RELIGION AND THE GOOD OF THE CITY

REPORT 1: THE CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE CITY

MAY 2017

CARDUS

CARDUS
SOCIAL CITIES

ABOUT THE SOCIAL CITIES RESEARCH PROGRAM

What makes a great city and how do we get there?

Our Social Cities program explores this complex question through integrating work in a variety of social infrastructure project areas.

Cities that are enriching for all citizens require that all of the resources within and around them interact as effectively as possible. This includes social and institutional resources that range from the very local, where we spend most of our lives, to the regional, national, and global contexts we are part of.

The complex network of relationships between people, institutions, and culture represents what we at Cardus call social architecture. We explore the existing social architecture and propose ways in which it might change to better serve the common good.

It is important that we understand the networks of institutions that make up our society. Taking stock of the best ideas and practices in research and policy development thinking can lead to thriving cities.

Cities are complex, social, and essential. Within these three assertions there are key issues related to building better cities that we are pursuing through our active 2013 projects.

MILTON FRIESEN
Program Director, Social Cities
Senior Fellow
mfriesen@cardus.ca
905-528-8866 x124
Hamilton, Ontario

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT CARDUS

CARDUS IS A THINK TANK dedicated to the renewal of North American social architecture. Headquartered in Hamilton, Ontario, Cardus has a track record of delivering original research, quality events, and thoughtful publications which explore the complex and complementary relationships between virtues, social structures, education, markets, and a strong society. Cardus is a registered charity.

cardus.ca

REPORT SERIES INTRODUCTION

If we imagined living in a time when it was not fashionable to treat religion as superstitious, socially irrelevant at best and malignant at worst, when ignorance of both the history and practice of faith were not worn as badges of honour, but were able instead to adopt an open and descriptive posture about how social goods are generated, then we would find our reports about reality characterized by accounts of how religion has contributed significantly to many of the common goods we enjoy. We could find ourselves collecting data about those goods, as Robert Woodberry ("The Missionary Roots of Liberal Democracy," *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 2 [2012]: 244–74) did using a two-hundred-year historical lens, and conclude that to the extent that liberal democracy, education, social equality, and improved physical health are good things, organized religion (yes, organized religion, not just an internal, personal, psychological state of communion and private conviction) has been a powerful generator of many of the things we wish to attain for ourselves and others around the world.

But we don't live in that world. Although it may be changing, popular communication and even academic research have tended to think it proper to overlook the contribution of religion to the social and cultural goods of the city even where evidence has suggested that it exists in substance and extent, both historically and at present. We live in a time when reporting on the failures of organized religion can seem to be the only legitimate form of coverage. Like the necessity of little-seen plankton in the oceanic food chain, it may well be that the continuous birth and rebirth of religion constitutes a basic stratum for civil life.

When W. E. Allan drafted his short paper "Life History of Marine Plankton Animals" while working as a scientist at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography (*Ecology* 8, no. 1 [1927]: 60–62), very little was understood about the role that these tiny and very diverse life forms have on all other ocean life. Allen, however, had an inkling based in the science he did know—that something important was at stake, even if not fully understood:

> It is true that the difficulties of field study in the sea are so great that we are unlikely to attain to exhaustive knowledge of any single species; but, in approaching any problem, a single established fact affords a better basis of attack than any number of suppositions, and, where the whole is unattainable, fragments of life history may rightly be used to indicate tentative conclusions of great value. (60)

Today we have become very aware of the role that phytoplankton play in food production, marine environmental change, and atmospheric quality—up to 50 percent of the world's oxygen is generated by phytoplankton (Abigail McQuatters-Gollop et al., "The Continuous Plankton Recorder survey," *Estuarine, Coastal and Shelf Science* 162 [2015]: 88–97. Allan was right, and the survey that began in 1931 as a result of his efforts continues to collect data about phytoplankton.

The story of phytoplankton provides an illustration that is useful (rather than substantive—religion and phytoplankton are not at all the same thing) for our own deliberations. Without formal research or conscious investment in data, religious practice has emerged, grown, changed, and been part of us since as far back as human history can reach. We are only now beginning to understand what that means.

In this series of three papers, three postures will be adopted, each one animated by a series of questions designed to provoke our thinking.

1. **Report 1: Contemporary Cultural Context of Socio-cultural Goods of Religion**

   How are we advancing the understanding of the socio-cultural good of religion—especially Christianity as the dominant faith in North America? How does religion contribute to the well-being of cities? What form do these religious public goods take? What are their shortcomings that would be valuable to address?

2. **Report 2: State of Research and Influence of Socio-cultural Goods of Religion**

   What insights does research provide that could inform people and help shape public relations and policy efforts on behalf of the socio-cultural good of religion? What are the stories that can be told? What do educators, journalists, and cultural influencers need to know? How could this work be undertaken?

3. **Report 3: Future Conditions of the Socio-cultural Goods of Religion**

   Future research, collaboration, and learning need intentional focus and investment. How will this investment become more difficult in the coming years? How will it get easier? What would it look like for religious faith to be seen as a vital contributor to the common good that we depend on? How might the history of religion and the common good inform our future?

I hope these themes and questions will serve to sustain existing research and examination while provoking new frameworks, new approaches, and new investments of resources. As far as we can know, cities will remain the primary context for human civilizations. As such, we can safeguard what we value, limit what is hazardous, and deepen the richness of human experience much more effectively if we know in what our social infrastructures consist. Even if that description is never complete, we may still reach "tentative conclusions of great value" regarding, in this case, the role of organized religion among us.

— Milton J. Friesen
Program Director, Social Cities
Senior Fellow

INTRODUCTION

CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL CONTEXT

How are we advancing the understanding of the socio-cultural good of religion—including Christianity as a dominant faith in North America? How does religion contribute to the well-being of cities? What form do these religious public goods take? What are their shortcomings that would be valuable to address?

January 31 – February 1, 2017
Hilton Chicago O'Hare Airport Hotel

A group of twelve carefully selected contributors met for an evening and a full day for the incubation of ideas and exploration of how religion contributes to the good of the city today. Their thoughts were presented as a pre-meeting submission that was then discussed face-to-face followed by an invitation to offer a two-thousand-word op-ed-style written response based on those interactions.

Our work is intended to advance understanding, explore possible collaborations, and stimulate ongoing, strategic, and thoughtful work around the role of religious communities in cities. The intention is to complement the significant academic work that has been and is being done on these themes in sociology, anthropology, religious studies, historical studies, and myriad other disciplinary spaces.

The justification for this particular injunction is that however much is being done formally by researchers and practically by women and men in religious communities of all kinds in modern society, there remains far more yet to be done in making connections practically, conceptually, and creatively.

The contemporary cultural context is challenging, diverse, and certainly dynamic. Some religious communities are flourishing, some are in decline, and others are emerging as new forms of collective religious expression amid the puzzles and open edges of life in our cities today. In some place religious life is applauded, supported, and actively pursued. In others, it is contested, opposed, vilified, and trivialized. The need for critically engaged thinking and practice has never been greater, either on the part of the cultural gatekeepers (religious or otherwise) or those with direct involvement with or as part of religious communities.

