharing of close personal matters that would not have been shared previously with another man. In these respects, and while more data are certainly needed, results reported signal a departure in some cohorts from the once well-entrenched and homophobic male friend culture.

Health Benefits of Having Male Friends and a 'Bro-Bud'

There are numerous studies on the importance of having close friends for emotional and physical health (Sanders 2016; Reiner 2019; Greene 2017; Cox 2021b). These suggest that not unlike romantic male-*female* love interests, intimate platonic male friendships also yield great emotional stability, increased sociability, increased resilience to stress; all influencing longer, healthier lives (Chalos 2018; *Friendship Report* 2022). Findings underscore having male friends and interacting with them regularly increase men's longevity by double percentage points; reduces risk of heart attacks and coronary disease; and helps men with catastrophic loss (such as that of a spouse) to better cope and rebound from its aftermath (*vide* Chalos 2018). Other studies emphasize the mental health benefits of having "coping buddies" and male friends who can willingly offer emotional support (*vide* Suttie 2023; *Friendship Report* 2022; McKenzie et al. 2018).

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[9] "On the morning following a night out clubbing, the friends will congregate at one house, where they watch TV, play video games. These activities would include frequent cuddling, which is described as 'feeling good,' adding, 'If your mate has a headache you can like massage his head, or you just lie there together holding each other and laughing about how awful you feel.'" Scott Christian (2014, 1).

[10] To be clear, the solidated definition of a *bromance* is a particular type of homosocial bonding which occurs between two friends, which increases intimacy with the perceived self-same other. It exceeds usual male friendships by offering an elevated relational-emotional experience, relational stability, thus enhanced emotional disclosure possibilities, social fulfillment, and self-other confidence. Bromances also seem to dissolve many of the taboos of intimacy which have presumed any physical or emotional intimacy between male friends signals homosexuality. Among the younger generations, a bromance is now a rather accepted staple. Bromances therefore go beyond the "side-by-side" relationships men have had with friends and resemble more the "face-to-face" intimate female friendships women have historically enjoyed. See Ritch Savin-Williams (2019).

[11] The notion of men having bromantic relationships as a 21ˢᵗ century "novelty" ignores the history of men in the 18ᵗʰ and 19ᵗʰ centuries, where platonic love included male intimacy which today would have not only raised eyebrows, but definite suspicions of homosexuality. Some significant historical figures are recorded as having long, lasting, intimate relations with their male friends, living together and even sharing the same bed. As notable example, Abraham Lincoln and Joshua Speed became friends, then close friends—emotional friends who lived together and shared one bed for six years. Speed eventually married, and Lincoln suffered a nervous breakdown which many attribute to the "loss" of his companion. This male-male bonding was not unusual in the earlier part of the nineteenth century, where unmarried men were *expected* to engage in close, intimate friendship with another man, *without* being sexual partners. This was a time when male friendships mirrored friendships between women; but of course, determinedly different in context but not in substance. Emotional and physical closeness, mutuality, pining for each other in letters that today seem 'romantic' was not unusual in male friendship exchanges. See Charles Strozier (with Wayne Soini), 2016.

Biohormonal Underbelly of Male Bonding

What has also come to the foreground recently is how these dyadic, platonic experiences engage biohormonal elements to further the ability of men to bond with each other. Without these affective bonding experiences, men do not receive the full emotional-health benefits the literature mentions. Therefore, and because I am a medical anthropologist, I briefly review these novel understandings of how endocrine profiles in men affect and are affected by male-male social interactions; how such can aid or hinder their getting to the place of bonding relationships with other men.

Investigations into the neuroendocrine correlates of male friendship formation, while largely unexplored in the past, are now revealing the role of male hormones in male friendship formation.

There are interesting revelations to ponder in what recent studies reveal: how low levels of self-disclosure conversations—as those between recently-acquainted males *who do not perceive themselves as competitors*—keep both cortisol and testosterone (T) levels *low* in the socializing pair (Ketay, Welker, and Slatcher 2017, 88). Such engagements and lower hormonal levels can increase the feeling of "closeness" between acquaintances and may thus help facilitate initial male-male social interactions, eventual bonding. It is also suggested that these forming social bonds may, in turn, be agents in *maintaining* hormone levels at "socializing" ranges (Gettler et al. 2020). The reverse was found to also be true: men in high T levels engaging in dialogue with a recent male acquaintance felt *less close* to the other male and desired *less social interaction* with them (Ketay, Welker, and Slatcher, 90).

Intuitively, it makes sense that the most important hormones implicated in male aggression and competition—testosterone and cortisol—can also play a part in men's sociality when lowered: When these hormones are organically low *while* in lexical exchanges of *low risk,* such levels encourage further mutual engagement: lower levels of T and cortisol also allowing men to *want* to be closer to their socializing other.[12] In simpler 'personalized' language as example, "*This conversation reduces my tension and helps me to dialogue without the need to act or feel competitive* [the "one-up, one down" relational tropes men instinctively feel when around little-known other males]. *In turn, I am prone to liking more 'this guy,' and letting myself get closer to 'this guy.'*" Low cortisol is known to reduce stress, blood pressure, and even blood sugar levels (*Cortisol: You and Your Hormones* 2023, 2).

Neuroendocrine contributions here would be incomplete without mentioning the role of oxytocin (OT), that neuropeptide hormone produced in the hypothalamus and known to play key roles in our affects and sociability. A plethora of studies document the role of OT in social situations, friendship formation, pair bonding, intimacy; even the regulation of anxiety, among other effects (all summarized in Jones et al. 2017). Regarding men who are open to forming a homosocial relationship with another, OT's significant anti-stress effects, which are central to bonding, "can induce a feeling of safety and support," allowing approach behaviors required for eventual male-male sociality and bonding (Jones et al., 195–96).

Reports of Gen Z mentioned earlier, which reveal novel forms of dialogical exchanges among men, could corroborate neuroendocrine findings that social dialogues of this sort serve as a triggers for "biobehavioral synchrony" in the socializing pair. These are sex-specific, hormone-specific mechanisms which further social attachments, and at the same time yield health benefits (Djalovsky et al. 2021, 12421).

Such studies are not suggestive that men who are homosociable are so solely because of their neuroendocrinology. They do suggest the importance of how hormonal elements are altered and influence our human dispositions *as these are processed through our socio-lexical exchanges*; our cognitions, emotions, and enculturation. We now have a clearer window into

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[12] Testosterone (T) often serves as a physiological mediator of behavioral trade-offs. In particular, a male's T is often higher during periods in which these compete with other males (e.g., 'mating' opportunities, sports, even when perceiving the other male is superior in some way). In contrast, during periods when males partner with females to raise young, for instance, their T often declines, which helps divert limited time and energetic resources toward cooperative parenting efforts and away from competition. (A great example comes from Gettler et al., 2020, 15422.) Consequently, T has the potential to shape variation between males in health, survival, and reproductive fitness. In this general framework, higher T has also been linked to competitive, dominant behaviors in men related to pursuit of social status. Meanwhile, there is also evidence that men with lower T may engage in greater prosocial, generous, and empathetic behavior overall. What is becoming clearer is that male perception of another male as non-threatening enables lower levels of T and cortisol, which then allow the sociability quotient to rise. See S. M. van Anders, 2013; and Ketay et al., 2017.

understanding these biobehavioral elements, as well as how these can be catalyzed to encourage, support, greater homosociability among men.

To be clear: hormones do not in and of themselves determine behavioral outcomes in humans. Our knowledge of hormonal elements and their actions can, however, clarify how a generation of more open-minded males—men who have engaged greater openness about what it is to be a man and how these communicate—can be aided *by their hormones* in their quest for 'biobehavioral synchrony' with a liked other (*vide* Feldman 2017).

