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FROM SERVANT TO CO-CREATOR:

TOWARDS A CIVIC ECCLESIOLOGY

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

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In Partial Fulfillment of

The Requirements for the Degree of

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This thesis may be duplicated.

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I write these acknowledgments as I prepare to submit the final version of this thesis for examination. It is a moment of quite overwhelming thankfulness.

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I dedicate this final assignment for my degree

to the memory of my father, Gunnar Ström,

who entered the last weeks of his life

just as I was beginning to turn my attention to this task,

and whose constant encouragement still lingers with me;

to my mother, Helen Ström,

nurturer, listening ear, and lifelong learner extraordinaire;

and to Harry,

my beloved husband and co-worker

in the ongoing task of building democratic societies.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I came to Luther Seminary when my job as a democracy educator with a large African NGO, Idasa, came to an end after twenty years. Before plunging into a new job, I felt that it would be valuable for me to spend some time reflecting on the work that I had done over two eventful decades in the life of my country, South Africa, and the broader continent of Africa. Since my work mainly took place at the grassroots level, my challenge had been to make complex concepts accessible to people with limited education. I discovered in the process that they had much to teach me. My understanding of what it means to build a democratic society deepened considerably over the years as my colleagues and I interacted with citizens from diverse social, ethnic, religious and political backgrounds in hundreds of communities across the continent. I hoped that coming to seminary would enable me to theorize this experience more sharply while also learning to reflect on it theologically.

In this thesis, I take up the challenge of analyzing and naming the diverse ways in which I believe that God can, does, and might work in the world through efforts to build more democratic societies. In particular, I focus on the idea of *citizens as co-creators* of safe, flourishing communities. From a theological perspective, I base my reflections on the idea of human beings as *created co-creators.* I contend that individual Christians, local congregations, and larger church structures could become vastly more effective as agents of change in our world if they embraced their identity as God's *created co-*

creators, within the realities of their surrounding communities and societies. I support this claim by way of a conversation between theology, pedagogy, and the field of Civic Studies.

In this introduction, I provide brief background on Civic Studies, followed by a description of my work as a democracy educator, posing some questions about whether and how God's presence might be discerned in such work. I make a case for why the idea of co-creation is important in today's world. Finally, I outline the structure of the thesis argument.

Civic Studies is a trans-disciplinary framework for civic engagement organized around the concepts of agency and citizens as co-creators of different kinds of communities at various scales. The Civic Studies field was established in 2007 by a group of engaged political theorists, pushing back against dominant intellectual trends that had increasingly eclipsed popular agency through the 20th century. Civic Studies brings together several strands of practice-grounded theory, notwithstanding the often lively debates between them. All of these currents of thought in some way emphasize themes of agency (generally collective or "civic agency") and co-creative citizen activity. These areas include the theory of democratic governance of common resources (for which one of the Civic Studies co-founders, the late Elinor Ostrom, won the Nobel Prize in 2009); public work theory which stresses the co-creative labors of building communities and societies as well as the public and democratic potentials of all types of work; community organizing; popular education; deliberative theory and practice; and interpretative social science. Several of these strands had influenced our work in Idasa,

and the emergence of the Civic Studies field represented a promising synthesis that added new dimensions and depth to our democracy education program in particular.

Idasa's democracy education work began with grassroots-level electoral and civic literacy training that aimed to provide previously disenfranchised South Africans with basic knowledge about what it meant to be a citizen in a democracy. Over time, my colleagues and I realized that although this knowledge was empowering to a certain extent, citizens lacked the democratic skills to make real change happen in their communities. Also, the dominant North Atlantic conception of democracy with its focus on government and elections did not sufficiently support our commitment to developing people's agency. We began to draw on some of the strands that were coalescing in the Civic Studies field, in particular community organizing and the theory of public work. We also drew inspiration from the Scandinavian popular education tradition. This led us to develop an extended citizen leadership training program delivered through non-formal "schools for democracy" in marginalized communities across South Africa and also in a number of other African countries. The training focused on a set of core concepts and practices that undergird a paradigm shift towards understanding democracy as a way of life, the everyday work of the whole society, not simply the work of representatives who are elected to "do democracy" on behalf of everyone else. A central idea is that citizens are co-creators of a such society, working with fellow citizens (including citizens in elected office) to solve shared problems, produce public goods, and shape a decent, "common life" politics.

As part of the schools for democracy program, participants worked in groups for several months to organize their communities to begin to take collective action on an

issue of common concern. Whenever the groups reported on how they had managed to access local resources, build relationships, open doors to people in power, and energize their neighbors to work with them on a range of initiatives, I would sense the power of the Spirit at work in them. In particular, I perceived something holy as they spoke about the personal transformation that they had undergone, learning to believe in themselves and—just as importantly—in each other and their collective capacity to change and co-create their communities.

As vivid as these glimpses of the Holy Spirit were, I also often found myself questioning whether it was legitimate to make such claims, especially since this work happened outside of the church context. When I came to Luther Seminary, I felt torn between two positions: on the one hand boldly claiming that I had experienced God at work in Idasa's school for democracy program, and on the other hand wondering whether it was excessive—perhaps even blasphemous—to say so. I have found many resources for thinking more deeply about this, including Jürgen Moltmann's musings on the experience of the Spirit. He describes this as "an awareness of God in, with and beneath the experience of life, which gives us experience of God's fellowship, friendship and love."[1] He refers to "lasting expansions of the consciousness, not fleeting impressions,"[2] and to primary experience as "something that 'happens to us,' something that overpowers us without our intending it, unexpectedly and suddenly."[3] Contrasting such experiences with the objective stance of scientific rationality and the resulting uniformization of the

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[1] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 17.

[2] Ibid., 19.

[3] Ibid., 22.

world, Moltmann shows how the positivist ideology of the modern era makes it difficult to talk about experiencing the presence and work of God in the here and now. He counters that it is essential for theology to reflect critically on this modern temper, and not simply adapt to it. This leads him to propose the idea of "immanent transcendence" and to state: "Every experience that happens to us or that we have, can possess a transcendent, inward side. […] It is therefore possible to experience God *in, with and beneath* each everyday experience of the world […]."[4] With this in mind, I feel encouraged to claim God's presence in democracy-building work.

Moltmann places the work of voluntary groups, activist groups or self-help groups that address social and political concerns against the broad horizon of the kingdom of God. He states: "There are apparently two ways of access to the community of Christ. On the one hand through faith in Christ, mediated through Word, sacrament and fellowship; on the other hand through shared work for the kingdom of God."[5] Many secular organizations include people from different faith backgrounds among their members and staff, including Christians. For Moltmann, when churches are able to recognize that these groups' efforts to promote peace and justice and provide support for those who suffer is work for the kingdom of God, this itself is a sign of the work of the Holy Spirit in the churches, leading them beyond their own frontiers.

The relationship among people inside and outside the church working for change, and God's participation in this work, is a key motivation for my interest in the theme of co-creation. How does God work in the world, and with or through whom? My efforts to

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[4] Ibid., 34.

[5] Ibid., 242.

learn to think theologically about the work of promoting democracy and developing civic agency spring not only from my desire to build a stronger bridge between the church and society, but also to discover resources that can help churches to become more effective agents of change in the world and unleash new energies within churches themselves. Most of the serious problems facing society today are far too big for governments to solve on their own. The idea of democratic co-creation is based on the belief that solutions to society's problems can better be found through collaboration among a variety of groups and institutions, including governments, and that this also deepens people's sense of ownership and stake. Yet cultural trends in today's world make it difficult for people to take this line of thinking seriously.

Such trends are increasingly visible in the African setting that continues to provide the main motivation for me as I reflect on the theme of co-creation. Among ordinary citizens across Africa there is a pervasive sense of powerlessness and hopelessness in the face of problems such as poverty, food insecurity due to climate change, ethnic violence, corruption in government, gender-based violence, and many more. The feeling of powerlessness produces ever-deepening dependencies on governments, international aid agencies, and NGOs and their credentialed experts, as citizens wait to be "rescued" from their dire situations. It is seldom that one hears people asking, "What can we do to get out of this predicament?" Rather, they express anger towards those in power or those with resources for failing to assist them. Others sink into a state of cynical resignation, and do their best to keep themselves and their families afloat amidst a scarcity mindset that pits the poor against each other in bitter competition for limited resources. At times, organizations and opposition parties manage to mobilize

citizens to draw attention to their problems, but governments remain the central focus of these protests. Protestors experience little more than an ephemeral sense of power expressed as public anger.

This is deeply frustrating, not only because intractable problems continue to dog the continent of Africa, but also because the vast resources to be found among its citizens and their institutions—their talents, energies, ingenuity, local knowledge, and life experience—go largely untapped. Rather, following global trends, a slowly expanding middle class with increasingly individualistic values gets caught up in dog-eat-dog competition to "make it big" while the poor fall further and further behind. In the face of these worrying cultural trends in Africa, churches are largely silent. For the most part, African churches offer some solace for present suffering and the promise of release in the hereafter. Some Christian leaders speak out against human rights violations and abuses of power in politics, sometimes at their peril. Churches offer charitable support and services to the most needy, almost always in a "rescue" mode. They seldom position themselves as sites of citizen empowerment, where members can gain the skills and confidence to work with others to transform their communities. The notion that *all* Christians can be co-creators of a better society, called to work with fellow co-creators beyond the walls of the church, is almost entirely absent.