Each contributor to this report has taken on the task of engaging with the opportunities and challenges represented in our time. David Goa challenges us with the radical idea of a kind of friendship and hospitality that has characterized many religious communities but that we have forgotten. Rosalyn Murphy articulates how Christian renewal includes a responsibility to be with others, not just do things for them. Kristine Culp flags the dangers of protecting or looking at what is missing, and asks us to think instead about glory and "aliveness." And Tony Carnes turns a journalistic eye toward religious communities that are active in cities and discovers that the landscape is rich and dynamic, even in the global capital of New York City.

Special thanks goes to Fieldstead and Company for their generous support that made this Symposium possible.

Symposium Photo Credit: Tony Carnes

SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP AND CARING FOR THE SOUL OF THE CITY

Dr. David Goa *has curated the* U Encounter Online Exhibition *and* Anno Domini: Jesus Through the Centuries*, a public exhibit and book in collaboration with Jaroslov Pelikan. He was the founding director of the Chester Ronning Centre for the Study of Religion and Public Life, at the University of Alberta (Augustana Campus), the first such centre at a Canadian public university. Over three decades, he developed the program for the study of culture at the Royal Alberta Museum in Edmonton. His most recent book is* The Christian Responsibility to Muslims *(2015).*

Several years ago one of Canada's foremost ethical thinkers commented to a gathering of largely left-leaning Christian activists that he sometimes thought they had done the job of translating religious language into a public language so well that their children no longer had even a feel for why the church, as local parish, should exist—much less why their parents continued to participate in the life of a congregation. He went on to say that one of his children had abandoned the church altogether and showed no interest even in talking about it. The other child had found a new church: working for the New Democratic Party. The NDP provided him with community, society, ethical work, and a sense of purpose beyond his own interests.

The civil state has taken over most of the social and charitable work once the preserve of churches, and this, to my colleague's mind, was an accomplishment of their activism. Given this accomplishment he also, being a fine liberal, continued to see important places within the public commons for churches and other religious organizations to provide alternative ways of doing such work. Public ways of delivering service are significant, but they need to be complemented by "religious" ways of serving the life of the world. What I think troubled him a bit was how all he had invested in both Christian thinking and action through church institutions and organizations was ending with his generation.

I was startled by the anger many present that evening showed toward the church institutions they had served from the 1960s to the 1990s. During those years they all had paid and pensionable positions in various denominations doing social justice and community development work. All this ended several decades ago for reasons beyond my consideration here, but it left each of them with deep individual bitterness and, as most of them said, some satisfaction that their children no longer cared about the church. I sensed a kind of spiritual anorexia, an appetite to take on each new cause and push it forward into the public square. Their preoccupation with the works of social justice, as good as that was, left little room for understanding or seeing the church as more than an ideological fraternity.

The way the historical understanding of the doctrine of the church, the *ecclesia*, framed its particular ways of holding together the true, the good (including social justice), and the beautiful had disappeared from their consciousness. It may have even disappeared from their capacity as human beings called to communion and community. Over the course of that evening frustration and anger flowed out of a dry, withered place in their spirit.

Saint John Chrysostom (ca. 349–407), archbishop of Constantinople and Doctor of the Church, challenged his own bishops to resist a temptation offered by Emperor Arcadius, a temptation that would be beneficial to the building of church institutions and provide them with more public presence. It is hard, I should think, for bishops to resist an offer to develop institutions. The emperor had promulgated an edict banning all street people from Constantinople, "the city of the world's desire." He then turned and, with his left hand, granted licenses to bishops to open hostels to house street people and give them a permanent address inside the walls of the great city.

This may have been the beginning of the church's engagement with empire (and nations) in providing social services at state expense. In response, the crusty archbishop preached a fiery sermon to his fellow bishops pointing out the implications: "If you do not have a bedroll, a loaf of bread, and a candle sitting in the corner of your home waiting for a stranger to knock at the door seeking shelter and sustenance, and if you do not invite the person who speaks a word to you on the street, as you are returning to your home, in the hope of receiving a little toward what is necessary to live another day, you do not have a Christian home." If the bishops accepted the emperor's offer they would be outsourcing an essential aspect of the Christian home.

The natural unfolding of community, which only exists when the stranger is both present and a welcome part of our life together, would shrink. The poor would be institutionalized. Their bodies would be cared for, but their souls would be starved. The face of the poor and the stranger would be hidden behind the mask of a needy case. And the Christian home would be robbed of moments of annunciation, those moments that arise in our life whenever we welcome the stranger and hear the human story, moments revealed to us in the narrative of Abraham and Sarah when they welcomed the three strangers who lingered by the oaks of Mamre (Genesis 13). The very church herself, in Chrysostom's understanding, would be transformed. Instead of being the *ecclesia*, the gathering of all for whom God's grace is sufficient whether they know it or not, it would become a fraternity of like-minded people, a religious fraternity at best.

Milton Friesen through his work on Social Cities at Cardus has invited us to rethink the way religion and faith communities contribute to the well-being of cities. Certainly churches and other religious bodies bind some people together in richer communities than they would otherwise experience.

Yet we must ask: Do we have room for the stranger? And if not, have our churches become religious fraternities? Tightly knit religious communities increase our capacity to care for others across race, class, ethnicity, and political and ideological allegiance. How intentional are we in exercising that capacity and engaging the gift of difference, including differences we fear? Most churches, it seems to me, still provide the worshipping community with a language of meaning larger than economics and self-interest.

But this light is often hidden under a bushel of fear. This is the case especially when the church community has shrunk almost to the point of including only those who share particular ideological interests, where the majority live lives of comfort in isolation from the stranger, strangers they do not have to meet because the "suburban captivity of the church" has robbed them of the deep differences present but unnoticed on the streets of our cities.

There are many religious public goods that, while often under the radar of public officials, are obvious to anyone who takes the time to look. Charitable work—largely as triage—continues to garner attention, support, and service. How well do these works of mercy move beyond service and shape opportunities for the flourishing of friendships and the enlarging of community? Some health-care institutions including hospitals, long-term care, and hospices remain under the administration of faith-based organizations.

With the new legislation on physician-assisted death, these institutions face new challenges and new opportunities. Have they moved beyond the good and necessary care of the body to a practice of integrating those who suffer into caring communities? In these communities, solidarity in the human struggle turns patient and professional into guest and host, nurturing an enlarged capacity for the faithful to linger close when the guests have entered their particular Gethsemane.

Educational institutions, including K–12 schools (Catholic, Muslim, Jewish and...Pentecostal), in various parts of Canada shape the religious and civil formation of the young in ways larger than what is normally done in public institutions. The perennial question for faith-based education remains: How well do such institutions nurture the spiritual formation of the young so the understanding of their faith is large enough to counter the common fears propagated in our world? How well do they educate the young about the fragile gifts of the civil life, as limited as they may be, in modern liberal democratic society? The same set of questions can, of course, be asked of our faith-based universities.