Likewise, such studies can help explain why older generations of males, who admittedly *do not* have many close friends and report to have made no significant gains in male friendships within the timeframes studied, can remain socially disconnected, not experiencing sociality with other males. Older males have typically retained stereotypic masculinity norms in place, relying on time-worn modes of lexical exchanges that can keep them 'on their guard' with new acquaintances (thus producing higher levels of T and cortisol), making feelings of attraction more difficult to detangle from any suspect move to greater intimacy.

Contradictions? Multiple Reports Also Signal a 'Crisis in Men's Friendships'

In the recent *State of American Friendships Survey* conducted by the American Enterprise Institute (2021, n=2,019), primary author Cox (2021b) reiterates young adults (Gen Z, 18–26) as those males most likely to have developed new friendships within the year surveyed, and most likely to have engaged a "bud"(3). The *Survey* also confirms older males not gaining new friendships, with nearly one-third of such seniors (over 60) stating it has been at least five years since they developed new male friends (4).

Overall, the *Survey* emphasizes close friendships among men have considerably *declined* since 1990, most men in 2021 generally having *three or fewer friends*. A majority report "few or *no close* [male] friendships," and are not satisfied about the size of their friendship group (4). This *Survey* finds men are also far less likely than women to have received emotional support from a male friend, despite these sharing their feelings with them (5). In this respect, this

large and randomized study finds there are *no generational differences* when men do share feelings with a male friend, meaning younger men are not more likely than older men to have shared feelings (5). Finally, and with no surprise, when men and women are compared, twice as many women regularly tell their friends they love them vs. males doing so (5).

Comparing these survey findings to findings from singular reports of sampled populations, as noted above, the conclusions are strikingly different. Formal comparisons are difficult, however, since definitions of friendship, intimacy, etc. are not standardized among surveys and reports, and thus become problematic to equate. Sampled sizes also range from non-generalizable small cohorts to large and randomized samples in singular reports.

Stepping back, even when the larger research reports substantiate fundamental changes to manhood, some appearing significant and even transformative, those data reviewed do not confirm a majority of Western men are neo-configuring their masculinity in some way, or to a degree sufficient to validate **IM** theory collectively.

Most novel changes to masculinity, its performance and its value propositions are evidenced in age-specific, *younger* cohorts of men. These have managed to question orthodox masculinity for the many reasons stated in the studies and reconfigured themselves differently: performatively, emotionally, affectively. The tenor of culture change is underscored here, reminding us of its unevenness across the fabric of society and population groups. Gen Z may thus well fit the typology of *Innovators*, if not *Early Adopters* coined by Rogers (1962), and later elaborated by Rogers & Shoemaker (1971).

A Loneliness-Friendship 'Crisis'?

Notwithstanding generational changes, one finds many reports which suggest men are *still lonely*—some suggesting a "friendship crisis"—men remaining socially isolated and lacking meaningful male connections. *Cigna,* a large and well-known health insurer, continues to report via a series of large, yearly surveys (2018–2022) that nearly half of all American men remain—by their own self-assessments—lonely or isolated.[13] Moreover, and paradoxical to what has been

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[13] Cigna Corporation. See variously: *Cigna Loneliness Index: Ipsos Survey 2018.* This survey's data are based on interviews with 19,000 U.S. adults. Also, Cigna Corporation, *Cigna Morning Consult Survey 2021*, which surveyed 2,469 U.S. adults on loneliness; and Cigna Corporation, *2020 Cigna Loneliness Index Ipsos Survey,* based on 10,400 surveyed U.S. adults. All these, plus

reported elsewhere and covered above, these *Cigna* reports underscore the "loneliness epidemic" (their term) *impacts all age cohorts* and runs across known fault lines of mental health, affecting most those males with intersections of race, underrepresentation, lower incomes, and physical-emotional health issues (Cigna 2022).

Of most interest here is the finding that *young adults* (overall) *are twice as likely to be lonely as seniors.* These are also twice as likely to experience feeling "left out." The 2022 report is specific: Nearly 8 in 10 Gen Zers (79%) and 7 in 10 Millennials (71%) report being lonely, vs half of Boomers (50%). Men, overall, remain "the loneliest" compared to women (4).

Mentioned earlier, the *State of American Friendships Survey* may offer a more nuanced, if not complex picture of male friendships or their lack. In that survey, reported data substantiate men's state of loneliness and male friendship loss. However, the *Survey* also documents roughly half of the men interviewed *also made new friends* over the same period reported. This report includes disaggregated data. Controlling for age, both situations can, and in this instance probably are, true: disaggregated data showing (again) younger men making new friends, while older ones (again) not doing so. Men who don't make friends, however, do remain lonely and feel isolated regardless of their age (Cox 2021a, 2021b).

Structural factors may most certainly be at work and could explain some of the perceived discrepancies between age cohorts. Lead author Cox reports,

> . . . we found that higher rates of loneliness among Millennials was due primarily to lower religious involvement, lower marriage rates, and greater geographic mobility. Once accounting for these factors, Millennials were not any lonelier than Baby Boomers. If men are marrying later than women on average, are moving around more, and are less connected to religious or other communities, it may further exacerbate the friendship gap (2021a, Abstract).

Cox et al. (2019) also suggest that Gen Z, whose work ethic differs significantly from Millennials, Gen Xers, and definitely from Boomers, are more prone to changing jobs for sundry reasons, and thus more likely to lose out on making friends at work. It is precisely at the workplace that most Americans find and form friendships—these sometimes becoming close friendships (Carmichael 2023; Cigna, 2022). Switching jobs more often, working remotely, working fewer or even longer hours; or in service jobs which do not allow much socializing on the job, all tend to affect the nature of work friendships. Such conditions, in turn, affect the ability of individuals—especially young men who are regularly more gregarious than older men—to form friendships (Cox 2021a, 3).

A Quick Recap

To sum up thus far, it is evident that male ideology and consequent friendships are in flux in the U.S., the U.K., and reported other Western countries. These changes relate well to theories of masculinity such as IM, which underscore a breakdown of hegemonic masculinity and its corresponding homophobia, lessening homohysteria and enabling avenues for a more open sociality among men and in male friendships. However, IM cannot be wholly corroborated, nor are all men experiencing social role and/or identity changes. Data reports emphasize *particular generation cohorts* evidencing the most changes in views and performance of masculinity, this occurring mainly among Gen Z (18–26) males. Reports also emphasize the greater lexicality, emotional openness, bonding, physical (non-sexual) touch and intimacy in this cohort, resulting in the now colloquially-labeled *bromance,* or "bro-bud" system of male friendships.

One can detangle those variables which make *both* conditions reported—social change and stasis—factual: there is overwhelming data to corroborate that the artifice of the Male Code *is* breaking down in the 21st century—but not wholly so. Among the innovators and early adopters of novelty are Gen Z males, no doubt. When studies allow for control of variables such as *age, workplace factors, marital status,* etc., we find that change takes hold most prominently in the younger, unattached (i.e., without a mate, unmarried) males. Older males—even half a generation removed—do not evidence sharp changes in ideology or behaviors, irrespective of attachments. Such stasis maintains homosocial strictures imposed by orthodox masculinity on making and keeping friends.

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newer data, are reported and referenced in Cigna, News and Insights (2022). *The Loneliness Epidemic Persists: A Post-Pandemic Look at the State of Loneliness in the U.S.*

Accounting for generational distinctives here are life event changes, work, marriage and family involvements, all factors reported to influence men *letting go of friendships*—of the type these enjoyed at earlier ages and with more abandon, thus dwindling the cohort of personal friends and lessening the time men spend with each other. Despite such factors, Gen Z appears more volitional and directed in seeking out and making friends than earlier generations. It remains to be seen, however, if Gen Z remains a primary catalyst for change, or if its novel efforts at male intimacy get subsumed by staid ways of being and doing over time–with work, marriages, and family.