In my work as a democracy educator, I have witnessed enough examples of the transformative power of the idea of citizens as co-creators to believe that a shift in how we understand democracy is possible and urgently overdue. I also believe that this holds important implications for education at every level. I am committed to making the case

that this conception of democracy centered on citizens as co-creators, together with a pedagogy that promotes it, can become part of the life and identity of the church.

My basic thesis in this paper is that a theology and a pedagogy of co-creation form the foundation for a civic ecclesiology. In Chapter 2, I focus specifically on the theological idea that human beings are "created co-creators" and consider how a trinitarian understanding of this idea, based especially on Moltmann's perichoretic reading of the Trinity, might validate and illuminate the role of churches in efforts to build better societies. In Chapter 3, I focus on the idea of a pedagogy of co-creation, holding up the pedagogical thinking of N. F. S. Grundtvig as an embodiment of the theological idea of humans as created co-creators. In Chapter 4, I propose a civic ecclesiology, moving beyond the widespread model of the "church as servant" to a model of the "church as citizen," where the citizen is understood as a co-creator of the society. In the conclusion, I briefly reflect on the tradition of broad-based community organizing and how the idea of human beings as citizens and created co-creators might expand the reach of this work when applied more broadly to all systems and institutions in the society.

CHAPTER 2

A THEOLOGY OF CO-CREATION

The Lutheran theologian Philip Hefner proposed the idea that human beings are "God's created co-creators." In this chapter, I begin with a brief account of Hefner's concept. Using key elements of his description, I then place the idea of the created co-creator in conversation with Moltmann's social doctrine of the Trinity. Along the way I formulate a trinitarian account of the idea of co-creation.

Hefner undertakes his theological inquiry in close conversation with evolutionary science. In his *magnum opus* entitled *The Human Factor,* he demonstrates his commitment to being accountable to the criteria of validity demanded by the sciences by using a scientific method of argumentation. He presents a series of hypotheses and proceeds to test these, laying out what each hypothesis affirms and negates. He states his basic theoretical proposal as follows:

> Human beings are God's created co-creators whose purpose is to be the agency, acting in freedom, to birth the future that is most wholesome for the nature that has birthed us—the nature that is not only our own genetic heritage, but also the entire human community and the evolutionary and ecological reality in which and to which we belong. Exercising this agency is said to be God's will for humans.[1]

A number of Hefner's hypotheses and the material he draws on as he explores them are the stuff of mainstream science and social science. However, he places all this within a theological framework, and articulates three theological arguments to constitute

[1] Philip J. Hefner, *The Human Factor: Evolution, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 27.

the core of his theory of the created co-creator, as stated above.[2] First, there is the basic claim that God, the Creator, is the ground of human existence as well as all of creation. Human beings are created by God to be co-creators within the broader context of creation as a whole, in order to help fulfill God's purposes. Second, God is also the ground of the evolutionary processes that brought human beings into existence. Hefner highlights the paradox that the freedom of human beings as co-creators emerged out of the conditioning matrix of genetics and culture that birthed them. Thus humans are firmly rooted in the bio-historical processes of nature. These processes constitute a vehicle for divine grace, and human freedom marks the evolutionary emergence of a new stage of freedom for all of creation. Third, the created co-creators, acting in freedom, participate in the realization of God's purposes for creation. Human culture—the meaning-making endeavors that include myth and ritual, and hence religion—is endowed with purposes that flow from God's own will.[3]

For Hefner, the human animal is a two-natured creature that is both conditioned and free. On the one hand, as a *created* being, the human being is *conditioned*, dependent on antecedent influences. The theory rejects the dualism of nature and nurture, recognizing instead the confluence of genetic and cultural factors, and the grace and purpose of the Creator operating through them. On the other hand, as *co-creator*, the human being is *free*. Here Hefner adopts a particular meaning of freedom as follows:

> Freedom is defined in this connection neither as liberty (the classical liberal and prevailing American view) nor as the ability to make and shape the world (the

[2] Ibid., 32.

[3] In personal feedback, Gary Simpson pointed out an unresolved tension between teleology and eschatology in Hefner's work. (Conversation with Simpson, April 22, 2016). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to pursue this issue in depth, although I would suggest that Hefner's treatment of freedom (see page 15 below) does emphasize the openness of the future rather than determinism.

> prevailing Marxist[4] view). Rather, freedom refers to the condition of existence in which humans unavoidably face the necessity both of making choices and of constructing the stories that contextualize and hence justify those choices.[5]

The element of "choice" in Hefner's definition aligns with the principle of selection in evolutionary science. The idea of storytelling points to a major aspect of Hefner's theory that revolves around human culture. He presents culture not only as a conditioning force but *also* as an expression of freedom, focusing his argument on the human activity of meaning-making through myth and ritual.

Hefner developed the theory of human beings as created co-creators in the context of the ongoing debates between theology and science in the closing decades of the 20th century, and the seemingly unquestionable dominance of scientific thinking. He felt the urgency to develop a theology capacious enough to engage seriously with contemporary scientific methods and discoveries, and the concept of the created co-creator provided the framework for this engagement. I believe that this is an immensely promising idea, although Hefner's science-focused argument does not fully mine its potential. In this paper, I use Moltmann's treatment of the perichoretic Trinity to expand the concept of the created co-creator. I also engage with adult learning theory and democracy theory in order develop a proposal for how the idea of humans as created co-creators might find concrete expression in a new, civic ecclesiology. Key elements of Hefner's theory remain relevant in my endeavor to develop a trinitarian account of co-creation.

The three core concepts around which I structure my theological reflection emerge from the first two lines of Hefner's basic theological proposal, namely that

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[4] Marx believes that the human being is *homo faber*, but he has a radically modernist and scientific view of what this means, quite different to my more culturally rooted argument in this paper.

[5] Hefner, *Human Factor*, 38.

"Human beings are God's *created co-creators* whose purpose is to be the *agency*, acting in *freedom*, to birth the *future* that is most wholesome for the nature that has birthed us." Using co-creation as the central organizing idea for this thesis, I focus on freedom, future and agency as key theological concepts, from the perspective of Moltmann's perichoretic re-reading of the Trinity. First, I provide an outline of this social doctrine of the Trinity.

The Social Trinity

Moltmann challenges the monarchical monotheistic understanding of God that has dominated Western Christian thought since the time of the Patristic theologians. The emergence of the doctrine of the Trinity—the concept of God in three Persons—did not prevent the Christianity from remaining strongly monotheistic, somewhat to the puzzlement of other monotheistic religions. Moltmann argues that this trinitarian monotheism also displays a strong monarchical character. The tight connection between monarchianism and the Trinity lies in the fact that traditional thinking about the Trinity focuses first on the idea of the One God, before grappling with the three Persons. He traces the history of this thinking from early theories about God as one "substance" in three Persons to later theories that present God as one "subject" in three "modes of being." According to Moltmann, in both these approaches where the "One" provides the starting point, there is "not only […] undue stress on the unity of the triune God, but there is also a reduction of the triunity to the One God."[6] This way of thinking takes on a monarchical character both in terms of the internal dynamics of the Trinity where the Father is conceptualized as sovereign, *and* in terms of the sovereignty of God, the One-

[6] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 17.

in-Three, over all the world. This monarchical understanding has found expression across the centuries in a particular depiction of God as omnipotent, omniscient, and unchanging. In turn, this sovereign depiction of God has provided the justification for top-down and often autocratic structures of leadership in society, the church, the home and elsewhere. The framework of religious monotheism has been transferred all too easily into political and social ideologies of domination.

Moltmann presents an alternative to the monarchical concept of God by proposing a reverse logic to describe the Trinity, beginning with the three Persons before arriving at a new understanding of the One. This provides the basis for a *social* doctrine of the Trinity, with emphasis on the relationality and reciprocity of the Father, Son and Spirit. The inexhaustible, circular process of mutual indwelling—*perichoresis*—is an expression "of most perfect and intense empathy"[7] between the three Persons. This dissolves the monarchical image of the One God. Rather, as Moltmann puts it, "The unity of the divine tri-unity lies in the *union* of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, not in their numerical unity. It lies in their *fellowship*, not in the identity of a single subject."[8] This perichoretic conception of the Trinity "flattens" the structure of power within Godself, offering a relational understanding of power instead. Furthermore, this relational understanding of power is not restricted to the inner life of God. Moltmann presents the social Trinity as an *open* Trinity. The sending of the Son and the Spirit into the world opens up the Trinity to all of creation. Thus, instead of exercising sovereign power over the world, the triune God enters into relationship with creation, drawing it into God's very life.

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[7] Ibid., 175.

[8] Ibid., 95.