The response of various religious organizations to the current refugee crisis our world faces has been noteworthy. Christian churches, while caring for the immediate needs of those who come, also are responsible to be open to spiritual friendship with the strangers in our midst so that

a deep and palpable sense of belonging enlarges our new life together. Are we up for this? It is simply too easy to focus on works of mercy in lieu of integrating an ethos of spiritual friendship.

Yet the church's contribution to the life of a city does not depend on global or local crises—it also cultivates a quieter means of public edification. An overlooked part of the social capital of churches in the modern world is their historic contribution to the shaping of cities with an eye to the beautiful. Do faithful communities also have a capacity and a responsibility, on behalf of the whole of the city, to provide the beauty of holiness in the places of worship they build and for the encounters within its precincts? Chrysostom tells us that "art is given to us by God so we may hold the world together."

A renewed sense of this public vocation of churches enhances the life of all, whether they simply pass by on the street and give a moment's attention to the loveliness of a church or enter and hear and see and dwell in the presence of beauty in word, song, music, painting, sculpture, and all the other ways Christians have come to encounter and express that "beauty which will save the world," in the words of Fyodor Dostoevsky. Chrysostom lived in and loved both Antioch and Constantinople, even though he was kidnapped and taken under force of arms from Antioch to serve in the imperial church in Constantinople and then, some years later, taken again at the hand of his own bishops and marched out of Constantinople into an enforced exile that led to his death. We know this because he includes in the liturgy that bears his name a petition that Orthodox faithful pray weekly: "For this city, for every city and land, and for them that dwell therein with faith, let us pray unto the Lord." Along with the prophet Jeremiah (29:7), we are invited to pray for the city and anoint it and all those who make it their home with the oil of gladness.

In both their worship and their theology, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and other religions invite the faithful to engage the sojourner, stranger, enemy, and the neighbour. Our traditions have spiritual disciplines to nurture the capacity of the faithful for spiritual friendship. We need to recover and renew an evangelical (in the ancient sense) vision and mission that sees the local world as the place of our belonging, the locus of our daily pathways where enmity may turn to empathy, loneliness to friendship, and service to relationship. We need to reaffirm our local world as the immediate place where we work and are present to the healing of neighbourhood. Neighbourhood only exists where there is difference, and to choose and bless those who are different is a call of the gospel.

We are called, or so it seems to me, to find ways of working across denominational and religious lines and across the liberal/conservative divide in ways large enough to break down the secular/religious silos that so often frustrate our capacity and desire to nurture healthy and textured communities.

And we need to think seriously about the "suburban captivity of the church." The church has passively gone along with the urban developer's preoccupation with creating bedroom silos, fraternities of self-interest, and economically homogenous places. Churches are responsible to work to transform their suburbs into human-scale cities and recover the pathways and meeting places where we can come to know and share in the joy and sorrow of others with whom we are not like-minded.

Churches and religious communities have a larger set of concerns and an understanding of excellence (virtue) than those that typically inform developers and city planners. Calling these gifts forward and developing the skills necessary to participate in city planning, neighbourhood (re)development, and suburban transformation ought to be part of a new evangelical mission. The good news is that life is richer when we live in modest-scale neighbourhoods that are not characterized by like-minded similarity but are rather full of difference, and thus replete with experiences of surprise and moments of annunciation.

Churches also exist for the life of the world, for the city and their local neighbourhoods.

What would our neighbourhoods look like and be like if local churches developed a tradition of neighbourhood festivals anchored in the idea of conviviality, a day or two a year in which the faithful would invite whomever happens to come along to a time of eating and drinking together, in a space open to hearing the human story and deepening how those stories dance with our own story of sorrow and joy? This would be a new way to express the understanding that lies at the heart of our religious traditions: that churches exist for the life of the world, and that through this understanding the faithful live as friends to all—including "the least of these my brothers and sisters."

RENEWAL IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGE: A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

Rev. Dr. Rosalyn F.T. Murphy *is Vicar of St Thomas' Church, located in an urban priority area (UPA) in central Blackpool, United Kingdom. As a parish priest she is an advocate for government collaborations with faith-based organizations designed to address economic, cultural, and social challenges that affect many communities in England. She is a member of the Archbishops' Council—the governing body of the Church of England.*

I often wonder why we refer to land redevelopment in our inner cities and towns as "urban renewal" (or urban regeneration). Typically, what this phrase really means is that an unwelcome economic, social, and cultural change has transformed a once lucrative and desirable community into one with an unsavoury characterization. While the terms "ghettos" or "slums" may be more apropos, the more contemporary description of "high-density, low-income housing" estates often sounds more palatable.

The reality is that often "urban renewal" begins with the demolition of buildings occupied by small privately owned businesses, retailers or branches of much-needed services such as banks, postal outlets, grocery shops, or custom boutiques. What typically follows is a relocation of the people who have made a community their own—a community that will soon be used to accommodate a new, more profitable rebuilding scheme. In most instances, these are government-led (or sponsored) schemes that includes pre-negotiated contracts for "upscale" retail giants, office buildings leased or owned by blue-chip corporations or international financial enterprises, and large chain restaurants. What generally accompanies this regeneration project is a surrounding residential community offering high-end housing accommodation for lease or ownership. And, like any magician performing sleight of hand—poof! all unwelcome characterizations (and people) vanish. Or do they?

The most puzzling aspect is that our urban-renewal programs rarely centre on renewal as the causal outcome of relationship. This connection between renewal and relationship acknowledges an understanding as to why these segregated "underclass" communities have formed and the people bonded together. They share a common socio-economic or cultural experience. Without giving them a new perspective through relationship, the causal outcome is impeded and nothing changes, regardless of the change in their geography. Perhaps this is why in the Christian tradition, the biblical words for renewal in both the Old and New Testaments—*chadash* in Hebrew, *kainos* in Greek—associate renewal with *relationship*.

In fact, an individual who experiences renewal literally becomes "newly different" based on their relationship or association with another (1 Samuel 11:14; 2 Chronicles 15:8; Psalm 51:12; 104:30; Lamentations 5:21).[1] From the Jewish perspective "the other" is ostensibly God. Likewise, the New Testament (*kainos*) carries a similar understanding whereby renewal describes a "distinctively new" person empowered by the Holy Spirit through their relationship with Jesus Christ, God incarnate.

> Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *they are* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

In both instances, the interpretation is one whereby the person who experiences or undergoes renewal *is* someone who "did *not* exist before."[2] While their physical appearance may remain unchanged, a spiritual transformation has occurred, forming a new creation. From this perspective, renewal (urban or otherwise) is one that transforms the human context and condition through relationship, with the causal outcome that something entirely new comes into existence—be it people, buildings, or landscape. This understanding proposes that renewal doesn't refer to demolition, displacement, or even redevelopment. Rather, renewal is a theological principle that engenders a miraculous "like-new" status to someone (or something).