Reported accounts in both directions, change and stasis, friendship seeking and friendship loss, are true despite the seeming discordances: that some men are changing, others are not, and that both have lost friendships regardless of the age cohort in question, are all factually correct. There are significant shifts in the way masculinity is identified and played out; but while these are definitive generational distinctions, Western men overall have still not achieved a level of homosociability that would lessen the inured homosocial cautions traditionally in place which affect how men construct their lives together. This continued hesitancy is most evident among American young men, who want that *bro*-intimacy, but still feel suspect about public demonstrations of *bud*-closeness. Overall, Western men remain with a loss of male friendships, and thus "lonely" for additional male companionship.

What About Christian Men?

Do these exhibit any changes to hegemonic masculinity tropes? Are these "any better off" because of their faith, the doctrine of loving your brother as yourself? What, if anything, does the literature report on Christian male friendships? Are these missing out also, or cashing in on a Christian version of *bro culture*?

Long Shadows, P(f)ew Relations, and Stained Glass Ceilings

There are recent and plentiful writings on male Christian friendships in the West, from Wesley Hill's *Spiritual Friendship* (2015) to Jon Bloom's *Man Among Men* (2021), all of which repeat the dire state of male friendships *in the church as well*—and regardless of age.[14] Hill asks in a *Christianity Today* article, "Why Can't Men be Friends?" (2014). Other writers also underscore a continued difficulty by Christian men in making friends: the "loneliness epidemic", male fears of intimacy, their seeming inability to share emotions, being seen by other guys as weak if they do; all the traditional pivots of orthodox masculinity; and the list goes on (Nicoletti, 2010, 2019). Men get the blame and blame themselves for not being capable of male friendship—and here, their Christian culture *is* implicated.

Culbertson's 1997 analysis of Christian men's friendships may seem chronologically dated, but on close examination, is completely relevant to today's male predicaments.[15] Reading Culbertson accentuates a sad fact, that "certain influences in Christian theology . . . continue to keep [close] friendship between men a near-impossibility, even with the increasing influence of the men's movement" (150). I review these "influences in Christian theology" because of their long shadow-casting over centuries, and still today.

Long Shadows Cast by Theology

Perhaps one of the longest shadows falls on Jonathan and David and their friendship (1 Samuel 13 to 2 Samuel 1). The persistent question is how can such intimacy of friendship *not* be suspected as homosexual in nature? According to Culbertson (1997 152, 171), patristic writers ". . . struggled with the same issue: how can two adult men develop an intimate relationship that went beyond any taint of suspicion, when protagonist David recalls it as far superior in virtue to the marital relationship between a man and a woman?" (Culbertson, 152; *vide* Boswell 1981).

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[14] A survey through Google Scholar on articles in Christian journals, magazines, church newsletters, and published sources reiterate what we hear in society at large: Men are in dire straits when it comes to friendships. There is an acknowledgement in many writings that the Christian male is not impervious to the friendship void, and that in fact, the community of the church isn't really providing adequate means for men to reconnoiter and garner more intimate friends.

[15] See also John Boswell's (1981) *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality.*

The 'seed of doubt' planted early in church theology and culture about sex continues in the nervousness we Christians have regarding, specifically, *male sexuality:* Any male-male relationship that becomes privatized, as in intimate friendships male-to-male, raises our fear because we have been taught to fear both male behavior and male sexuality "as though either may spin out of control at any moment" (Culbertson 152; *vide* Nicoletti 2019).

Lurking within this fear is the homophobia. Even though the term "homosexual" was not coined until 1869 (Beachy 2010, 807),[16] and "homophobia" did not crystallize as a term till 1960 (McCormack 2013, 35),[17] fear of men moving into 'male genital intimacy' with one another was biblically well stated from Genesis on; written against in the historical church canon; certainly cautioned about repeatedly by the time monasticism was established. The term *prospatheia* (avoiding feelings of partiality to another) was used by St. Basil to caution against high affectation toward another male monastic brother—which could lead to intimacies of a sexual nature if one wasn't careful.[18]

Theological control of male intimacy via ensuing homohysteria set the stage for safeguarding men from homosexuality, and generating a theology and culture of male friendship that of necessity required spiritualization (*vide* Dreyer 2007). Aiding and abetting was the need to theologically sublimate the spiritual nature of man vs his carnal nature. To briefly explain how such necessity impacts male friendship, we must turn to Augustine and his doctrinal contributions to our sinful nature.

One of Augustine's main thesis centers on *originale peccatum:* that the body was 'by nature' sinful because one is born in "original sin" (i.e., all human beings are born *culpably misrelated* to God)—the disquieting result of Adam and Eve's fall from grace (*Confessions*

8:12). For Augustine, it is this consternation with *his own flesh*, the irrepressible sexual impulse and inability to rein in his penis' seeming self-will that consistently leads him to equate this *peccatum* with the corruption inherent in male sexuality (Freeman, 2012; Stanley, 2006). In his *Confessions* Augustine repeatedly, and through a large number of autobiographical chapters bemoans his own "unquiet, *concupiscent* sexuality"—a carnal eroticism he (and presumably all men) found uncontrollable (see also *City of God* 14, 16-19). It plagued him until he took on monastic vows of chastity for the priesthood; vows which he eventually did keep (*Confessions* 10:41).

Such personal struggles set the stage for separating and dissociating male bodies, their "insatiable lasciviousness" (*Confessions* 6, 161) from their spiritual soul. The soul of man can be redeemed in the here and now, even if he continually has to safeguard himself from his flesh. As Augustine draws conclusions which enable male friendships, he argues these must come to symbolize Christ's own supreme friend-model: sinless in body, engaging acts of benevolence and hospitality, responsibility to others, and self-sacrifice. We thus see a culture of friendship centered on living out *brotherly* love through selfless acts toward *many* others, which then fulfills the "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" mandate (Leviticus 19:18) and protects you from *prospatheia*. To Culbertson, "Once male friendship was spiritualized, it was easily universalized" (1997, 165). I discuss more below.

Credit Augustine for moving another shadow into place here, one being cast by distinctions among and separations between *agape, philia,* and *eros,* the three common terms in Greek for love.[19] His definitions and usage lend credence to his ideas that male friendships needed to be protected from putting too much affection or love on another (in this case, another male.)

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[16] K. M. Kertbeny, often cited as Benkert in its Hungarian form, is said to have initially used the term "homosexual" (and also coined "heterosexual" as its opposite) in letters to his friend Karl Heinrich Ulrich. See Robert Beachy, "The German Invention of Homosexuality." *Journal of Modern History*, 2010, 82(4), 807.

[17] George Weinberg, a psychologist, is attributed to first using the term "homophobia" in the 1960's, but the term did not appear in print until 1969. This, although the aversion toward, and fear of, homosexuality was already culturally entrenched in the West.

[18] St. Basil is well known for not only his theological, trinitarian contributions but also for his laborious organization of ascetic communities, laying down a series of "long rules" for male monastic communities to live by. See Claudio Moreschini, "Basil of Cesarea." Chapter 15 in Anna Marmodoro and Sophie Cartwright (eds.) (2018), *A History of Mind and Body in Late Antiquity.*

[19] For elaboration, see footnotes 47 through 49.