Surmounting the traditional Western monotheistic understanding of God has important implications for how the *work* of God is understood. The idea of perichoresis highlights not only the perfect reciprocity of the three Persons of the Trinity, but also their self-differentiation. Relationality cannot exist without differentiation. Moreover, the relationships within the life of God do not eternally repeat the same pattern. They are ever changing as Father, Son and Spirit work in their own way, and yet equally, and also in dynamic relationship with each other. This double movement of self-differentiation and relationality within the life of God allows for a multi-dimensional understanding the work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the world, conventionally understood as creation, redemption and sanctification, the latter leading ultimately to glorification. Moltmann observes:

> In the historical and eschatological testimony of the New Testament, we do not merely find one, single form of the Trinity. We find a trinitarian co-working of Father, Son and Spirit, but with changing patterns.
>
> We find the order Father – Spirit – Son; the order Father – Son – Spirit; and finally the order Spirit – Son – Father. Up to now, however, dogmatic tradition has only worked with a single pattern. And in the West this pattern has always been Father – Son – Spirit.[9]

Moltmann's evocation above of the "trinitarian co-working" of the three Persons is important, particularly in relation to the overarching theme of this paper, co-creation. In my exposure thus far to the idea of the social Trinity, I have found the emphasis to be chiefly on the self-emptying *love* that unites the three Persons in a bond of eternal and equal sharing—*communio* in the life of God. I propose that a stronger focus on co-working—*cooperatio*—holds significant potential to enrich discussion of the social Trinity. The divine tri-unity lies not only in the fellowship of the three Persons, but also

[9] Ibid., 95.

in their collaboration. In the next sections of this chapter, I will emphasize the collaborative work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in offering freedom to God's created co-creators, opening their future, and developing their agency.

Freedom

Freedom forms a major part of Hefner's argument in *The Human Factor.* As mentioned above, he places the idea of human freedom over against the idea of human "conditionedness." However, he also argues that the two factors are intimately related to each other, with freedom emerging paradoxically out of the deterministic process of evolution. Hefner draws attention to the work of John Hick who highlights a kind of organic agency at the heart of the evolutionary process of natural selection. Through an organism's *own* "efforts" of selection, it traverses the distance between the condition in which it finds itself and a new condition which it will attain. Conceived in this way, evolution is a continual, unscripted process of reaching for the future.[10] Hefner explains: "If indeed it is God's will that there be a free creation, it is necessary not simply that the world be created in a condition of freedom, which God presumably could bring about by fiat, but that the creation be created so that it *can become free* by its own choosing."[11] Thus, even at the biological level, the idea of freedom is an intrinsic aspect of the history of creation and human history. God desires that the created co-creator, together with all of creation, freely desires freedom.

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[10] Reflecting on the evolution of life in a similar vein, Moltmann observes that "the system possesses a certain open range of anticipation." Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 203.

[11] Hefner, *Human Factor*, 44. Original italics.

A new theological doctrine of freedom emerges from the trinitarian critique of monarchical monotheism. To elaborate this idea, Moltmann elaborates an understanding of the kingdom of God informed by the work of the 12th century theologian and mystic, Joachim of Fiore. Joachim developed a trinitarian doctrine of the kingdom of God, to which he added a fourth, eschatological dimension. According to this scheme, the kingdom of God, the kingdom of the Son, and the kingdom of the Spirit represent different stages of history—creation, redemption and rebirth—which reach their consummation at the end of time in the kingdom of the glory of the triune God. Joachim explores the evolution of human freedom in relation to God that accompanies the transition from one kingdom to the next. According to Moltmann, this is Joachim's most important contribution. It gives rise to a trinitarian doctrine of freedom that holds important implications for a theological understanding of co-creation.

The kingdom of the Father is the realm of creation over which the Creator reigns as Lord across time and beyond: in the beginning, in the continuous preservation and perpetuation of creation, and in anticipation of the new creation. As created beings, humans, along with the rest of creation, can be seen as the "property" of the Creator to whom they owe their existence. Thus, within the Father's kingdom, God's followers are understood as God's servants. Moltmann illustrates this point with servant language from both the Old and New Testaments. In human society, servitude is experienced as a painful, oppressive condition. The only way to escape it is to gain power or "lordship" over others and to ensure that they remain in a position of servitude. By contrast, Moltmann argues that being in the service of the Most High is liberating. In the kingdom of the Father, the Lord does not exercise power in a way that oppresses those who serve:

"For the person who is a servant of the Most High is indeed utterly dependent on his master; but he is completely free from other powers and other things. […] He belongs to his Lord alone and to no one else."[12] Paradoxically, therefore, dependence on God is freedom.

The kingdom of the Son comes into existence through "the liberating lordship of the crucified one, and fellowship with the first-born of many brothers and sisters."[13] The Son's followers enter freedom in this new family. Here Moltmann draws a parallel with the paradigm of human freedom as "community." This marks a shift from the power struggles in which freedom is understood as lordship to a social or communicative understanding of freedom expressed as love and solidarity. In the kingdom of the Son, the understanding of freedom as community is deepened through familial bonds. Through the liberating work of the Son, the Lord's servants become the Father's children. They are heirs to the kingdom, and are freed to relate to one another in sisterly and brotherly love.

The Son's gift of the Holy Spirit to his followers brings into existence the kingdom of the Spirit. The Spirit dwells in the children of the Father, drawing them into a more direct relationship with God, as God's friends. For Moltmann, this friendship is expressed first and foremost by talking with God in prayer. He writes: "The prayer of the friend is neither the servility of the servant nor the importunity of the child; it is a conversation in the freedom of love, that shares and allows the other to share."[14] In other

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[12] Moltmann, *Trinity*, 219.

[13] Ibid., 210.

[14] Ibid., 221.

words, in the kingdom of the Spirit, freedom is experienced as friendship with God. The freedom of prayer allows God's friends to participate in God's rule.

With the images of sonship/daughtership and friendship, the trinitarian doctrine of freedom as presented by Moltmann can be situated within the framework of the social Trinity as *communio.* The emphasis is on relationality. The idea of human beings as created co-creators requires a theological reworking of the third dimension of human freedom alluded to by Moltmann. In human terms, the first paradigm of freedom, that is, freedom as "lordship," revolves around the relationship between a subject and an object. The second paradigm, freedom as "community," or communicative freedom, is based on a subject-to-subject relationship. The third paradigm is freedom as "creative initiative." As Moltmann expresses it, this is the freedom that exists "in the relationship of subjects to a *project*."[15] I argue that focusing on this dimension of freedom offers possibilities for a more public understanding of freedom in the kingdom of the Spirit. If freedom is understood as creative initiative, then God's followers can be understood as God's co-creators. They are God's created co-workers, free to participate in the life of the Trinity as *cooperatio.*

The idea of an evolving trinitarian doctrine of freedom can also be understood in terms of the following progression: freedom "from," freedom "among," and freedom "to." The Father sends the Son so that through his liberating work, in the power of the Spirit, Christian believers may experience new life, freed *from* inward and outward forms of oppression. Gathered together in the church, the Son's body, and united by the Spirit, the Father's children experience freedom *among* their brothers and sisters. But this

[15] Ibid., 216. Original italics.

freedom is not simply intended for the enjoyment of relational happiness. Liberated by the Son and empowered by the Spirit, the created co-creators have the freedom *to* participate in the Father's ongoing work of creation. The idea of freedom "to" is an essential aspect of co-creation. Importantly, seen from the perspective of human experience, it marks a shift from the common preoccupation with freedom from oppression in our world, and freedom expressed through service and solidarity towards those in chains, to emphasize the possibility of freedom to create a better world, in active collaboration with others.

Moltmann presents the three dimensions of the trinitarian doctrine of freedom as "strata" rather than as chronological stages. All three dimensions co-exist within the history of the Trinity, and also within every experience of freedom. Nevertheless, there is a "future" logic at work as well. The kingdom of the Father presses forward towards the kingdom of the Son, which in turn presses towards the kingdom of the Spirit. As Moltmann explains, "According to Joachim, the times and forms of the kingdom are so entwined with one another that the one is already pregnant with the rest […]."[16] Thus the experience of freedom in history, which is always partial, drives forwards towards the unhindered experience of freedom, for human beings and all of creation, in the future kingdom of glory. The human work of co-creation anticipates this future.

Future

Reflecting from the perspective of Christian faith on the evolutionary processes out of which the *created* co-creator emerges, Hefner adds an eschatological dimension to his theory. He presents creation as existing in a state of continuous unfolding, "defined

[16] Ibid., 205.

not so much by what it has been and is now, but rather by what it can become."[17] It is a moving system whose evolution is unpredictable. Hefner makes the point—richly elaborated by dynamic systems theory—that it is possible to perceive the continuities of evolution retrospectively, but not to predict them ahead of time.[18] This openness towards an undetermined future exists in all creation. Creation is not pre-programmed. In faith, it can be seen to be inscribed within the open future of the new creation. Viewing the processes of nature from an eschatological angle highlights a theological point. As Hefner puts it, "God is able to provide new possibilities and new futures without destroying the life-giving continuities with our origins."[19] The evolutionary continuities find their theological counterpart in the continuity of God's work in the past, God's ongoing work in the present, and God's anticipated work in the future. The history of creation unfolds and remains open in God.

Hefner insists that the freedom of the created co-creator, especially as it is expressed in the cultural forms of myth and ritual, will enable creation to enter this future. He makes the bold suggestion that "*Homo sapiens* is a proposal for the future evolution of the planet."[20] Human culture, including technological culture, can be a vehicle for the fulfillment of God's purposes for creation. According to Hefner, God's purpose for human beings as created co-creators is significant indeed: they are to actualize a "wholesome" future for the rest of creation. From a christological perspective,

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[17] Hefner, *Human Factor*, 43.

[18] John H. Holland, *Emergence: From Chaos to Order* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1998).

[19] Hefner, *Human Factor*, 47.