From a biblical standpoint, the social class of "the poor" represents those who are weak, vulnerable, and oppressed—who are in need of protection and liberation. Unsurprisingly, these characteristics are often associated with God's covenant people, reminiscent of their exodus experience. In fact, Israel's exodus narrative in the Torah, which details their enslavement and oppression, was expected to ensure their compassion for those they encountered in a similar state (Exodus 22:25; Deuteronomy 15:11).

> You shall not withhold the wages[3] of poor and needy laborers, whether other Israelites or aliens who reside in your land in one of your towns. (Deuteronomy 24:14 NRSV)

This suggests that the relational covenant in the Old Testament between the people of Israel and God would be exemplified in their treatment of their neighbours, aliens, the poor, widows, and orphans. The causal outcome of this relationship is one that will benefit others. And the Torah provides constant reminders (Deuteronomy 5:15; 15:15; 16:12; 24:18, 19, 22).

---

1 J. Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbour: Logos Research Systems, 1997).

2 G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 447. Emphasis my own.

3 Here the Hebrew *'ashaq* literally means "to oppress," "mistreat," or "crush." See Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages*, 6943.

> You shall not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice; you shall not take a widow's garment in pledge. (Deuteronomy 24:17)

Despite these repeated teachings to treat fairly the disadvantaged members of society, Scripture calls attention to Israel's frequent failure to do so, which often gave rise to the laments and oracles of the nation's prophets (see Isaiah 10.2; Amos 5:11, 8:4–6; Zechariah 7:10).

Today references to the poor often echo the scriptural context in which dire circumstances or devalued socio-economic status of the poor is often attributed to the unfair practices of the wealthy. These are the few elite who wrongfully use their pursuit of wealth and power to crush and impoverish others (see Job 24:14; 29:12; Psalm 10:9; Isaiah 3:14; cf. Ecclesiastes 5:8),[4] while disingenuously directing portions of their wealth toward good deeds that rarely resolve the problem.

Alternatively, God's depiction as the one who is the refuge and deliverer of the poor (Psalms 12:5; 14:6; 70:5) gives those who are disadvantaged renewed status and self-worth. God acknowledges their continued struggle as ones who reveal humility and righteousness (Psalm 14:5–6), therefore deserving of a "seat of honor" (1 Samuel 2:8). In this context we are able to grasp of glimpse of the theological interpretation of renewal. However, this may not be the message the wealthiest 1 percent of the world's population are interested in hearing today. Thus the response to the plight of those on the margins of society rightly rests with the church.

In many ways, today's shrinking middle class and technology-driven business infrastructures have created severe socio-economic challenges, which have been accompanied by numerous cutbacks in government-delivered social-service programs. Instead, this niche is currently being filled by social enterprises—a conglomeration of religious communities (ecumenical and interfaith), businesses, charitable institutions, and government agencies forming new collaborative relationships designed to meet the needs of the poor. Social-enterprise partnerships strategically target encounters with the poor in order to form new relationships and offer them much-needed social services.

However, it is the impetus of Christians participating in social enterprises and engaging with those struggling to survive in some of the world's poorest communities that offers access to spiritual renewal and transformation. Frequently, research focuses on the intellectual, social, or economic transformation. However, the spiritual and relational aspects of renewal are integral for *all* who are involved in the process—whether they are receiving, offering, or providing support. Old mindsets, stereotypes, and misconceptions are destroyed, as individuals are replenished with a new spiritual clarity—a heartfelt change—that brings fresh revelatory insight into the potential of every human being regardless of their circumstances. Thus, a new creation is formed.[5]

---

4 G. V. Smith, "Poor, Orphan, Widow," in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary,* ed. C. Brand et al. (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1311.

5 Also called "asset-based community development" (ABCD). See "Tackling Poverty in England: An Asset-Based Approach"

In their book, *The Myth of the Undeserving Poor: A Christian Response to Poverty in Britain Today*, Martin Charlesworth and Natalie Williams remind us that "observing what happens in our hearts when we come into contact with poverty is vitally important if we are to reflect the heart of the Father to those in need and to be more like Jesus in both our attitudes and actions."[6] This is not easy when media messages and our neo-liberal political culture criticize the poor, refugee, foreigner, or "other" using a broad brush to reinforce negative stereotypes. Rather, this underpins a culture of discriminatory social classicism, which the church must constantly struggle against to remain faithful to Scripture and its prophetic calling to service and discipleship.

In England, recent statistics reveal an increase in the working poor by more than 20 percent. In fact, working-class poverty has increased. Today more than 13.5 million people in the country exist on *relatively* low incomes, representing an increase of over 300,000 people. As this total excludes the 12.9 million already living on *absolute* low income (AHC),[7] the study offers glaring insight into the plight of the nation's children who experience the most severe impact of these increased poverty levels.

As the national church, the Church of England operates approximately 4,700 schools and academies. Consequently, its sensitivity to the needs of the nation's 7.6 million children living in poverty[8] and concern for their welfare has given renewed clarity to biblical teachings that identify the poor as a protected underclass. Consequently, the church has committed both financial and human resources (through its priests and Christian volunteers) to serve the most needy communities in the country.

Today, God's promise of care for "the poor, the fatherless, and widows" can be a tremendous source of hope during such severe economic challenges. Prayer *for* and relationship *with* the poor can (and *does*) inspire fresh forms of missional activities and services in which the underprivileged and outcast can experience renewal. While the positive relational outcome—coming to faith—may only be secondary, it is a most welcome one. Through relationship, service, and prayer those who don't know Christ can be introduced to a relational God who cares for their human and spiritual well-being. They come to know a God that recognizes them as an asset to their communities with "untapped" gifts, talents, and abilities that are both needed and desired. In this way, renewal offers a holistic approach that affects the body, mind, and spirit of those who are poor.

(Paper for the Church Urban Fund, 2017), http://www2.cuf.org.uk/sites/default/files/PDFs/Research/Asset-based_community_development_CUF_2013.pdf.

6 Martin Charlesworth and Natalie Williams, *The Myth of the Undeserving Poor: A Christian Response to Poverty in Britain Today* (Guildford: Grovesnor House, 2014), 104.

7 Feargal McGuinness, "Poverty in the UK: Statistics" (Commons Briefing Papers SN07096, 2016), www.parliament.uk. See http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN07096.

8 McGuinness, "Poverty in the UK," classifies 3.9 million in relatively low-income families and 3.7 into absolute low-income families.

The success of social enterprises mean that new relationships formed in soup kitchens or food banks have a "knock on effect" by offering referrals and introductions to befriending programs or coffee mornings for parents and toddlers. In turn, these relationships often direct individuals to community-based work clubs, job training, and free financial mentoring programs, such as those offered by Christians Against Poverty (CAP). In many instances these services gently guide the poor toward greater financial stability.