Augustine had many male friends, and describes these friendships with endearing language (*Confessions,* 8:4). However, reading Augustine carefully, especially after the death of his closest friend Nebridius plunges him into deep and prolonged despair, is the repeated admonition that to place much love on another self-same can supplant one's love for God, which should be paramount (*Confessions,* 4:4; 4:6-12). In other words, *agape* toward God cannot be diminished by the energy of any *philia* invested toward another; and cannot supersede the *agape* expressed toward God, it being paramount. Thus, for a man to love (*philia)* another man, such love must be free from any taint of pleasure—emotional or platonic—hence, free from any love-driving force (*eros)* and thus, in this 'divine economy,' avoid any element of over-affectation.

In this format, *eros* is segregated from *philia,* and certainly from the purest form of love, *agape.* In rendering the terms in such contexts, Augustine ignores the connections of love forms in Greek ideology of love.[20] To love neighbor, friend, as 'self' is not through increased intimacy of souls, what we've called "same-self mates," "soul-mates," "*bro*-buds" today—these are carnal and perish; but rather through loving acts which do not include *prospatheia.* Culbertson rightly concludes that in this theological framework, *eros*—the substrate force which rouses, which calls us to union and creation—is dehumanized by this division, rendering *philia* devoid of its animus.[21]

Augustinian theology thus casts a long shadow on any men who, via their platonic closeness could be suspected to be "perverse."[22] Further, relegating *agape* to the spiritual and *philia* to social duty, constructs lexical distinctions which keep men under control and conformed.[23] This platonic tying of good moral behavior to action is the result of *choice* and carried out by *will power.* Surrendering your will to Christ, then, makes God's will the centerpiece of choice. Thus, being in intimate friendship doesn't mean self-same emotional closeness; rather, it means giving up your will, energies, life for another (Jesus is the model here). Men continue to become by *doing* and not by *being,* certainly *not by being in relationships of the heart with other men.*[24] Augustinian theology is all

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[20] This separation ignores Greek ideology of love, which saw these expressions related along a continuum and not as separate categories. In Greek thinking, there is the assumption that a feeder *eros* motivates the passions to then embrace the platonic other in *philia,* and ultimately enervate higher forms of devotion and duty in love as *agape.* This is the Platonic refinement of the connections. See Plato (1973), *The Symposium.* Translated by Walter Hamilton. Such thinking gets significantly altered by Augustine. See John Wallace (n/d), *Interpreting Love Narratives,* "Early Greek Philiaophy," 25:4.

[21] *Eros*—to Augustine, is a carnal element (not just an animating force of our nature), which he fought mightily against, thus a debased and dehumanized form of passion due to sinfulness which was the root of all of Augustine's carnality—his "concupiscence." And, while Augustine wrote enough about the benefits of friendships—and he did have cherished friends—his ultimate prescriptions are not at all what we would call intimate in emotionality nor in platonic physicality. Through his writings we see friends and friendships increasingly described by serving one another, not self-involved with one another; and together, always serving God. After the loss of Nebridius, friend of the heart, Augustine's teachings on friendship aim to guard the person from heartbreak, and any codependent 'idolatry.'

[22] This platonic and loving closeness Augustine had with Nebridius, of which he writes emotionally, he himself attempts to redact in his later letters. It seems by close reading of *Confessions* 4:11, where Augustine explains his grief at the death of his friend, that his reference in this text to two Greek characters (friends in the 5th century tragedy *The Libation Bearers of Aecschylus*) alludes to erotic longings between him and Nebridius—given that Orestes and Pylades were Greek lovers. (All the more the need to insure *prospatheia* would not occur in male friendships.) See also Matteusz Strozynsky (2019), "Augustine on Loving Too Much. Friendship and the Fall of the Soul in *Confessions.*"

[23] Let's recall Plato placed an exceptionally high value on the exertion of the *will,* and thus asserts the benefits of discipline are measured by the degree of will power one can marshal. He posits morality as the soul being confronted by choices, with the better men, "men of spirit," making the more difficult choices that require will power to conform the body and mind. *Agape* becomes that level of spiritual willpower love. See John Wallace (as above in footnote 20).

[24] A generous example of this thinking is John Cuddleback's recent (2021) book, *True Friendship: When Virtue Becomes Happiness.* Cuddleback combines Platonic virtue with the wisdom of St. Aelred to generate an Aristotelian guide of virtuous living by, again, *doing* for a friend, and not by *being at one* with a friend.

about selfless service, selfless love *that has no affective attachments.*

Marriage and Shadows

One more long shadow needs discussion, the one cast by marriage. To be objective here, how marriage intersects with friendships is a concern older than Christianity, of course; yet Christian views on marriage and marital oneness do affect how Christian men in particular negotiate their male friendships—before they are married, and most certainly afterwards.

Contemporary articles as well as earlier literature detail the historical process by which Western men "lose friends" as they move from singleness and male groups to marriage and the requisites of familial life (Anthony 2022; Reeves 2023). The powerful attraction of marriage in Christianity, and the bond it creates in the "one flesh" ideal—freely sexually erotic at that—becomes the bond into which men are encouraged to invest most deeply. Rightly so. Over time, the marital bond influences and often directs male friendships, sometimes at the *cost* of male friendships—a cost which most women *do not pay* when they marry (Anthony 2022; Fiori et al. 2018).[25]

The sense of "competition" between a man's male friendships and his marriage, i.e., competition with his (best) friend, his wife, points to male sociality after marriage often being governed by the wife (Gomillion et al. 2014). Such usually means curtailment of the husband's male friendships in exchange for *married couples* with whom the wife gets along. This point, the literature well confirms (Hamlett 2019; Anthony 2022; Fiori et al. 2018; Kalmijn 2003): Purely dyadic/ exclusive male friendships are difficult at best for men to sustain after marriage, and often non-negotiable if these pit time away from spouse and family to cultivate

bro-intimacy and time together (Gomillion et al. 2014). A Gen X Christian psychologist friend confided,

> When I got married, I set out to keep a couple of my intimate male friendships intact. I can tell you that eventually this took us [spouse and self] into many strong discussions of how my time was being used. I've had to carefully but steadily be convincing that these are essential relationships in my life, and without them, I would be less of who I am. But it's taken time and a lot of will power to get here. . .[26]

In the U.S., most men by their later thirties or early forties, married, with children, have virtually given up old friendships and are mostly with acquaintances fostered through work or the marital filter (Cox 2021b). *Bud*-intimacy, or a close personal friend increasingly disappear from the male's social world—and this is also true in the world of the church (James 2021). He is lucky to find a companion at the gym, or running track, or at work and with whom he can enjoy an occasional lunch. Any intimacy usually takes a third seat here.

P(f)ew Relationships and Stained Glass Ceilings.

In many church contexts, it is the *woman* who is invited by programs and venues into friendships and encouraged to do the one-on-one: "meet friends," and "make friends." Men are mostly encouraged into Bible studies (attending or leading them—see below), competitive sports, work-related venues of service or missional in nature (James 2021).

At church, the mid-week men's group is not about building *bud*-intimacy, but about whatever biblical topic takes the hour, and whatever ramblings take up the half hour before or thereafter. If any of these meet-ups happen, *men don't talk intimately,* nor do they

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[25] Women tend to keep intimate friends when they marry. Some of these may go back decades, to childhood, adolescence, college, etc. Others are *made while married.* Women often *keep up* these friendships via social dates, lunches, or other activities which have been enjoyed for years. Such activities are never seen as more than friendship, or sexually suspect, or robbing time from other responsibilities. As a matter of course, it is culturally expected for women to *keep their intimate friends* and *do things with friends*—who are often stated to "relieve them" from household, work, or other requisites which married life brings. Few men complain about women taking time with friends—it is expected that these should be cultivated: *"Isn't that what women do?"* (Chandler 2019, 2).