[20] Ibid., 50.

this is the future that Jesus opened up for humanity. Jesus sets forth what created co-creators, in freedom, can become.[21]

The future is an important theme for Moltmann as well and, like Hefner, he stresses the continuity between past and future, with a particular focus on the history of God. Moltmann's doctrine of the Trinity emphasizes not only the social character of the triune God, but also the trinitarian history of God with the world. Likewise, his doctrine of creation emphasizes the complex intertwining of times in the history of the world and the history of God.[22] In Moltmann's scheme, it is the Holy Spirit who provides continuity between the past and the future in the history of God. Pneumatology is situated in the present, between christology (which looks to the past) and eschatology (which looks to the future).[23] The forward movement of history towards an eschatological horizon of hope is a recurring theme. Importantly for Moltmann, the future horizon is not something that recedes continually into the distance, forever out of reach. Rather, the future comes towards the present, always about to be realized.

Analyzing the impact of Platonism on the Christian faith, Moltmann observes that the idea of heaven, or God's *eternity*, displaced the idea of the coming kingdom, or God's *future*. He argues that retrieving an eschatological perspective focused on the future makes it possible for Christians to anticipate the kingdom of God in the present, and for them to work with others to begin to realize it concretely in the power of the Spirit.

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[21] Ibid., 248.

[22] Drawing on biblical tradition, Moltmann distinguishes between five different strands of time in the history of God: a) the time of time of the right and opportune moment; b) historical time; c) the messianic time; d) eschatological time; and e) eternal time. See Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 124. He constructs a complex argument using verb tenses to describe the intertwining of past, present and future.

[23] Moltmann, *Spirit*, 18.

Moltmann states: "The kingdom of God ahead of us that is going to change the world becomes more important than the religious heaven above us."[24] This has important implications for a theological understanding of human beings as created co-creators and their role in the history of the kingdom. The future opens time and space for the fulfillment of the potentialities of people and places. It allows for the setting forth of projects for changing the world, and for the possibility that these can be realized. In this way, the Holy Spirit collaborates with God's created co-creators to bring the new creation into the present, although it is experienced only partially and in tension with the contradictory realities of this world. This tension between the present and the future, between the world as it is, as it should be, and as it will be, is a generative tension that energizes the work of God's created co-creators.

Another way of understanding the created co-creator is through Moltmann's trinitarian reading of the *imago Dei.* Human beings are created in the image of God. As such, they are *imago Dei.* They are created in the image of their Creator. As such, they are created co-creators. But Moltmann argues that the *imago* is not a *fait accompli.* Rather, human beings are in the process of becoming like God: "The true likeness to God is to be found, not at the beginning of God's history with mankind, but at its end […]."[25] In other words, the *imago* is oriented towards the future and needs to be actualized. All three persons of the Trinity are involved in this process of human transformation. The *imago Dei* in human beings is fulfilled by the *imago Christi*. The Son's redeeming work makes it possible for human beings to be created anew by the Spirit, in God's image. In

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[24] Ibid., 111.

[25] Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 225.

this life, it is the Spirit who sanctifies those who follow the Son, gradually transforming them into the Son's likeness, as they look forward in hope to becoming one with God in the eschatological transfiguration of all of creation. Moltmann writes:

> So likeness to God […] is charge and hope, imperative and promise. Sanctification has justification as its presupposition, and glorification as its hope and its future. In the messianic light of the gospel, the human being's likeness to God appears as a historical process with an eschatological termination; it is not a static condition. *Being* human means *becoming* human in this process.[26]

Expressed in these terms, sanctification can seem like a magical process. Rather, I believe that sanctification is the messy process of becoming human as the Spirit draws people into relationship with each other. Becoming human is also about learning what it means to be a created co-creator by doing the patiently negotiated, often frustrating, but also ingenious and hopeful work of building a better future for this world. In this way, human beings participate concretely, in time and through a rich learning process, in the work of the future creation. The human work of co-creation is fuelled by the hope that a better future is possible. As agents of new creation, in the power of the Spirit, the created co-creators become agents of hope.

Agency

In summarizing his theory of the created co-creator, Hefner states that the purpose of human beings is "to be *the agency*, acting in freedom, to birth the future […]."[27] Here "agency," used as a common noun, primarily conveys the sense that human beings are to perform the function or duty of God's agents, although Hefner removes any suggestion of coercion by stressing that they act in freedom, as explained above. As God's agency, the

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[26] Ibid., 227.

[27] Hefner, *Human Factor*, 27.

created co-creators are authorized to accomplish work on God's behalf, that is, to participate in the work of creation. In other words, human beings have been given *responsibility* to act as co-creators of the world's future. From a Christian perspective, this means working in practical ways to realize the coming kingdom of God in concrete situations in the present, as discussed in the previous section. In this section, I assert that in faith, men and women acting as God's agents are not only given the responsibility to be co-creators, but also the *power to create*. I use "agency" as an abstract noun, and in the context of co-creation I take it to mean the *capacity of human beings to harness their collective capabilities to shape their worlds.* In this sense, I argue that agency is an enactment of power understood in trinitarian terms.

Hefner's theory of the created co-creator has stirred up its fair share of controversy. How can human beings claim to be co-creators alongside God? It seems to verge on blasphemy. Hefner remarks: "It is the *co* that causes misgivings for theologians, because it implies that humans are somehow on the same level with God, at least in the significance of their actions."[28] From this angle, the theory appears to promote hubris. Even many scientists object to its seeming anthropocentrism, suggesting instead the need for a bio-centric approach to the world. The second major objection to the co-creator theory comes from the opposite angle. Rather than faulting the idea for being too arrogant, some accuse it of being unworthy of human beings. By claiming that the purpose of God's created co-creators is "to birth the future that is most wholesome for the nature that has birthed us,"[29] Hefner suggests that human beings are to be understood in

[28] Ibid., 236.

[29] Ibid., 27.

the light of the evolutionary processes out of which they have emerged, and that their role is to serve the natural order by actualizing the next phase of nature's ongoing evolution. Those who find this idea unacceptable presumably consider the human story to be exceptional and quite separate from the rest of creation.

Hefner's critics have proposed alternative terminology for created co-creators, including "creative creatures" and "co-creative creatures." However, he finds all such terms inadequate for conveying the dual nature of the human being as both conditioned and free. He also points to a more fundamental reality:

> Although, clearly, the co-creator has no equality with God the creator, inasmuch as the former is a contingent creature and dependent upon the creator, nevertheless the very use of the word *creator*, even in a derivative sense, establishes a distinctive quality for humans. Furthermore, the word points to the essential character of the human, to be a kind of co-creator.[30]

I appreciate Hefner's insistence on retaining the designation of created co-creator for human beings. It goes to the heart of human agency. I believe that it holds potential to be a transformative identity for Christians and others of every faith and persuasion. I too have encountered a good deal of reticence towards the concept among Christian colleagues and friends. There are huge obstacles in the broader culture to the idea of citizens adopting the identity of co-creator. I will develop this argument in the next two chapters. However, I agree with Hefner that in spite of people's discomforts and objections, there is something compelling in the idea that has not gone unnoticed:

> […] these positions, critical of the created co-creator imagery, nevertheless recognize one of its most important dimensions—its tremendous dynamism and energy. Those who raise the first objection fear that this energy will get out of

[30] Ibid., 39.

> hand; the second, that it will be wasted on ends too small. Precisely because of this enormous energy, the created co-creator concept is a dangerous one.[31]

The concern that the created co-creator will "get out of hand" is a fear of what will happen if people become intoxicated with this energy and with a sense of their own power. Whether or not this is truly a frightening prospect depends on how power is understood. I distinguish between three different types of power that exist in parallel with the three paradigms of freedom discussed above. Most commonly, power is understood in terms of domination, or power exercised *over* others. This is a zero-sum understanding of power: some people have it; most don't. The person or entity that holds the pie decides how it will be distributed, if at all. Power can also be understood in collective or relational terms. This is power *with*: people acting together are more powerful than people acting alone. Collective power is mass power, and can veer easily in the direction of domination. Relational power conveys the idea that power can be shared, especially when it comes to decision-making. In other words, it is possible for many people who are interested in a slice of the pie to deliberate over how it will be shared. But there is still only one pie. Finally, there is the power to make more, bigger, and different kinds of pies. This is a relational and generative understanding of power. It involves construction. It is the power *to create*.

When human beings exercise co-creative power to shape their environments, they are exercising agency. Agency is a creative response to a *context.* This responsiveness is highlighted by Mustafa Emibayer and Ann Mishe in a seminal article entitled "What is Agency?" They argue that the core meaning of agency "lies in the *contextualization* of social experience […through which] in deliberation with others (or sometimes self-

[31] Ibid., 237.

reflexively, with themselves) actors gain in the capacity to make considered decisions that may challenge received patterns of action […].”[32] Challenge, though, is not the same as change. Civic Studies elaborates this idea by stressing that co-creation is about altering contexts. In this view, agency is understood as people’s capacity to act with others in diverse and open environments to shape the world around them.[33] In today’s world, people talk about the need to change the structures of society, but mostly this is perceived as an impossible task. Efforts to improve conditions of life seldom go beyond discussions about how to distribute the pie, while the pie itself is taken as given. Human agency is in short supply, yet this is in my opinion the most important defining characteristic of the created co-creator.

A trinitarian reading of God’s agency offers resources to catalyze the agency of God’s created co-creators. In every respect, God’s power is creative: creating, redeeming and re-creating the world. In the ongoing act of creation, the Father makes room for created co-creators. God is not fully “in charge” of the work of creation, but shares this work with the co-creators. As a theological idea, co-creation therefore challenges the commonly held conception of God as the all-powerful and commanding mastermind of creation. It reinforces Moltmann’s concept of the open Trinity, making room for men and women. It also expands the argument that I have already made for *cooperatio* among the three Persons to include human beings as well.