For example, a young parent and toddler begin attending a weekly Christian coffee morning. Once a month, the coffee morning offers a free two-part course in food preparation, first aid, food hygiene, parenting skills, or safeguarding. Generally, within twelve to eighteen months those who regularly attend have not only developed relationships with service providers and one another, but they are now also capable of serving as ready volunteers to support the program. In many instances, they offer word-of-mouth referrals and serve to welcome and encourage newcomers, often drawing on their own personal experiences and testimonies. Then as their children reach school age, relationships are such that parents feel comfortable having them attend Christian after-school feeding programs that include instruction in basic life skills such as table etiquette, verbal skills, shared responsibility, and team building. This level of support does not discriminate against those families living in hostels, shelters, or renting "bed sits."

In some instances, these initiatives weave aspects of Christian teaching into a two-hour children's program using music, arts, and crafts, while celebrating the most popular Christian festivals (Easter, Christmas, Harvest or Thanksgiving). Rather than expensive child-care solutions, these programs allow parents to attend community work clubs where assistance with job applications, résumé and CV writing, computing and interview skills, and even more volunteer experience is available to those seeking first-time employment or returning from long-term redundancy. It is not unusual for charity shops to work in consort with work clubs offering affordable clothing to low-income families for upcoming interviews.

While this rudimentary scenario reveals renewal from the Christian perspective of parents with children, it is an easily adaptable template for breakfast and lunch programs for the elderly, or groups of people dealing with grief, addiction, or loneliness. Elderly day centres and friendship clubs designed for the poor living on limited fixed incomes are increasingly common, meeting in church buildings typically underused or vacant on weekdays. Those senior programs that include quarterly or semi-annual outings to local or regional places of interest are well attended.

Relationships forged over a midday meal once or twice a week create a "safe space" with an atmosphere conducive to building familiarity and trust. And these gatherings supply ready au-

diences that make self-help seminars more practical. Short one-hour sessions on emergency contact services, home safety, funeral and will preparations, healthy living, or hobbies that offer entrepreneurial potential are just a few seminar topics with proven success among older, retired people. The formation of relationships among each other and service providers, particularly in a Christian environment, prove favourable to promoting a free exchange of information.

In poorer urban areas, even the most basic community services are beginning to seek innovative ways to remain present in local communities. Credit unions and postal and banking services, along with mobile libraries and health checks are finding "welcome space" in church halls and parking lots. As these services find it increasingly difficult to pay high leasing rates or fees associated with newly constructed buildings, working collaboratively with a Christian social enterprise makes sustainability more lucrative. Partner services can be easily tailored to support target groups—the elderly, children, and the poor.

Likewise, as the church forges new relationships within poorer communities, congregations are being inspired to volunteer their gifts and talents in the support of others, but also in ways that introduce new approaches to being church. Fresh expressions and resource churches are leading the way to innovative worship styles such as Messy Church, Café Church, Coffee Church, Bread Church, Goth BCP, and Jazz Eucharists. While these are only a few ways of offering a fresh perspective of being church, they are examples that creatively combine liturgy with the personal interests of the worshipping community, while forging relationships while meeting personal and social needs.

More importantly, these varying types of services are often held in churches, Christian halls and centres, or schools. They are also held on multiple days of the week (including but not limited to Sunday), and at different times that are best suited for the worshipping congregations. This is significant because the working poor tend to hold permanent part-time, weekend, or zero-hour contracts (also known as casual contracts).[9] Further, with increasingly more family-oriented, extracurricular, and recreational activities being held on Sundays, midweek services are growing in popularity. Interestingly, many of these new worship services also create opportunities for Christian lay leaders, allowing them to lead, teach, preach, and serve alternative congregations.

As a result, new ways of worshipping foster renewal in the church through lay affirmation and empowerment as Christian disciples acquire increased opportunities to respond to God's missional call. It is when *all* exercise their unique gifts in service to one another that the outcome of renewal is most powerful. It stimulates mutual respect between lay people and ordained ministers, generating a renewed clarity as to everyone's calling and vocation. It lays the foundation

9 Zero-hour or casual contracts permit employers to hire individuals to complete a specific piece of work, or to be "on call"

for engagement with the "other," with an understanding that *all* are created in the image of God with the potential to work and serve in even the smallest capacity as baptized disciples of Christ. The common thread in grasping this theological interpretation of renewal is to examine the causal outcome—does renewal establish relationships with others and with God?

to work, such as interpreters, hotel kitchen staff, and cleaners. In practice, the employer offers the employee a contract that offers no guarantee of work, but allows them to be categorized as "employed." The employee remains "on call" to work when and as needed. For additional information see "Contract Types and Employer Responsibilities," Gov.uk, https://www.gov.uk/contract-types-and-employer-responsibilities/zero-hour-contracts.

THE SEMINARY, HUMAN GOODS, AND CHICAGO

Dr. Kristine A. Culp *is Associate Professor of Theology at University of Chicago Divinity School. She is the editor of "T*he Responsibility of the Church for Society*"* and Other Essays by H. Richard Niebuhr *(2008) and author of* Vulnerability and Glory: A Theological Account *(2010), one of the first theological works to connect multidisciplinary conversations about environmental and economic vulnerability with theological anthropology and sociality. As dean of the Disciples Divinity House of the University of Chicago, she is actively involved in student pastoral formation and theological education.*

A good deal of conversation about religion and public life has focused on the perennial matters of how religious discourse and reasoning can "enter the public sphere" and on what basis. Those questions, which are not insignificant concerns, nevertheless often become ensnarled in an unproductive parsing of "religious" vs. "secular." Although it too begs a definition of "religion," a conversation about religion and socio-cultural goods promises to be more productive. I'm grateful, then, for the opportunity to consider "the social cultural good of religion" and to explore "the forms that religious public goods" might take.

The religious vs. secular framework often simply recasts the old dual framework of "church and state" or of "church and world." By contrast, there are multiple and intersecting dynamics to be explored among religion/s, dimensions of goods, and public life. A robust picture of socio-cultural goods and values both requires attention to diverse dimensions of goods and also resists pervasive cultural tendencies to attenuate consideration of goods to their measurement by economic worth or value alone. A similarly robust picture of religion can inform and be informed by attention to diverse basic, social (including political and economic), cultural, and reflexive goods. These more dynamic and complex pictures are necessary for making sense of the complex demands and possibilities of urban (indeed, global) life.

Three contexts give particular shape to how I have come to think about the socio-cultural goods of religion.