[26] This psychologist is keen on understanding the necessity for men to have intimate friendships with male friends. He confirms this is a widespread problem—i.e., negotiating the spouse's understanding of such a necessity for men, and overcoming what appear to be suppositions if not stereotypes, that men don't 'have' the kind of friends that women do: intimate, close, and personal. (Personal conversations, April, 2023.)

presume their relationship with other males will go any further than the mutual moments shared in these spaces. Perpetuation of a rather orthodox masculinity in Christian culture continues the superficiality of male friendships through church events (McCormick 2021). Fortunately, some Christian males are noticing and writing about the dearth of male friendships *in Christian circles* (again, see Hill 2015; Bloom 2021; McCormick 2021; James 2021).

The church has historically cultivated *male packs* if these are institutionalized, sometimes ritualized, and bounded in some way. For most males, these are 'pew relationships'—*'Sure, I know Ralph. He's in my men's group. We talk sometimes.'* Think of men's activities fostered by the church that it agreeably supports: the once-a-month men's breakfast, men's yearly retreat; and yes, the men's mid-week 'study group.' All are public and predictable in outcomes. James (2021) believes men's gatherings are thought of *instrumentally:* they are to be valued to the extent that they represent opportunities to do the "real" stuff of studying the Bible, or praying, *or doing.* What matters in men's events is *being productive:* programming events and groups so that men are free to come, download the content or do the work, and leave efficiently (2).

It is predictable also, that such forms of male socializing do not result in deep friendships, or friendships of the sort that can be cultivated in *other spaces* and lead to male-male closeness. By their very own testimony in studies, articles and books, Christian men confirm these church relationships do not yield growing or abidingly deep friendships between participants (Bloom 2021; Hill 2015; James 2021; McCormick 2021). *Why not?*

McCormick (2021) suggests these are not the "third spaces" that can cultivate the sort of "common horizons" that foster *time one-on-one*, or *one-on-one conversations*, and thus opportunities for more than acquaintances to happen (3). Church culture provides little opportunity for men getting to emotional sharing, much less for vulnerable conversations to happen in dyads among these. (If these happen, they do so within the context of a group meeting, which can then turn the session into an impromptu *Al-Anon* type moment.) The programming just doesn't encourage men to *form dyads*—so awkward for men, so familiar to women—when having social gatherings.[27]

To begin transforming this shortcoming, McCormick (2021) rightly suggests we become cognizant of the culturally constructed, gender-specific ways that men bond; and then construct *third spaces* where more than just common interests can be birthed, conversations of the type which can open men up to form dyadic friendships (3). Churches could stop filling a program and allow men to couple-up by giving them time and permission to just mingle among themselves—and in dyads. Then, sharing a horizon (i.e., themes that allow for the type of social conversation-starters over a topic, a familiar life moment, etc.) can pave the way for men to engage sociality and proffer likeability. I add, now that the neurobiology of male friendship formation is better known, fostering such *low-risk environments without competition* (i.e., aside from physical or athletic 'competitive' activities), and which promote appropriate neurohormonal responsiveness to the other, are suggestions worthy of inclusion and practice.[28]

Christian men also want, yet find restrictions on how to seek, a male relationship which is 'close' and which can feel intimate; one with some hoped-for permanence, given our need for lifelong friendship supports. We want that "friend that loves at all times" (Prov 17:17).

Yet a 'stained-glass ceiling' for men is still in place in the church, men not being helped in reaching deep connections with each other—because if these relationships aren't public (enough), structured (enough), it makes others—including some wives—feel nervous; men "spinning out of control at any moment

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[27] At any women's church event one will see women meeting up with friends, taking the time to break away from the group, often occupying a lone table or corner somewhere, and immediately involved in face-to-face life debriefings. It doesn't matter whether the event is a group one, or one of small social "round table" settings of the eight-or-less type. Women will find the time and space to reconnoiter with their friend and, if not seen regularly, make the time 'there and then', and mutually move to engage the personal. See Anthony Bradley, "American Evangelicalism Isn't Patriarchal or Feminized. It's Matrilineal." *Mere Orthodoxy*, August 26, 2020.

[28] Sam Woolfe, in his blog on masculinity and sociality suggests dyadic set-ups at lunches and dinners where men can 'couple up' vs. sitting in packs; two-member car rides to whatever events are taking place (vs. packing the car with 'guys'); and activities where men with similar interests can talk to another like-interested male. See Wolfe (2018), "On Masculinity and Male Bonding."

unless open to external controls" (Culbertson 1997, 171.) Unstated, yet deeply felt, this other "*problem that has no name*"[29] makes the private nature of close male friendships something the Western church finds inherently awkward, paradoxical to masculine Christian culture. [30] And we have much of our background theology affirming distrust of the male, his body, his sexuality—if not, his lack of self-control—to blame for that.

Conclusions

This has been a long piece, not by intention, but by necessity. Multiple factors play into our understanding of male friendships in contemporary Western cultures. Seeming contradictions in data reports—some highlighting essentialist changes in masculinity which are opening up male emotional friendships and thus bonding while others continue the decry the dearth of male friendships—can render confusing images of what is going on. This article has attempted to understand data reports in both directions, and suggests both are more than likely correct, yet only interpretable when one disaggregates their data and sees the facts at hand: Young generations are indeed changing masculinity tropes, allowing for greater variety of gender expressions and friendship bonds to occur. At the same time, middle-gens and older men continue to hold on to traditional elements of masculinity, sufficient to interfere with these gaining a more relaxed familiarity with same-self other males. All generations of Western men lose friends over time for many reasons, and this pattern is not limited to those married and/or involved with family responsibilities.

Regardless of aggregated or disaggregated data evidence, men, overall, are losing more friends than making friends; a concerning pattern. Some loss can be attributed—even in young generations—to shifts in work environments, remote work, communication styles that rely on media vs in-person exchanges, difficulties in the negotiation of male friendships after marriage, economic and occupational variables, and continuance of male friendship stereotypes—i.e., what a male friendship ought to represent and include.

This exploration has also taken time to examine how Christian men in particular are faring amidst the reported positive changes to masculinity, and the reported lack of friendships among all men. This was an important population exploration, given Christianity's doctrinal and cultural emphases on brotherhood, love and camaraderie.

We find Christian men, as variously reported in cited sources, faring no better at cultivating deep male friendships than the general population of Western men reported. The realization underscores the voiced illusion of some Christians—and their Christian congregations—of being intentional agents of intimacy and brotherhood. It perpetuates a syntactical means of keeping faith in our assumptions about how Christian norms and views facilitate friendships, rather than the cultural-doctrinal realities which still hinder men from being intimate with one another.

A deep dive here reveals historically assembled Christian doctrine and dogma also contributing to congregations of faith being tremulous about deep male friend relations. We find rationales about male sexual mistrust, as well as a continued emphasis on stereotypic masculinities; of male friendships; of prototypes of what male gatherings and leadership ought be like. In many ways, the Church resembles and oftentimes supports hegemonic masculinity tropes that further 'aid and abet' maintenance of stereotypic performances for such men of faith.[31] Christian men seeking alternatives experience the stained glass

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[29] The term is borrowed from Betty Friedan's (1963) revolutionary tome, *The Problem That Has No Name* (NY: Penguin-Random House). Here, the unnamed problem is noted as church-going men not being trusted with their emotional investments or time; nor being trustworthy to rely on themselves to monitor how their male-male relationships fit in to their lives when married. Men can only move 'up' so far with another male in the emotional scale before they encounter the 'ceiling limit'—of it seeming inappropriate; (here too) suspect of being homoerotic; or robbing the family, the spouse, of their time and affections.