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[32] Mustafa Emibayer and Ann Mishe, “What Is Agency?,” *American Journal of Sociology* 103, no. 4 (1998): 994-5.

[33] Harry C. Boyte et al., “The New Civic Politics: Civic Theory and Practice for the Future,” 2007, http://activecitizen.tufts.edu/civic-studies/summer-institute/summer-institute-of-civic-studies-framing-statement/ (accessed 1/31/16).

The gospels are replete with examples of how Jesus exercised agency during the course of his earthly life, calling disciples, working miracles, challenging authorities and so on. He not only proclaimed the coming of the kingdom of God, but also enacted it in startling ways. However, the agency of the Son is demonstrated most strikingly—and paradoxically—in the crucifixion. Although his patient endurance of his arrest, trial and death on the cross might ordinarily be interpreted as a relinquishment of agency, or a handing over of power in traditional terms, the Son's agency is in fact on full display, in a way that turns conventional human categories upside-down. He exercises agency by entering knowingly into suffering. Thus Moltmann calls the suffering and death of the Son a *passio activa*, that is, "a path of suffering that he entered upon quite deliberately, a dying that he consciously affirmed."[34] Through passionate love for the world expressed in active suffering, the Son becomes the agent of God's work of liberation and reconciliation. He bursts open the finite human context and thus *creates* the possibility for the world to be re-created in the power of the Spirit.

The Spirit is perhaps most often understood in dynamistic terms as the "energy" of the Father and the Son. From a trinitarian standpoint, however, Moltmann insists that the Spirit is *also* a Person of the Trinity, that is, a "subject" who exercises agency. He argues that the eschatological work of the Holy Spirit, the work of the new creation, proceeds actively from the Spirit in order to glorify the Son, and through him, the Father. By transforming men and women and drawing them into fellowship, and by raising the dead to new life, the Spirit gathers them together and in these acts glorifies the Son and the Father. In this respect, for Moltmann, "[…] the Spirit is not an energy proceeding

[34] Moltmann, *Trinity*, 81.

from the Father and the Son; it is a subject from whose activity the Son and the Father receive their glory and their union, as well as their glorification through the whole creation, and the world as their eternal home."[35] As I have argued above, the Holy Spirit's agency fully involves human agency. The Spirit does not miraculously transform the world while human beings look on. Rather, the Spirit works through human beings, sometimes in seemingly miraculous ways. Moltmann states: "Through faith the hitherto unexplored creative powers of God are thrown open in men and women. So faith means becoming creative with God, and in his Spirit."[36] In other words, faith enables people to embrace the identity of created co-creator.

The doctrine of the triune God also illuminates the idea of the created co-creator. The claim that men and women are not simply God's co-creators, but God's *created* co-creators, gives full recognition to the work of the Father as creator. Human beings are not God's equals. Human life begins in God and remains rooted in the creative ground of the divine life. In a world marked by evil and sin, the Father sends and surrenders the Son so that the relationship between God and human beings can be restored. Thus it is the Son who makes the *co*- relationship possible, enabling us to be God's created *co*-creators. The Son also breaks our isolation as humans and draws us into his body, and thus into fellowship with each other. As created *co*-creators in the Son, we collaborate not only with God, but engage in collective creative work with other human beings as well. The Son redeems our flawed and failed efforts as co-creators, and our destructive actions too.

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[35] Ibid., 126.

[36] Moltmann, *Spirit*, 115.

As Mary Hess points out, "humans are both creative and death-dealing […]."[37] In his death and resurrection, Jesus the Son redeems the ambiguities and contradictions of human existence and makes it possible for his fellow human beings to live into the new creation.

Finally, it is the Spirit who endows people with the creative powers to participate in God's work in creation, that is, to fulfill their role as created co-*creators*. A pneumatological reflection on the created co-creator is essential for understanding human agency in both individual and collective terms. Through the indwelling of the Spirit, people develop agency. Moltmann observes: "[…] believers are not merely the passive objects of divine sanctification. They are also the new determining subjects of the Gestalt or configuration of their own lives."[38] Although Christians might at times be more conscious than others of the Spirit's work in their lives, I believe that the Spirit can and does work in and though all human beings in different ways, as they grow into the created co-creator role. As I will argue in the next chapter, this is an identity that needs to be discovered, developed, and assumed through empowering and contextual processes of learning.

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[37] Mary E. Hess, "Learning with Digital Technologies: Privileging Persons over Machines," *Journal of Moral Theology* 4, no. 1 (2015): 131.

[38] Moltmann, *Spirit*, 175.

CHAPTER 3

A PEDAGOGY OF CO-CREATION

The idea of co-creation first came alive to me not through theology, but through my work in the field of democracy education in South Africa and a number of other African countries. Co-creation flows from education. Although all human beings are created co-creators, according to Hefner's argument, in the sense of having evolved as cultural beings through the evolutionary processes of nature, I do not believe that they are innately equipped to fulfill their large and daunting purpose of birthing a wholesome future for humanity and the rest of creation. Co-creation does not amount simply to doing creative work, whether on a small or large scale, individually or with others. It is the joint enterprise of human beings to build a good and sustainable world. As Dorothée Sölle writes, "The task of co-creation is not tantamount to planting flowers in the garden and feeling good about it." Rather, she states, "To become involved in the work of co-creation means dealing with the nothingness that threatens to swallow us up."[1] How is this to be done? I contend that people have to learn how to become co-creators. This involves a process of living into a conscious identity of created co-creator, and developing skills and habits for effective action in the world. In particular, from the

[1] Dorothée Sölle and Shirley A. Cloyes, *To Work and to Love: A Theology of Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 38. Sölle argues that the continuing creation is still *ex nihilo*, out of chaos and against powers of destruction.

perspective of democracy education, it involves learning and adopting a new citizen identity—that of "citizen as co-creator."

In this chapter, I give special attention to the educational thinking of N. F. S. Grundtvig, the 19th century Danish Lutheran pastor (b. 1783; d. 1872), a vital but little-known resource for a pedagogy of co-creation. A note of background is in order. Grundtvig was an independent thinker often in conflict with mainstream Lutheranism. He was also a prolific author who wrote on history, mythology, education and theology. Much of his work has not been translated and remains inaccessible to English-speaking audiences. Today, beyond Lutheran circles where he is appreciated as a hymn-writer, Grundtvig is best known outside of Denmark as the father of the Scandinavian "folk high school" movement, although he himself did not establish any schools.[2] His educational philosophy was totally integrated with his understanding of human life and Christian life. He summed this up in the statement "Man first, then Christian." For him, human beings

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[2] The word in Danish is *folkehøjskole*, but the rendering in English as "folk high schools" is rather misleading on a number of levels. Folk high schools are not institutions for secondary education as in the case of the "high school" in anglophone countries. Rather, they are schools for "higher" learning, that is, for adult education, although quite different to traditional universities. "Folk" does not have the same resonance in English as it has in other Germanic languages where it means "the people." The best translation of *folkehøjskole* that I have encountered is actually "people's colleges." See Asoke Bhattacharya, "Adult Education in India: Relevance of Grundtvig," in *Grundtvig in International Perspective: Studies in the Creativity of Interaction*, ed. A. M. Allchin, et al. (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2000). However, I retain "folk high school" as it is commonly used in the literature.

The folk high school movement spread fairly rapidly from Denmark to Norway, Sweden and Finland in the second half of the 19th century, and reached large numbers of young adults, especially among rural populations. The schools in these countries all took on a slightly different character and have survived with varying degrees of success into the 21st century. Several hundred still exist. Folk high schools were also established in Germany and the Baltic countries, and more isolated experiments with this form of education occurred in France, Switzerland, Great Britain and what was then known as Czechoslovakia. Other folk high schools were established in the USA (including the well-known Highlander Center), Canada, Japan, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Argentina and Israel. African experiments occurred mostly in the 1980s and 1990s in Nigeria, Tanzania and Ethiopia. Idasa's work followed in the new millennium. See K. E. Bugge, "Some International Varieties of Grundtvig Inspiration," in *Grundtvig in International Perspective: Studies in the Creativity of Interaction*, ed. A. M. Allchin, et al. (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2000).

are a divine experiment, uniting flesh and spirit. Both aspects are equally important. This is a far cry from pietism with its disdain for earthly things. Grundtvig believed that without being "awakened" to the reality of human life, people could not engage eternal life. Thus, the folk high school was to be a school for life—this life—awakening young people to their reality, in all its promise and its anguish. It would enable them to solve real problems in everyday life, and also ready them for faith, which Grundtvig understood as the unique work of the Holy Spirit in the church. Hal Koch explains:

> Men must be living before they can become Christians. […] Christ did not come to earth with a whole new life and a whole new language, but became a man and entered human life, to which he thereby gave rebirth into the life the creator had willed from the beginning. Salvation is not the genesis of something wholly new and unknown, but is a *re*-birth of the created life, and salvation presupposes creation.[3]

Idasa's democracy education program was strongly influenced by the Scandinavian folk high school tradition.[4] Through extensive work in South Africa and other African countries to create non-formal "schools for democracy" inspired in part by the Grundtvigian tradition, I learned that there are important differences between Grundtvig's philosophy and the better-known popular education tradition pioneered by Paulo Freire and his followers. Although these differences hold important implications for co-creating better societies, they remain largely unexplored. Below, I deepen my reflection on this theme, as I take a closer look at the question of how people learn the

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[3] Hal Koch and Llewellyn Jones, *Grundtvig* (Yellow Springs, Ohio: Antioch Press, 1952), 141.