First, the graduate preparation of students for ministry. The MDiv program at the University of Chicago Divinity School is oriented to "public ministry" - that is, to ministry that addresses public goods and speaks to the wider public, and that connects the work of caring for souls and of fostering religious communities with broader socio-cultural contexts and the common good. It is an interdisciplinary and interfaith program in keeping with the Divinity School's literal location in the center of the University of Chicago (a major research university where doctoral students

outnumber undergraduate students). I regularly teach a graduate course titled, "Theology in the Public Square." Reinhold Niebuhr's 1932 book, *Moral Man and Immoral Society,* remains consequential for thinking about religion and socio-political life. It is a mainstay of the course along with classic texts by Dorothy Day, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Martin Luther King Jr, Malcolm X, and Thich Nhat Hanh. These texts still offer powerful insights for any consideration of religion and socio-cultural goods in contemporary cities. I will return to Niebuhr in a moment.

Second, I am one of thirty-five scholars who are involved in the "Enhancing Life Project" at the University of Chicago. It is directed by William Schweiker (University of Chicago) and Guenther Thomas (Ruhr-University Bochum). This 26-month-long project, funded by the Templeton Foundation, brings together scholars from religion, social sciences, and humanities. In thinking together about the enhancement of life, we are paying special attention to the range of human goods, how they are interpreted and "enhanced" (or endangered) in these times, and whether there are "spiritual laws" (over against too simple metrics) that can guide reflection and action towards enhancement. This very diverse group of scholars reflects the wide array of vantage points from which the socio-cultural goods of religion can and are being considered. It is important that questions of the nature, value, and impact of religion are part of serious research across disciplines and professional fields.

The third context, and perhaps the most powerful, is the city of Chicago itself where I live and carry out my work. Chicago is an imposing context for thinking about religion and public life, a city where diverse, vibrant religious communities *do* shape well-being and public life. As the stream of news from and about Chicago often suggests, it is also a city where moral and spiritual challenges are vividly illustrated. There are moral challenges that take the form of income inequality, the use and often abuse of power, and the limited access to basic goods of housing, safety, health care, and education for many of the poor in Chicago. There are also significant spiritual challenges that take the form of threats to hope, community, and dignity. Daily life can bring constant reminders of the harshness, beauty, and hope of a major U.S. city.

In light of these contexts and sources, let me make three sets of observations about what religion can contribute to the socio-cultural goods of the city.

1) Why Reinhold Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (MMIS) is still a useful starting point.

Reinhold Niebuhr argued that unselfish other-regard is rare enough among individuals, but it is pretty much impossible for groups; an approximation in the form of "enough justice" is about as good as it gets. However, "Any justice which is only justice soon degenerates into something less

than justice. It must be saved by something which is more than justice." (MMIS, 258). When thinking about cities, Niebuhr reminds us that justice is the goal, but that achieving any approximation of it will require reaching for a greater vision and reaching for it with unselfish other-regard. Both are necessary contributions of religion to the justice of cities and the flourishing of life.

For Niebuhr, religion opens the horizon of history and allows for interpretation and action that are more nuanced and, finally, more realistic, than provided by either a theory of the endless clash of will and power or some rationalized account of progress. That does not mean that religion itself will somehow redeem history. Rather, religion is always ambiguous within history because, for ill and for good, it is always intertwined with the ambiguities of reason and of will-to-power. According to Niebuhr, religion is "ultra-rational"; it is in his words, an "imagination" - or perhaps better, an "imaginary," as Charles Taylor has explored - of the absolute in which absolute value and absolute power are united.

At its best, religion does not defeat or diminish the goods of social cultural life. It can effect their transvaluation. Religion enables individuals and groups to reach beyond the "reasonable" to the "ultra-rational," say, beyond the racial status quo and beyond mandated integration to a new comprehension of human dignity, and thus expanding the possible horizon of shared life and history. One might say that religion depends upon and can transform natural, socio-cultural, and reflexive goods rather than creating the goods. Similarly, religion may alter and elevate the drive to reason and the will-to-power that are no less deeply embedded in contemporary culture than they were in Niebuhr's day.

Niebuhr also alerts us to the possibilities that religion's "transformations" can, in fact, be destructive or deleterious. He refers to certain extreme forms of asceticism as the "overripe fruit" of religion, and views legalism, moralism, fanaticism as made more dangerous because of religious absolutism. By showing the susceptibility of religion, knowledge, and power to misappropriation and misdirection, and by accenting the ongoing challenge of envisioning and achieving some approximation of justice in societies, Niebuhr slammed the brakes on his day's overconfidence in rationalized progress (including technological progress) as leading to the amelioration of the ills and injustice of social life. Even though today's context has changed dramatically, Niebuhr's cautions remain salient. His overarching theses can be especially instructive, namely that justice won't evolve, it must be envisioned and sought, and that religion, ambiguous as it may be, is as basic and vital for shaping the justice and flourishing of cities and civilizations as are knowledge and power.

Although Niebuhr draws a sharp line between the kind of unselfish other-regard ("love") that may be possible among individuals and the relative "immorality" of societies where justice is

the highest good that can be attained, he does not view religion itself as a private matter. For Niebuhr, religion is not just a vision of the absolute beyond reason but a genuinely creative part of social life. This generative nature is often overlooked in contemporary caricatures of organized religion (and in caricatures of Niebuhr). *Religion at its best transforms the goods of human life, tempering self-interest, making reason more compassionate, allowing power to be creative, and providing the "illusion" that drives politics and history towards redemption*. In Abraham Heschel's 1967 phrase, which is sympathetic to Niebuhr's formulation, "Religion's task is to cultivate disgust for violence and lies, sensitivity to other people's suffering, [and] the love of peace" (*What Ecumenism Is*).

The creative, transformative work of religion addresses societies as well as individuals. It doesn't add religious value to some sort of less valuable life. It cultivates and lifts shared *human* goods—for example, compassion in the face of suffering, or peace where there is violence. A good dose of Niebuhr and Heschel (not to mention of the traditions of Protestant Christianity and prophetic Judaism in which they stand) counters the contemporary cultural bias toward consuming religion as a personal choice and its practice as "merely" an interpersonal matter.

2) H. Richard Niebuhr's work on a relational theory of value and an ethics of responsibility allows a next step.

Although Reinhold Niebuhr offers a useful starting point, he does not offer an account of how religious institutions or communities (vs. individuals) might enhance as well as endanger social goods. This is possibly an inconsistency in his thought. To explore the positive work of religion, and especially of religious communities, we can turn to his brother H. Richard Niebuhr, who spent a lifetime thinking about the relation of selves, communities, and God.

"The Church is not responsible for the judgment or destruction of any beings in the world of God," H. Richard Niebuhr observed, "but for the conservation, redemption, and transfiguration of whatever creatures its action touches." When he wrote this in 1946, he was reflecting on the Marshall Plan and the reconstruction of cities in Europe in the aftermath of the war's devastation. The situation and his comments offer an instructive parallel for our concerns. In light of the situation of contemporary cities, the violence and poverty that threaten human survival, the gross inequalities of access to housing, health care, safety, education, and also the complex intersections of life, work, communities, and histories, what do religious communities offer?