[30] We have many examples, but to be extreme, read about Mark Driscoll and Mars Hill Church (Seattle), in Jennifer McKinney's (2023) *Making Christianity Manly Again: Mark Driscoll, Mars Hill Church, and American Evangelicalism.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[31] Refer to Joshua Darwin's (2022) article, "TheoBros, Muscular Christianity, and Other Hyper-Masculine Nonsense." Retrieved from https://eagleandchildblog.wordpress.com/. See also Jennifer McKinney's (2023) *Making Christianity Manly Again: Mark Driscoll, Mars Hill Church, and American Evangelicalism.* UK: Oxford University Press.

ceiling" (my label) of not being helped to move beyond casual friendships and into intimate ones with men in the faith. We find there are no *third spaces* enabled by the church for such to easily occur. We've described these issues collectively as "*another* problem that has no name."

Changing the current threshold of male loneliness will take mental agency as well as the power of intent. Human intentionality is required to both complete the task of reimagining masculinities as well as building, or rebuilding, intimate friendships. Men, of course, are hardly hapless victims in all this. Men need to awaken more to both—imagining healthier masculinities and friendships—lose the fear of one-upmanship, of intimacy, homophobia, while learning the joys of such alternatives. Women need to encourage their men to discover intimacy with their male friends, the type which most women have forever enjoyed with *their* female friends. Society at large, while changing, needs to "man down" on men, and allow alternative masculinities to emerge, coexist, and thrive. It will also take a different course of male socialization from infancy forward to achieve all this, one that finally does away with hegemonic models of masculinity. What is published and cited here all agree on this: male mental health and wellbeing will benefit immensely from the changes. So will Western society and culture. So will women, and all future male children who sex-gender-identify as male.

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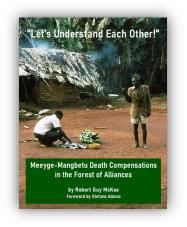
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BOOK REVIEW

"Let's Understand Each Other!"
Meegye-Mangbetu Death Compensations
in the Forest of Alliances
By Robert Guy McKee

Reviewed by Joyce Mlenga

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This book, titled, *Let's Understand Each Other!: Meegye-Mangbetu Death Compensations in the Forest of Alliances,* by Robert Guy McKee, is a modern anthropological study that examines the practice of death compensations among the Meegye-Mangbetu that lasted up to May 2001 when the practice formally ceased. McKee delves into the structural, cultural, and linguistic components of these compensations based on his 1995 dissertation. Although the book has been shortened, it has been updated with current information to reflect the present situation. Using Van Gennep's (1960) elements of a rite of passage as a model, McKee analyzes the process by which intermarried groups negotiated and assessed their alliances through compensations over time.

McKee gives an interesting account of the Mangbetu community of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) who, until recently, would pay compensation for death. They believed that when

someone died, they had passed away "in the hands of" their father's family group. This meant that the father's family group was responsible for compensating the mother's group, regardless of the circumstances of the death. When someone died, the father's side would gather to mourn the deceased in their house. In the mourning process, the culture allowed the uncles from the female side to "attack" the fathers' place in a sort of "war." The father's side would then flee to the forest, a neighbouring village, or any other location where they could seek refuge. They could return after reconciliation, which occurred only after paying death compensation. The war in which the deceased's maternal uncles came to the death place was viewed as a legitimate response to the deceased's death in the hands of the deceased's own paternal descent group kin. It was understood that a valuable possession of the mother's group had been ruined in the father's group's custody and required redress.

McKee's perception and interpretation of this Meegye-Mangbetu practice contradicts the findings of other authors who previously studied the group. While the earlier studies suggested that the death compensation war was violent and aimed at harming people and damaging property, McKee views it as more metaphoric than literal, primarily involving harmless symbolic rituals. According to him, the perceived war was peaceful and aimed at reconciliation, renewed understanding, and alliance, rather than revenge or hostility. Furthermore, McKee suggests that the isolated cases in which violence occurred were exceptions to the rule. The rule was that the war was expected to be more metaphoric than literal.

McKee has successfully analyzed the death compensations, paying attention to the most essential

details of the ritual. The study argues for a Meegye-Mangbetu ethos of intergroup understanding (or alliance) rather than for one of defiant outsiders. Death compensations are intergroup rites of what was, ideally, a positive engagement that played an important role in area intergroup politics. McKee has ably utilized Van Gennep's (1960) concepts of separation, transition, and incorporation to explain what goes on in the ritual. Ideally, the overall process follows the pattern of an intergroup rite of passage, from its "war" (separation) through a cooling off period (transition), to reestablished understanding (incorporation).

This book is unique in the sense that it provides a paradigm shift from previous authors who have done studies of death compensation in the Meegye-Mangbetu area. The book demonstrates a thorough and solid ethnographic study, immersed in local culture, conducted over a long period of time, using a hybrid of methods by a person who was fluent in the Meegye language. The study also confirms the importance of fieldwork and emphasizes its power in research.

McKee has demonstrated his integrity by not only carefully handling his methods and sources but also acknowledging that some aspects of the 1995 study may be outdated. Being the first English-language anthropological monograph of the Meegye-Mangbetu people, the study has provided additional insights into the Meegye-Mangbetu death compensations, particularly in terms of the sociocultural richness of men's and women's dialogues.

McKee has succeeded in presenting his major arguments on the death compensation ritual as reconciliatory and for alliance purposes, and he has provided enough evidence for his arguments. His arguments are consistent, balanced, concise, and substantiated with well-analyzed data. The author has succeeded in fusing the old study carried out in 1995 with new data collected when he returned to the field in 2001 when the ritual was undergoing change.

McKee's study stands out because it focuses on the role and status of women in death compensations. The study sees significant complementarity between women's and men's roles in death compensation. The sociocultural complementarity of women's and men's value and power has shown that men's power to restore intergroup "understanding" ultimately depends on women's power to pave the way for it. Women are recognized as the peacemakers of society, while men are its warriors. Hence, women's involvement played a

crucial role in ending the death compensation war and renewing understanding between the groups involved.

A strong literature review and careful treatment of sources characterize McKee's work. The study compares the existing literature while identifying the gaps to be filled, which include the lack of contemporary sources that use contemporary anthropological methods, the absence of monographs, and insufficient available literature in English. He suggests that the limited available literature may have caused failure to distinguish clearly between the Mangbetu and the neighbouring Azande.

The fact that the book has one prelude and two brief interludes makes the reading more enjoyable and illustrates relevant social structures and cultures. Additionally, the inclusion of photographs provides additional documentation that reinforces the testimonials and stories in the book. The diagrammatic presentations throughout the book add clarity to the content presented.

The book provides an anthropological perspective on its subject from a Christian faith standpoint. Of interest is chapter eight, where McKee delves into a detailed analysis of a decision made by the church to end death compensations. As a missionary-anthropologist, he raises important issues regarding faith and practice that are directly related to the mission of *On Knowing Humanity Journal*, particularly concerning the decision to stop the death compensation ritual without carefully assessing its impact on the Meegye-Mangbetu people.

However, a few shortfalls are worth noting. First, McKee does not adequately discuss Meegye-Mangbetu's understanding of death and its causation. If death is something that one cannot control, readers need to know why compensation was sought when the custodians were not the ones who caused it. Second, while the author has referred to his ethical responsibilities, he should have made a statement regarding the photos of deceased adults and children who are either lying on the mat for viewing or in their mother's arms. Although McKee may have included a statement in his 1995 dissertation, he should have done the same in the preface, where he discusses the use of the photos, given the sensitivity of the pictures.