[4] From 2002 to 2009, Idasa collaborated with Swedish partners in popular education who introduced us to the folk high schools in that country, as well as to some of their counterparts in Denmark. Our "Schools for democracy" project was widely implemented in South Africa, and also in Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique and Angola, until Idasa's democracy education program closed at the end of 2011. Since then, I have continued this work in a consulting capacity in Burundi.

meaning of co-creation in the context of their everyday lives as citizens, and some of the serious obstacles that stand in the way of this learning process.

In this chapter I deal with co-creation as a "political" idea, although from a Grundtvigian perspective, this is an integral part of Christian life. For Grundtvig, politics and pedagogy are both expressions of theology. The chapter is divided into three sections. First, I consider the importance of gaining a new understanding of citizenship to counter the narrow meanings that currently prevail. Second, I focus on how citizens gain a sense of collective agency, to overcome widespread feelings of powerlessness and victimhood. In particular, I address the tension between critical pedagogy and what I call the pedagogy of co-creation. Finally, I reflect on how citizens learn to work together as co-creators in order to build stronger communities and a better world. Here, I deal with the problem of idealized visions of cooperation in the public sphere, and suggest that a different understanding of politics is needed in order for collaborative work to be accomplished.

Rethinking Citizenship

In today's world where refugee crises and tensions over illegal immigration seem to deepen by the year, the idea of citizenship has been widely interrogated and even discredited. This is because the citizen is defined in narrow, legalistic terms as someone who has the right by birth or naturalization to live and work in a certain country. Some enlarge this definition by adding the right (and also the responsibility) to vote, and the right to receive basic services. However, the definition remains entirely state-centered. I support the paradigm shift—promoted by Civic Studies—towards a more expansive understanding of the citizen. Peter Levine expresses it as follows:

> I am going to assume that you are a citizen. I do not mean someone who possesses legal rights and responsibilities in relation to a particular government, but rather a member of one or more communities that you want to improve. Your communities may range from a block of houses or a single church to the whole earth. You want to address these communities' problems and influence their directions, but more than that, you want to *make* them through your work, your thought, your passion. You want to be a co-creator of your worlds.[5]

Adopting a broader definition of the citizen also calls for a different understanding of democracy, beyond simply the idea of elections and representative government. Josiah Ober, the classicist and political theorist, in a meticulous etymological study of various classical regime types, argues that democracy does not mean the rule of the majority:

> Rather it means, more capaciously, "the empowered *demos*"—it is the regime in which the *demos* gains a collective capacity to effect change in the public realm. And so it is not just a matter of *control* of a public realm but the collective *strength* and *ability* to act within that realm and, indeed, to reconstitute the public realm through action.[6]

Conceived in this way, the central actor in democracy is the citizen as co-creator. Ober suggests that our contemporary conception of democracy might be usefully expanded by a retrieval of the original meaning. Given the impoverished, election-oriented democracy paradigm that currently dominates not only Western countries but also most of the world, Ober's definition does indeed point towards possibilities for rehabilitating what has become a thin and questioned concept in many quarters.

The task of rethinking citizenship and democracy is of obvious interest to me as a democracy educator. However, this is not simply a matter of personal professional interest. Rather, I am convinced that redefining the citizen's identity and role in a society

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[5] Peter Levine, "The Case for Civic Studies," in *Civic Studies: Approaches to the Emerging Field*, ed. Peter Levine and Karol Edward Soltan (Washington, DC: Bringing Theory to Practice, 2014), 3.

[6] Josiah Ober, "The Original Meaning of "Democracy": Capacity to Do Things, Not Majority Rule," *Constellations* 15, no. 1 (2008): 7. Original italics.

is a matter of fundamental importance in order for all human beings to realize their purpose as created co-creators. The citizen as co-creator is a rooted identity. It offers to restore people's dignity and develop their agency, whether at the level of local communities defined by geography, religious or ethnic affiliation, or other interests, or at the national level. Even migrants faced with the crisis of rootlessness can claim new, if only temporary, bonds as they engage in the life of the communities in which they find themselves—including in refugee camps—and undertake to work with others to improve their conditions. Drawing on cultural roots in plural situations can be a way of enriching citizen identity and also the democratic life of communities, whether large or small. To facilitate this, I believe that democracy education is essential for everyone at every level of society, not only school children and marginalized groups, and that the work of democracy education itself needs to be greatly expanded to include every type of professional and occupational training. In this way, the capacity of created co-creators to work together to build a wholesome future can be developed and realized.

Grundtvig, writing over a hundred and fifty years ago in Denmark, captured this vision. Reacting against the cultural colonization of his country by other major European cultures, including what he called the "Roman yoke" of the classical Latin curriculum, Grundtvig developed a passionate commitment to building the identity of the Danish citizen in order to build a flourishing, authentically Danish society. If one reads his work superficially, one might find it jarringly nationalistic. However, Niels Jensen remarks: "Though no one has declared his love of his fatherland with greater warmth than Grundtvig, he is no traditional nationalist. He only recognized that man was necessarily born into a particular nation and would grasp and understand life in this mold and in this

tongue."[7] For Grundtvig the vernacular language with its proverbs and idioms, and traditional culture with its ballads, myths and histories offered deep resources for building a good society. Although his homogenous cultural context was vastly different from today's more diverse societies, including 21st century Denmark itself, I believe that his understanding of the citizen and the role of education still holds deep wisdom for our time.

The overarching aim of Grundtvig's educational vision is "enlightenment for life"—*livsoplysning*. He understands the word "enlightenment" in a somewhat different way from how it is typically used today. Holger Hansen explains that Grundtvig is concerned about "making people aware of their own identity and possibilities in their own setting and within their own way of life, of putting man at the center in his historical, national and religious context."[8] For Grundtvig, the surest route to such popular enlightenment is through living interaction[9] among people from different backgrounds across the whole society. For this to happen, he believes that a particular kind of "people's education" is needed. The popular enlightenment or awareness that he so desires to see does not come about automatically. He expresses the view that people from *every* occupation—farmers, tradesmen, sailors and others—all need some education "other than that which is gained behind the plow, in the shop, climbing the mast of a

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[7] N. F. S. Grundtvig and Niels Lyhne Jensen, *A Grundtvig Anthology: Selections from the Writings of N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783-1872)* (Greenwood, S.C.: Attic Press, 1984), 29.

[8] Holger Bernt Hansen, "Grundtvig and the Third World: The Transfer of Grundtvig's Ideas to Other Peoples and Cultures," in *Heritage and Prophecy: Grundtvig and the English-Speaking World*, ed. A. M. Allchin, et al. (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1993), 307.

[9] "Living interaction" among learners and teachers, and among learners themselves, was one of Grundtvig's core educational principles. This was a radically different approach to the magisterial lecture.

vessel or in the place of business."[10] He also urges that "public servants and professional men"[11] need the same education. This is the purpose of the folk high school, which he describes as providing "an indigenous, general education, on a continuous basis, [to] enable [people] to understand the structure of our society and also help them to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of the various vocations as contrasted with one another."[12]

Grundtvig envisages the folk high schools as providing an opportunity for people from every walk of life to learn to see themselves as *citizens first*, "to become Danish human beings in all vocations."[13] In so doing, they will discover a civic dimension to their work and gain an understanding of how their vocation fits into the society, what other vocations contribute, and how they can interact usefully with each other. The aim is for the people together to build a thriving society through their *daily work*—citizens as co-creators—not only through voluntary, after-hours civic effort, which is often how "civic engagement" has come to be understood in the American context. I find this to be an extraordinary vision for democracy education: unleashing the powers and capacities of every citizen, or, as Grundtvig put it, "the fostering of all our vital efforts."[14] In the contemporary context, this can be taken as a challenge to citizens in every setting—

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[10] N. F. S. Grundtvig, "The School for Life," in *Selected Writings*, ed. Johannes Knudsen (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 156.

[11] Ibid., 155. Although the very first folk high schools admitted only young men, it was not long before young women were also admitted.

[12] Ibid., 157.

[13] Grundtvig, "A Letter Concerning the Folk High School to Peter Larsen Skraeppenborg in Dons," 173.

[14] Grundtvig, "School for Life," 154.

whether school, sports club, neighborhood, factory, office, town, province, or nation—to understand their role as doing the practical work of building a better society.

Developing Agency

Agency, as I presented it in the previous chapter, is the core characteristic of the created co-creator—the capacity of citizens to work collectively as agents of change in their worlds. But how do people learn agency and what can be done to "teach" it? This question leads me to reflect on the different pedagogical approaches of Grundtvig and Freire. I recognize that these two philosophers of adult education worked in radically different contexts—mid-19th century Scandinavia and mid-to-late 20th century Latin America—although there were also some similarities, especially in terms of social stratification, dramatic inequality, and widespread poverty. Scandinavia of the mid-19th century was nothing like the Scandinavia of today. However, severe political oppression was not part of Grundtvig's experience, while it defined Freire's life and work. My purpose, though, is not to argue the one against the other in terms of their respective contexts. Rather, I reflect on how I have seen Freirean and Grundtvigian pedagogies at work in the South African context, as well as the African countries where I have been involved extensively in democracy education. In particular, as part of my effort to elaborate a pedagogy of co-creation, I consider their effectiveness in terms of developing people's agency.