Neither judgment nor moral condemnation of any beings, in fact. Niebuhr assumes that even in devastated cities there are already a variety of goods there. Cities are not devoid of goods, although those goods may be inadequately recognized and may need to be transformed for the

sake of the full glory of the beings who dwell there. Moreover, that transformation doesn't necessarily first involve adding "religion." Niebuhr says that the work of churches and of a Christian moral philosophy is to acknowledge, ensure, and transfigure whatever goods – natural, basic, socio-cultural, reflective goods – already exist. In European post-war cities, providing for the basic goods of food and shelter was a basic good by any valuation, human or religious. We can hear echoes of the gospel here: "Whoever offers a cup of cool water…"(Matthew 10:42).

The same is true for contemporary cities. Basic goods and socio-cultural goods don't become better by being supplanted by some sort of "higher" religious goods. Niebuhr's relational theory of value develops this perspective. For our purposes, let this example suffice: A cup of cool water that answers thirst and need is already in some sense a testimony of goodness and value at the heart of life. However, if thirst is quenched in a way that also upbuilds the dignity of a person, allows sympathy and understanding, strengthens social life, contributes to the flourishing of generations, and opens to interpretations about the meaning of life, then several dimensions of goods are engaged at the same time. As Reinhold Niebuhr's work also suggests, the transfiguration of values isn't a matter of substituting "religious" goods for some sort of "lesser" goods, but of cultivating and enhancing the intersection of diverse goods. Or in the more recent formulation of my colleague William Schweiker, the responsibility is "to respect and enhance the integrity of life." This is not a simple process. Neither respect nor integrity are fixed formulae but involve processes of ongoing "approximation," to return to Reinhold Niebuhr's term. Moreover, there are deep conflicts within and among us concerning how goods relate to each other.

Mediating institutions are crucial sites for such work, more often than we perhaps recognize. I am thinking especially of religious congregations, educational institutions, and service agencies, but without excluding a variety of not necessarily religious organizations such as parent-teacher associations, community organizations, local bookstores and cafes, labor unions, service clubs, and so forth. Congregations and other mediating organizations at their best are neighbor-making, hope-creating places of regular interaction (and therefore of the creation of value). We have taken them for granted more than we ought, and to the extent that they are diminishing, we as persons, societies, and cultures are likely soon to be diminished.

Congregations mediate "religion" by mediating diverse other goods through food pantries, worship services, preschools and religious schools, networks of service and care, or apart from places that support and symbolize these sacred processes of respecting and enhancing life. They are also one of the increasingly rare places in our culture where goods are mediated across the generations, and at their best, across other social and cultural divides. Congregations offer and hold together basic, socio-cultural, and reflexive goods and, in doing so, can "conserve, redeem, and transfigure" innumerable fellow creatures in mundane but powerful ways.

3) The Role of Vulnerability and Glory in Religion

Finally, my own work has been focused on the themes of vulnerability and glory. I've argued for interpreting vulnerability as the susceptibility to be changed – for good or for ill – and for interpreting vulnerability as a basic feature of creaturely life. Humans are earth creatures, "clay jars," as the book of Genesis and Paul's letter to the Corinthians portray us, and yet capable of bearing glory, the aliveness of life.

Strategies that attempt to protect creatures by somehow ensuring invulnerability to damaging change (say, closing borders to the flow of ideas or people, policing focused on containment, a safety culture that insulates children from learning) may also close off possibilities of positive transformation. I have paired vulnerability with "glory" instead of "resilience", which is the counterpart to vulnerability in contemporary risk management literature.

I'm haunted by the everydayness of violence in some city neighborhoods, by the lack of investment in education, by the rise of addictions, by the collapse of "good jobs," by the diversion of consumption and facile "connections," and also by how easy it is for ostensibly unaffected segments of the population to see few connections among the harshness of some lives and the ease of their own. These seem to me to be symptoms of dehumanization, a loss of the aliveness of life, of hope and of meaning.

To be sure, fostering resilience to damage (e.g., adolescents with "grit" in the face of adversity) is certainly critical in situations where devastation seems to be an ever present threat. Moreover, the picture of seemingly inevitable damage and of resilience at best may capture the tenor of these times, but it does not yet offer a capacious enough horizon for the complexity and full ambiguity of life. What religion must also do is to broaden the bandwidth of creaturely life, as it were, to offer vision and action that focuses attention, expands imagination, and fosters enactments of creaturely life in its integrity and glory.

Religion at its best offers a broader horizon for life that allows us to grasp the vulnerability and glory – the aliveness – of life. Religion doesn't do this in the abstract. It does so primarily through communities of faith that are also communities of interpretation and action. Religious communities offer both imaginaries and spaces where this recognition is fostered and though which its vision and action can circulate among and enhance persons, neighborhoods, and cities.

What kinds of interventions are needed? We need leadership formation to strengthen these mediating institutions. We need to recognize what already exists so we can better support them and "conserve" the values that they are already adding to neighborhoods and cities. Where they are lacking or becoming diminished, we need to help facilitate neighbor-making,

hope-creating institutions. There are some very creative and unselfish other-regarding leaders and institutions out there. I wonder also about the merit of MacArthur Foundation-like recognition for their genius and "aliveness."

These observations are incomplete. They offer some provisional perspectives that are still somewhat removed from the concrete demands of cities and current social contexts. However, there is significant scope for direct connection to the practicalities of our cities. We need to continue to reflect on these questions as we identify salient points for "advancing the understanding of the social-cultural goods in relation to religion," and for identifying dangers as they appear among and around us.

RELIGION IN THE STREETS OF NEW YORK CITY

***Tony Carnes** is editor and publisher of A Journey Through NYC Religions. He started Journey in 2010 in order to search for every church, cathedral, synagogue, shtiebel, mosque, temple, zendo, and ashram in the five boroughs of New York City. Carnes is a member of the Society of Professional Journalists, the Online News Association, Religion Newswriters Association, the Deadline Club, and the Society for the Social Scientific Study of Religion.*

A Journey through NYC Religions started in the summer of 2010. Very early into our travels, the non-believers in our crew were asking themselves why they should be doing a journey through the religions of New York City. I too was wondering what to tell them. I was unlimbering from a tight defensive position around my own faith.

We stopped at a florist-bookstore-church run by a Haitian American woman who was locally respected as a wise woman. After listening to her for a bit, I realized that she really was a shrewd and good woman. So, I decided to ask her for advice.

As the summer rains roared outside, they threw a wave of steam into the shop and were mixed around by a loud aircraft-propeller-sized fan. When I asked my question, I wasn't sure that the shopkeeper-pastor had heard me. Nor did it occur to me that my crew of reporters, who were sitting a bit back from the interview, could hear either. I was wrong.

She heard me precisely and gave really wonderful advice. My crew's ears immediately perked up, because they knew we were talking about them.

"We Christians always think we know the answers. We need someone to tell us when we are wrong," the local wise woman said. "That's what your reporters can do—tell you when you are wrong."