Despite the shortfalls, the book is written by someone who is well-versed in the subject and provides information that is often missing in most studies of the Meegye-Mangbetu. McKee has successfully provided a contemporary source using modern anthropological methods about the Meegye-Mangbetu in the English

language, making it relevant to both general readers and academicians who appreciate African culture and its socio-cultural traditions. This is a very scholarly piece of work, with non-scholarly touches, that must be read by everyone interested in socio-cultural issues. In my opinion, the book is an excellent primer to the Mangbetu death ritual of death compensations.

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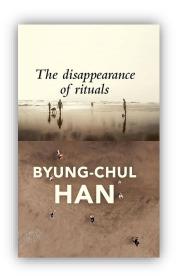Van Gennep, Arnold. 1960. *The Rites of Passage.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

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BOOK REVIEW

The Disappearance of Rituals:
A Topology of the Present
By Byung-Chul Han

Reviewed by Jacob Winn

Medford, MA: Polity Press
2020

In Byung-Chul Han's *The Disappearance of Rituals*, the reader is presented with the stark reality that rituals are disappearing from our modern world. This mass disappearance is not limited merely to rituals. Symbols are also losing their place in the world. This connection between rituals and symbols, along with their tandem decline, is emphasized throughout the book. Even from the outset, the connection is clear. "Rituals are symbolic acts," the first page of the book explains, followed by a reference to the "symbol-poor" nature of today's world on the following page (1-2). Later in the first chapter, the author makes this connection explicit by stating that "de-symbolization and de-ritualization condition one another" (6).

What, then, is the cause for such de-symbolization and de-ritualization? A primary culprit is identified throughout the book: the modern world of production is above all else. When examining why enduring symbols have taken such a backseat in today's world,

Han states that "the contemporary compulsion to produce robs things of their endurance" (3). In other words, our world lacks the enduring elements of more ritual-rich and symbol-rich eras from the past because our world's fixation on production has made such endurance untenable. The blame for the disappearance of rituals in today's world is placed squarely upon the shoulders of production at numerous times throughout the book. This is perhaps most explicit when Han states that "where everything is subordinated to production, ritual disappears" (42). That "where" is clearly shown to be today's world, such as when Han states that "today, to live means merely to produce" (54).

Aligned with the overarching emphasis on production in today's world is something Han refers to as "the cult of authenticity." Han states that, "the narcissistic cult of authenticity makes us blind to the symbolic force of forms, which exert a substantial influence on emotion and thought" (21). It is here that Han points to a potential solution to the disappearance of rituals, when he states that, "we might thus expect *a re-enchantment of the world* to create a healing power that could counteract collective narcissism" (26) [italics in the original]. Later, Han points to the nature of the task at hand by stating that, "in the face of the intensifying compulsion of production and performance, finding a way to make a different, playful use of life is a political task" (45). From these lines, a potential solution to the disappearance of rituals takes shape before the reader: the political task of working toward a re-enchantment of the world. One could even argue that this is a societal task as much as it is a political one. In any case, what stands before us is an all-encompassing, modern-world-opposing approach to life as we know it and how we as humans function in this world.

When thinking about the way in which rituals have disappeared from our modern world, the mind cannot help but be drawn toward a feeling of impermanence and ephemerality. The stalwart structures of yesteryear have dissolved, and we are left without a firm connection to the enduring. It is no wonder that so many people feel lost and directionless in the world today, untethered from the lasting things which have kept humankind moored for generations. Similarly, the loss of symbols is also troubling. Symbols are packed with much meaning and depth, and they cut to the core of our psyches, giving us an unwritten and unspoken language for the metaphysical realities that we intuit with our very souls. The symbol-poor world that Han highlights, the world in which we live today, is one in which that unwritten and unspoken language is encountered less and less, and we are thus deprived of something essential to our being in the process. With rituals disappearing, and the ubiquitousness of symbols disappearing along with them, our production-mad world is cascading down into an abyss where deep meaning is rare, while the shallow and hollow things take center stage. But, as Han alludes to, there is still hope to be found. There is still the potential for positive change.

If we can work to re-enchant the world, bringing rituals back and reviving the power of symbols, we can offer a solution to these woes. When we stand up against the domineering culture of production-above-all-else, we can point to an alternative, clearly and unashamedly stating that another world is possible. It can be our hope, then, that this re-enchanted counterculture can one day become a re-enchanted dominant culture, and that the culture of production will inversely shrink down to its proper proportion. The opportunity to accomplish all this and more is waiting for us, and all we need to do is to take the initiative and begin working toward forging (or re-forging) the re-enchanted world. As we do this, we will see rituals return and symbols provide meaning once more.
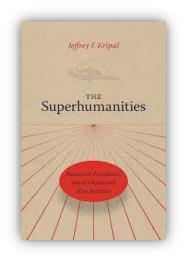
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BOOK REVIEW

The Superhumanities:
Historical Precedents, Moral Objections, New Realities
By Jeffrey J. Kripal

Reviewed by Jill L. Hurley

Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press
2022

My upbringing in third-wave charismatic churches shaped my epistemology and ontology in a way that allowed me to experience things beyond what the material world could explain. Reading *The Superhumanities* by Jeffrey Kripal, I finally understood why my hunger to do research in this arena is important, not only for myself but for the rest of society. The reason is simple: we have been duped. The Enlightenment era saw brilliant scholars bring forth conclusions which were unequivocally and undeniably false, and yet their attempts at undermining the metaphysical, supernatural realm could not be stopped. Jeffrey Kripal takes readers on a journey of discovery that peels back the layers and exposes the true nature of reality, a glorious supernatural reality at that.

Modernity, the epoch following post-medieval history, was the defining worldview for centuries.[1] Then, in roughly 1970, a paradigm shift happened and the post-modern era was born. The world is going through another paradigm shift, into what I've deemed the anti-modern era. No longer are we simply dropping outdated modalities and belief systems, but there is a growing animosity towards the ways that the belief systems of the past have corrupted our lives and set us up to live in a false dichotomy. It is in this context that Jeffrey Kripal offers his book of hope for a path toward "Superhumanmities." To be clear, Kripal is not suggesting that we do away with empiricism, but rather wed it to an "imaginal" or phenomena-centric epistemology. In the case of human beings, he suggests, this means describing them not as a "soul and body," but rather as beings that experience,

> rare but real revelations of consciousness, which appear in these moments not to be restricted to the socialized body-brain but distributed throughout, if not identical with or the source of, the larger bio cosmic environment, which is alive. (119)

The point of this work is to succinctly proclaim that there is mystery in this world that cannot be explained as happenstance. There are too many circumstances that defy the boundaries of materialistic presumptions. In these moments when "the stars align" or however you want to phrase the fantastical, mystical, ecstatic, supernatural experiences that can be had by all humans, of all cultures, of all times—we understand in those moments that we were made for more than this material world that we've been led to believe is the be-

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[1] Philip Irving Mitchell. Definitions and Characteristics of Modernity. Accessed November 2, 2023. https://www.dbu.edu/mitchell/early-modern-resources/modernit.html.

all and end-all of existence. Perhaps the goal is not trading immanence for transcendence and vice versa, but learning to live in tension embracing both simultaneously.