Like virtually all popular educators in the Two-Thirds world, my work and outlook were powerfully shaped by the theory of Paulo Freire.[15] It was through Freire

[15] His book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, was banned in South Africa by the apartheid government. I still remember obtaining my first personal copy of the book in 1984 at a book fair in neighboring Zimbabwe and smuggling it back to Johannesburg.

that I grasped the liberating possibilities of adult education under apartheid and gained the motivation to leave a university teaching position to do grassroots democracy education. He provided me with the analytical framework with which to rethink the relationship between teacher and student, and to reconceptualize learners as co-creators of knowledge. His contextual, dialogical, problem-posing approach helped me to unlearn many of the teaching methods and habits that I had acquired in the traditional classroom. Freire's concept of "banking education" highlights the impact of top-down, teacher-centered methods that show no respect for people's experience or intelligence, effectively dehumanizing them and robbing them of agency. By contrast, his critical pedagogy focuses on raising consciousness among the oppressed about their situation of oppression, and its patterns and agents of domination. The aim of this process of conscientization is to empower the oppressed to liberate themselves. Thus the Freirean approach aims to develop agency and, in a certain respect, it does. It helps people to name their collective experiences of oppression, and to recognize its systemic dimensions. I would call this understanding of agency "the capacity to struggle." In South Africa, the adult literacy movement and many other grassroots adult education initiatives, including Idasa's—all inspired by Freire—played a significant role in bringing an end to the apartheid regime. I believe, however, that the struggle against oppression is not the same as co-creation.

Arriving at an understanding of the difference between struggle and co-creation marked an important turning point in my work. It was my encounter with Scandinavian popular education and Idasa's experiments with the folk high school model in South Africa that clarified this difference for me, together with the conceptual framework of

public work theory.[16] Following the end of apartheid, South Africa faced the huge challenge of building a new, unified society based on the values of its exemplary constitution, and addressing the deep structural problems created by three centuries of discriminatory rule. Predictably, it was not too long before South Africans started to express disillusionment. Democracy was not bearing the fruits that they had expected. A culture of complaint and blaming began to spread, and angry public protests multiplied. Everyone demanded that the government do a better job of solving their problems for them—a completely unrealistic expectation. Today the anger continues to mount. South Africa finds itself in a difficult situation with a struggling economy, corrupt and divisive politics, deteriorating race relations, and a host of other serious problems. It is a depressing picture and national morale is low, in spite of the positive changes that have happened in the country since the first democratic elections in 1994.

Analysis of the challenges facing South Africa is endless, but I believe that the country is facing a crisis of citizenship. Instead of seeing themselves as co-creators of their shared future, South Africans have cast themselves on the one hand as consumers and critics of government services, and on the other hand as victims of global capital. A constellation of factors has combined to create this situation, including the South African government's embrace of a Western technocratic service delivery paradigm while also paying lip-service to socialism. As a result, citizens do not consider themselves to be agents of change. On the contrary, they are stuck in victim identities, further complicated by aggrieved consumer identities, and caught in an increasingly bitter competition over scarce resources, while depending on the government to rescue them. In my experience,

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[16] For an overview, see Harry C. Boyte, "Constructive Politics as Public Work: Organizing the Literature," *Political theory* 39, no. 5 (2011).

Freirean pedagogy does not help people to move beyond this situation; rather, it traps them in the binary of oppressor and oppressed. Unmasking oppression—a culture of critique—becomes an end in itself because structural change seems almost impossible. This makes the poor and the intelligentsia alike feel powerless and acted upon, victims of power understood only as domination. A third category is needed—a way for people to reimagine themselves, develop agency, and regain hope. This is the identity of citizen as co-creator. If the world we know is going to be remade, it is people themselves—citizens at every level—who will have to do the work.

From a biblical vantage, I maintain that the shift from the identity of victim to co-creator requires a shift from an "Exodus pedagogy" to what might be called a "covenant pedagogy."[17] Freire's liberationist philosophy embodies the former. Liberation theology shares the same aim. Under oppressive conditions, Exodus is necessary. But what happens after that? Moltmann offers an overly optimistic prediction:

> Liberation theology aims to "make us free for freedom" (Gal. 5.1). So for its further development it will take its bearings from the biblical events: the *Exodus* leads to the *covenant.* This means that liberation theology will turn into federal theology simply of its own accord, and the liberating politics of the people in which liberation theology is embedded will turn into democratic politics. It is only in a covenant of free men and women that liberation, once experienced, can be preserved, and it is only in such a covenant that the dangers of new oppression can be averted.[18]

In the light of my experiences in South Africa, the idea that an Exodus mindset can be transformed "simply of its own accord" into a covenant mindset, with its related theology, pedagogy, politics and so on, is completely idealistic. What I have learned is

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[17] This is akin to Luke Bretherton's account of teaching and learning a "common life politics," across the lines of difference that so often divide communities. See Luke Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy: Faith, Citizenship, and the Politics of a Common Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 92.

[18] Moltmann, *Spirit*, 113. Original italics.

that the democratic covenant cannot bear much fruit if people retain an Exodus mentality. The shift to a covenant mindset represents a clear shift in conceptual paradigm. Covenant requires active collaboration between both parties: God and Israel, government and citizens, and also fluid, creative collaboration between Israelites or citizens themselves. Education for democracy is crucial in order for this paradigm shift to happen. People need to learn a new conceptual language and new habits of mind embodied in new practices. If citizens learn to *name* themselves as co-creators, they can begin to adopt the identity and become committed to acquiring the necessary skills. Power needs to be understood not in terms of domination, but as the capacity for collaborative, constructive work to build the society—agency. The rich need this kind of education every bit as much as the poor, in order to move beyond the state-centered democracy paradigm to a new understanding of democracy as the ongoing work of the whole society, with citizens as the central actors.

Grundtvig's educational philosophy is relevant, even in today's very different context. He did not pit the poor against the rich, but believed that all needed a "people's education" so that they might be capable of solving real life problems together and building a better, more egalitarian society. He wrote, "[…] the same potential for educational and cultural achievement is discoverable in both cottage and manor house."[19] In other words, for him, every citizen held essential capacities and resources to create a flourishing Danish society, both peasant and wealthy landowner. Today, the folk high school movement birthed by Grundtvig, as well as the cooperative movement that it nourished, is considered to have played a vital role in the democratization of Denmark

[19] Grundtvig, "School for Life," 156.

and the emancipation of its rural populations, as well as the country's commitment to the social welfare of all its citizens. Hans Henningsen observes:

> It has been said that the Folk High School movement […] performed miracles in Danish Society in the last century. But true as this may be, it was not as a result of any particular agricultural teaching or social criticism carried out in these schools – and this was perhaps the greatest miracle. In the Folk High Schools they always talked more about human life than social life, more about the admirable than the reprehensible, more about happiness than indignation, and at times a lot about faith and personal life.[20]

To the jaded contemporary ear, assailed by the world's many problems, this might sound like an impossibly sunny approach. To many educators today, pedagogy without critique is unthinkable. But the influence of the folk high schools with their hopeful outlook was was transformative. I have discovered through my work that this hopeful spirit, embodied in real strategies for constructive action in the society, can be transformative in our time.

In Idasa's schools for democracy, the five core themes were community, power, everyday politics, organizing, and mutual accountability. The methodology was highly experiential, with much of the learning derived from organizing projects implemented by small groups of participants in their communities, over a period of four to five months. The conceptual framework provided by Civic Studies helped people to name the shifts that were taking place in their own lives as they came to understand themselves as co-creators of their communities. The results, although very local, were often astonishing. Working with neighbors and accessing local resources through schools, businesses, churches, taxi associations, and many more, participants did all of the following and much more: establish food gardens; start after-school centers for orphans; challenge funeral directors to reduce the cost of coffins; help domestic workers to register for

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[20] Hans Henningsen, "The Danish Folk High School," in *Heritage and Prophecy: Grundtvig and the English-Speaking World*, ed. A. M. Allchin, et al. (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1993), 292.

unemployment benefits; educate children about water conservation; and create cultural programs for young people. In my most recent work in Burundi, I have seen project groups organize their communities to create a new path for cattle-herders to lead their animals to grazing and water without upsetting crop farmers; dig compost pits and begin to fill them with appropriately varied organic waste; build latrines for households without any form of sanitation; root out illicit producers of highly alcoholic liquor; and such like.

Through this work, participants and those who collaborated with them developed agency, both individually and collectively, overcoming the feelings of powerlessness that they invariably expressed at the outset of the training. Robert Kegan's description of the "fourth order of mind" captures the emergence of agency that I have witnessed in our schools for democracy as participants ceased to feel that they are being acted upon. They develop greater self-awareness and self-possession as they define and reorient their relationship to the situations in which they find themselves. In individual terms, according to Kegan, with fourth order thinking the self becomes "the *source* of direction and value," thus fostering "the expectation that we be self-initiating, self-correcting, and self-evaluating, rather than depend on others to frame the problems, initiate the adjustments, or determine whether things are going acceptably well […]."[21]

The Grundtvigian influence on Idasa's grassroots schools can be seen in a few important ways. First, there is a belief in the fundamental value of a "general" education for citizenship and democracy. In my early years as a democracy educator, I had many misgivings about whether it was reasonable to expect people to participate in workshops about democracy when they were worried about where their next meal was coming from.

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[21] Robert Kegan, *In over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 168.