As we went outside, Melissa Kimiadi, with the other reporter nodding, exclaimed, "I can't believe you asked her that. That you asked her about our conversations!" I realized that *Journey*'s future was at stake but was impressed with the advice, so I asked, "Well, what do you think about what she said?"

The sun had come out, and the rain had stopped for a moment. We were walking down a steamy sidewalk. I could feel the humidity brush by my face as Melissa answered.

"You know, what she said, it made a lot of sense. What do you think?"

As I agreed with the advice, I knew that I could listen to my very junior reporters with little religious experience as fonts of wisdom. I could feel my defensive crouch just ease away. (My

faith actually increased.) I said, “I think she is right. I feel really good about her definition of our working relations.”

This turning point in the summer of 2010 led to a redefinition of our journalism, the public square, and the city in which we live. As we practiced the interaction of mutual learning, we were beginning to see that the urban public square that was desperately needed for our times was one in which believers of all types and non-believers could listen to each other sympathetically and empathetically, arrive through open minds and open hearts at a rough objectivity, and, if necessary, a skepticism about claims that didn’t match up. We came to call this “sympathetic objectivity.”

It is quite different from the usual way of practicing journalism and public debate here in the United States. In the news business, “investigative journalism” is seen as the ultimate standard, and its methodological trinity is, in this order, skepticism (since everybody lies); objectivity as a result; and, maybe, sympathy or empathy at the end. Reporters should always keep their distance from those they are interviewing. As a result, a great deal of distrust is built into the reporting process.

Reporters like to fool themselves that their “objectivity” will win over the public, but many people sense the psychological distance of the reporter from the audience. A Stanford psychologist has found that people are highly accurate in reading what other people really think about them. So, when a journalist feigns sympathy or empathy over their skepticism, people can pick up the ploy.

The result is a rising distrust of journalism, so much so that the profession is one of the most distrusted professions in the United States. This is true in Europe also.

In fact, most reporters went into the profession because they wanted to help their communities. But as their education and adjustment to the newsroom culture took place, they became more and more distant from their audience and came to place more and more reliance on investigative reporting as their reason for existence. We are trained to go for the jugular, not for the heart. And journalists like myself have ended up despised and mistrusted. Sometimes we also end up as cynics, which seeps into our reporting.

At *A Journey*, we discovered that “community journalism” is a better route to objectivity and investigative journalism, if needed. We start with the conviction that every religious group has an interesting story that the rest of us would like to hear about. The goal of our interviews is to let them reveal their hearts and minds in ways that the rest of us can appreciate. People can judge themselves whether the products are good or bad. They don’t need snarky reporters to make judgments for them.

Creativity and kindness is not limited by religion, because all religious believers have souls, consciences, and imaginations given by God. Maybe the believers mess things up and forget who God is and what the full truth is. But it is obvious that people of different faiths are not completely alien to each other. Furthermore, in the democratic public square, we must figure out how we can help each other.

I am reminded of Jesus's admonition to "love your enemies." Notice carefully—he doesn't say "tolerate your enemies" or "convert your enemies." He says something that is more robustly appreciative. We believe that the best way to get interviews and mutual help is when you appreciate something that the other person says or does. For example—and it is a very minimal thing—every religious group has a certain cuisine that the rest of us have come to love. Whenever we visit this halal (Muslim-approved, similar to Jewish kosher) restaurant in Jamaica, Queens, we love the roasted meats and the sweets. A barely identified mosque sits atop of the restaurant.

For the long run, it is much more likely that we can tolerate each other if we appreciate each other. And mutual appreciation is an effective foundation for gaining a hearing for one's faith.

New York City is no longer the Sodom and Gomorrah that it used to be. Nor is it any longer an example of Harvey Cox's 1963 book *The Secular City*. It is not quite a religious city, but there is too much new religion here for it to be called "the secular city." New York is a liminal city that is somewhere between secular and sacred. It is a post-secular city of spiritual movement, questioning, and creativity. We feel that European cities are just beginning to move toward this modern development.

We are showing the new reality by journeying down all 6,374.9 miles of our city's streets, every uncounted alleyway, and quite a few hallways to map and photograph every religious site and to interview with sympathetic objectivity religious leaders and laypeople at every site. We accumulate masses of data to drive our stories. We say that our very detailed coverage of religion in New York City is like the animation produced by Pixar studios. We are constantly pushing to show more and more religious details in every crevice of the city so that after a while New Yorkers start to say, "Of course, we take it for granted that religion is natural to New York City. It is all around us."

A new form of journalism, scholarship, and politics is needed so that non-believers and people of different faiths can learn to talk, hear, and act together. They won't always agree, but once they are committed to blessing each other, that is, appreciating each other, the disagreements become more constructive.

We have visited every mosque in New York City, over three hundred of them. We sent women journalists into conservative mosques. At least one mosque was part of an Islamic denomina-

tion that had never let a reporter into their mosques here or abroad. But sympathetic objectivity works, because the mosque leaders sense our good-heartedness. I remember the evening when the leader of a very, very conservative mosque met me in the parking lot after a council meeting to reassure me that our female reporters would be treated well. "Don't worry, Tony, we will take care of them as if they are members of our own tribe." And they did. To quote something he tweeted about *Journey*'s methods, Jeff Chu, formerly of the business innovation magazine *Fast Company*, wrote, "Open hearts and open minds make for better interviews and better stories. Skepticism, later, if necessary." And over eight thousand religious sites later with 38 million viewers in six years, here we are.

So what are our next steps?

During our journeys, it became clear that the models of leadership used in church and seminary training programs are based on elite or corporate models. The slogan seems to be, change always comes from the elite at the centre of things. In fact, that was not true as far as religion in New York City goes. The outsiders, people in the boroughs or transplants like Tim Keller, were the ones who brought change to the city. Insiders joined them. Many of the outsiders, of course, pushed forward and have started to enter elite circles. But elites by themselves seldom want change because it would upset the status quo with them on top. Remember this model of social change resembles the course of Christianity: Jesus, an outsider from nowheresville, pushes toward the centre, disrupts things, and fundamental change comes about.

So, we need working-class models of leadership and church planting, theologies of innovation, elite corruption, racism, and classism, and a renewed focus on the religious-motivation factor in learning and innovation.

The counting of the social services of the faith-based groups in the city starts to show us for the first time the true size and detailed presence of faith-based inputs to the public good. We also need to add how religion is also an innovator in recognizing, tackling, and solving urban problems. At present, social innovation of religious groups seems to be underappreciated. There needs to be much more news media and scholarly attention on the value of religious innovation, in addition to the highly strategic, straightforward counting of the value of faith-based contributions. Churches are urban transactional centres that amass interactions that create disruption, innovation, and global connections.

We need more *Journey*-like strategies and investments in communications media. This type of detailed, street-level, and data-driving reporting will help revolutionize the churches' and general public's understanding of the true nature of social life and civic culture in our cities.

CARDUS

cardus.ca/socialcities