In light of this tension between empiricism and mysticism, it is imperative to critique Kripal's choice of descriptors within this book. Quoting Riesebrodt, Kripal defines religion as a "legitimate form of science fiction" (34). Kripal goes on to say,

> In short, people legitimate and make real these beliefs by acting on these superhuman powers, and practicing them within social institutions that we can now called religions, whose basic convictions and claimed phenomena look remarkably like what we now call in our more secular mode science fiction. (34)

On the surface, I understand Riesebrodt's and Kripal's perspective on the value that this definition brings to the entire discourse. While I don't believe for an instant that Kripal is suggesting that the entities in religious arenas are fictional, as a practitioner of faith, it nevertheless feels deeply offensive. Ironically, using terms like "imaginal" and "science fiction" when speaking of religion causes Kripal to come off as one of the materialists he is working so hard to discredit. Instead, Kripal could have used the literary term, speculative experience, to describe encounters with the fantastical.[2] Both Christianity as a whole, and my personal relationship therein, have an epistemic capacity to understand that there are non-human entities which occupy the "thin places" beyond the veil in the supernatural realm. What we cannot abide, any longer, is the over-simplification and dismissal of supernatural encounters as fiction. While that is not ultimately the way Kripal uses the words "imaginal" and "science fiction," these words are triggering to people who want the academy to treat these subjects with the respect that they deserve.

In conclusion, religion has taught us that we can know God. And with that knowledge, many have foolishly believed that they have conquered the mystery. The goal of religion is not to know, as in to conquer, but to know as in to have a continuously, never-ending curiosity that is at the heart of true intimacy. Knowing someone makes you want to know more. Knowledge begets knowledge. And without knowledge of the mystical people are increasingly becoming more depressed. Elsewhere, I have written,

> Porosity pinpoints precisely the thing that humans desire the most: a transcendental encounter with God. It is the spark of inspiration, a moment of comfort, an out of body experience where people come face to face with the mystery, and so much more. This porosity invades conversations, mundane moments, everyday circumstances and transforms people into evangelists and the theological landscape of peoples lives change in an instant. Porosity is why America is experiencing a psychedelic renaissance and why the American church is dying. People are craving an encounter with the divine. People are starving for transcendental, mystical experiences that reveal their place in the mystery. Porosity is why Tibetan Buddhists spin a prayer wheel, why Hindu's place mangos on the altar of the local shrine, why Muslims travel to Mecca, and why Christians sing "How Great Thou Art" at the top of their lungs as they watch the sunrise in the mountains. Worship is the only tenable response to encountering the mystery.[3] The noetic response is universal.[4]

To quote Roberta Flack's lyrics to the song, *Killing Me Softly,* Kripal is "Strumming my pain with his fingers, singing my life with his words. Killing me softly, with his song. Killing me softly—with his song." From the first to the last page, the overarching message is one that moves me and is why I also am studying religion. While I don't agree with all of Kripal's points, the pursuit of mystery invokes a deep Hallelujah in my soul.

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[2] Much thanks to Meg Mercury, for providing literary language to frame this rebuttal.

[3] A quote from a conversation with Benjamin McCauley, director of Denovo Psychedelic Therapy Clinic in Lubbock, TX on December 28, 2022.

[4] Jill Hurley. "Singing Samo Songs: From Shaman to Pastor: A Book Review." *On Knowing Humanity Journal: Anthropological Ethnography and Analysis Through the Eyes of Christian Faith* Vol. 7, no. 1 (January 2023).

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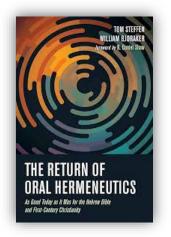
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BOOK REVIEW

The Return of Oral Hermeneutics:
As Good Today as it was for the Hebrew Bible
and First-Century Christianity
By Tom Steffen and William Bjoraker

Reviewed by Daniel Baker

Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers.
2020

In *The Return of Oral Hermeneutics*, Steffen and Bjoraker argue that orality must regain its primacy as a central factor in biblical interpretation. They do not argue for a novel hermeneutic approach, rather they demonstrate throughout the book that oral hermeneutics has been a significant interpretive strategy from ancient times. Further, oral hermeneutics was not only incredibly relevant to the past, it also remains so today and deserves our closest attention.

Steffen and Bjoraker lean heavily on the interpretive practices found both in Judaism and early Christianity in order to develop a definition of oral hermeneutics. Steffen and Bjoraker write,

Textual hermeneutics, a grammatical approach to hermeneutics, always had a place among the Jewish custodians of Scripture, but it was the specialized task of few, the literate scribes and scholars. The majority of the people learned God's word through oral hermeneutics, i.e., interpreting the interactions within and between characters, the recitation of laws and the poetry, and the retelling of the stories in the annual feast cycle of Israel. (20)

This same sort of oral hermeneutics, which depends heavily on the grand narrative of the scriptures, also took place as a primary form of teaching and learning among the disciples of Jesus and in the early Christian community (i.e. Luke 10:25-37; Acts 7).

Steffen and Bjoraker's book is intended to be very practical and focuses on helping a textually dependent readership rediscover the power of story as well as a compelling way to draw a much greater audience into impactful learning from the Bible. The book begins with an orientation chapter, but moves quickly to Part 1 which details a full description of an oral storytelling event (Elisha and the Widow's Oil from 2 Kings 4:1–7), followed by group discussion and the outworking of oral hermeneutics. In Part 2, the authors begin to flesh out the theory behind and basis for oral hermeneutics as well as their argument for the absolute necessity of taking an oral approach seriously in our increasingly oral and digital world. Finally, the authors provide a book end to their argument in Part 3 with an additional description of an oral storytelling event echoing the earlier event from Part 1 which serves to incapsulate and demonstrate in practice their theoretical discussion.

The book is atypical and there are few books that it can easily be compared to. This is due to both the authors' clear understanding of the need for resources on this newly reemerging approach that are concrete and practical rather than abstract and difficult to utilize.

This clear understanding has emerged from the authors' own experiences: fifteen years of cross-cultural ministry in the Philippines for Steffen, and thirty-five years of ministry to the Jewish people for Bjoraker. During these years of ministry, both men realized that heavily text dependent hermeneutical models and teaching strategies did not fit well with the needs of their audiences. A change was necessary in order to ensure that their teaching and communication would be as effective as possible for those they were hoping to reach, and this led to the discovery and utilization of an oral based approach.

One of the characteristics of the book is the frequent use of questions. This reflects the practices of oral hermeneutics—that our aim should not be to know all the answers, but rather to engage with the learning journey that draws us deeper and deeper into discovery. This disposition for frequent and numerous questions also reflects the outcomes the authors are seeking for the book. Steffen and Bjoraker write,

> The authors seek three outcomes: (1) an equal place at the table for oral hermeneutics, (2) user evaluation of the various oral hermeneutic models in use today around the globe, and (3) the beginning of a conversation between professors, pastors, and practitioners as to the rightful role of orality in hermeneutics. (52)

Although the practice of oral hermeneutics is shown to be ancient, it has been all but lost for much of the Western world for centuries. With this in mind, it is important to understand that the primary purpose of the book is to reintroduce this important topic and to raise its priority for discussion among Christians.

This does lead to a small critique of the usability of the text. Even though the authors may not have intended to cover in complete depth every element of oral hermeneutics which is touched on in the book, it sometimes feels like a window is quickly being opened and then shut before you have time to capture clearly what is being said. This is clearly due to the shear multitude of relevant topics and ideas that are demanding to be discussed in the realms of orality and hermeneutics. Still, the discussion might feel disorienting at times for someone who is unfamiliar with the landscape of this field. My hope is that this incredibly timely and relevant book will encourage much more discussion and even specialization in order that the many important topics touched on by Steffen and Bjoraker might be explored more thoroughly.

Even though some of the more theoretical discussion needs further exploration, the book stands on its own as a very helpful and practical resource for learning how to utilize a form of hermeneutics that aligns with the learning and communication needs of our increasingly oral and digital world. Steffen and Bjoraker have made a significant contribution to the fields of orality, anthropology, communications, education, and many others. This book is for everyone and will be a major help to those rediscovering the power of storytelling and orality in our modern day.

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