The folk high school model (especially in its 19th century expressions) helped me to understand that "learning" the identity of citizen as co-creator, together with other citizens, laid the foundation for transforming a community and solving a myriad of common problems. Collaborating with fellow citizens at the local level and drawing on local resources to deal with shared challenges in everyday life is another key Grundtvigian theme. We used the experiential, dialogical methodologies (influenced by Freire) that form part of the standard adult education repertoire in South Africa. However, our exposure to Grundtvig's philosophy led us to orient our program away from structural analysis and towards building hope through concrete problem-solving and the construction of public goods. We explicitly shifted the power analysis beyond the relationship between oppressor and oppressed to an analysis of how to *build* power through collaborative public work. This is how agency is develops, in action. Mutual accountability and self-critique become more important than criticism of other actors.

Overall, the influence of the Grundtvigian folk high schools on Idasa's work melded with the theory of public work and the broader framework of Civic Studies. As Levine puts it, in Civic Studies "there is just one fundamental question: What should you and I do?"[22] This question can only be posed if people have agency. In the post-apartheid setting, it seemed important to move beyond a politics of protest towards what we called a politics of development, in which all citizens played a role in improving their communities. Importantly, this marked a shift away from the human rights-based advocacy approach of most civil society organizations. We acknowledged that advocacy remained important in certain situations, and taught advocacy skills. However, it wasn't

[22] Levine, "Case," 5.

difficult for our participants to recognize that the widely used language of "rights-holders"—citizens—claiming their due from "duty-bearers"—the government—more often than not masked a victim mentality and conveyed a culture of complaint that engendered a disgruntled waiting attitude rather than developing people's agency.

Some people have questioned the local emphasis of the Idasa schools for democracy for being too piecemeal and even placatory in the face of serious structural problems in the society. This critique ignores the fact that the goal of the democracy schools, in addition to the implementation of concrete projects, is to develop a new citizen identity and also skills and habits of mind for collective agency, with a view to ongoing participation in efforts to build a flourishing community. This vision, in turn, is rooted in a more expansive desire to build a *good society*, insisting that this is the responsibility of all citizens, while acknowledging that accomplishing this is a complex task. I have found that holding up the "larger goal" of a good society energizes people by giving a bigger meaning to their local efforts. Thus, for example, instead of seeing the building of a latrine primarily as an act of kindness to assist an individual family, it can become part of a broader vision to improve public health in that locality and indeed to contribute towards building a more prosperous country, together with the efforts of countless other citizens. Instead of the crushing sense of powerlessness that so often results from structural critique of the society, the schools for democracy are based on genuine hope that change is possible, based on collective endeavors of the people and catalyzing local resources. This represents an incremental, co-creative approach to change involving citizens from all sides, rather than a polarizing, revolutionary approach.

Reflecting on the potential for grassroots citizen initiatives to transform the church and society from the bottom up, Moltmann observes: "Without a total social perspective community work loses itself in pragmatism, and citizens' action groups remain ambivalent. But without initiatives in the local, direct sphere these perspectives remain abstract and empty."[23] The problem of the ambivalence of local citizen initiatives that might satisfy the interests of some, but work against the interests of others, points to the need for people to learn political skills that enable them to negotiate differences and reach acceptable compromises. This is the focus of the next section.

Working Together

There are many forces in today's world that make it difficult for people to work together—to be effective *co*-creators. In the previous section, I treated the archetypes that have evolved around "oppressor" and "oppressed." These easily translate into a Manichean way of thinking that divides people into unambiguous, moralized categories of good and evil. In addition, a highly competitive culture spurred on the one hand by a scarcity mindset and on the other by rampant individualism undermines efforts to foster collaboration. The culture of competition is reinforced by deeply entrenched patterns in education. The traditional classroom is a competitive arena that pits individual students against each other. This competitive ethos is reinforced from an early age by testing. It is interesting that Grundtvig, already in his time, was alert to how damaging such a competitive culture was to the spirit of citizenship. Not only was he determined that there

[23] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution of Messianic Ecclesiology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 332.

should be no tests and exams in the folk high school, but also that it should have an open door policy that would admit students from any station in life.

The idea of "living interaction" across lines of difference is Grundtvig's foundational pedagogical principle which he believes will result in a sense of common belonging, or as he puts it, "an increased joy in the community of the people."[24] He recognizes the existence of tension in communities. He states: "In a human community there is always the obvious danger of inner dissolution, increasing conflict, and growing dissatisfaction with one's lot in life."[25] Deepening citizen identity through the folk high schools is the solution that he proposes to this problem. It would appear that he himself was a cranky and contentious character, given to polemic in his writing and quite frequently at loggerheads with church authorities and others, thus facing preaching bans and the like. Nevertheless, according to Hal Koch, he came to recognize that "Freedom on both sides (i.e., on listeners' and on speakers') is the basic requirement."[26] His deep love of Denmark and its culture overrode his angry outbursts and inspired his fundamental appreciation for the capacity of his fellow Danes.

In 1872, the year of Grundtvig's death, by which time "Grundtvigianism" had come to be expressed through a number of different movements, and his followers had formed or joined political parties on both the conservative and liberal sides of the political spectrum, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, a Norwegian admirer, praised Grundtvig for his "'spiritual capaciousness,' his ability to see friends amongst enemies and make full

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[24] Grundtvig, "The Danish High School," 162.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Grundtvig quoted in Koch, *Grundtvig*, 129.

friends of half-friends by showing confidence in them."[27] What I appreciate in the Dane is a profoundly *public* sensibility. The folk high school was not simply conceived as a place where citizens would become friends. The purpose was to build a thriving society. Working towards this goal could unleash potential of citizens. Without using the term co-creator, Grundtvig understood the creative power of the vocation of citizen expressed through everyday work, and believed that it could bring together people of different persuasions. I do not believe, however, that an appeal to a common national identity, especially in our time, is sufficient. Citizens need to learn the conceptual language of co-creation and a set of broad political skills to enable them to work together. The question is how best these concepts and skills can be taught and learned.

Reflecting on the dynamics of the classroom in our time, Parker Palmer analyzes not only the competitiveness that isolates students from one another, but the connection between this competitive spirit and positivist epistemology. If we see ourselves as "knowers" adopting an objective stance towards the "known," this essentially places us in an adversarial relationship with the world. As Palmer explains, "We seek knowledge in order to resist chaos, to rearrange reality, or to alter the constructions others have made. We value knowledge that enables us to coerce the world into meeting our needs – no matter how much violence we must do."[28] Palmer has reflected extensively on how to re-establish relationality in the classroom. For him, this goes beyond encouraging a sense of community and mutual responsibility among learners and teachers. It involves

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[27] Anders Pontoppidan Thyssen, "Grundtvigianism as a Movement until around 1900," in *N.F.S. Grundtvig, Tradition and Renewal: Grundtvig's Vision of Man and People, Education and the Church, in Relation to World Issues Today*, ed. Christian Thodberg and Anders Pontoppidan Thyssen (Copenhagen: Det Danske Selskab, 1983), 383.

[28] Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 23.

acknowledging the relatedness of all things, the fact that "reality is communal."[29] This calls for rebuilding the relationship between the "knower" and the "known," setting aside the idea that "objects of knowledge" are passive and those "in the know" are active agents. This reveals a desire to "reweave the great community of our lives"[30] in order to rediscover that "we are in the world and the world is within us."[31] Palmer highlights the spiritual dimension of this new epistemology in his proposal for a pedagogy of prayer which allows us to discover not only a deep awareness of our connectedness with each other, but also an awareness of God who reaches towards us.

Like many teachers, I have experienced moments of awe while conducting workshops, when participants have "come together" in a remarkable way and the process of mutual learning has been far richer than I expected. One of the most dramatic examples was during a party agent training program ahead of South Africa's first democratic elections when members from warring parties arrived with weapons, and left arm in arm, buoyed by new faith in each other and in the democratic process that we were about enact together. The classroom can be a powerful place of transformation through respectful interaction. Palmer's writing on this theme and the ways of "holding" the space for such learning, especially in moments of tension and conflict, is the most powerful that I have read. However, I believe that he places too strong an emphasis on decision-making by consensus.

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[29] Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 94.

[30] Palmer, *To Know*, xvi.

[31] Ibid., 35.

The world outside the classroom presents a very different, more agonistic environment where it is often not possible for minds to converge exactly. The faithful practice of relatedness in the classroom, or even in other environments where formal dialogue processes are facilitated does not adequately equip people to deal with conflict in the "real world." Rather, in my experience, these "oasis" moments often set people up for disappointment and frustration, especially if they come to expect that conflict can and should be overcome. Conflict is part of the human condition. In Idasa's schools for democracy, we attempted to deal with this by placing a priority on hands-on community organizing work conducted by participants. Concrete projects enable people to shift beyond inter-subjectivity in order to concentrate on co-creation—getting things done. They also provide endlessly rich opportunities for learning within an action-reflection curriculum.

Co-creative citizen action in real life settings is a messy business, not least because of clashing interests. Three skills that our participants in the schools for democracy learned in practice were how to recognize people's self-interests, how to think and act politically, and how to distinguish between public and private relationships. These skills are derived from the tradition of broad-based community organizing. However, learning and implementing these skills within the conceptual framework of Civic Studies introduces a significant change in mindset. Broad-based community organizations work within a scarcity frame and focus on "getting things" from the government for poor communities. Essentially, this is a consumer mindset. Viewed from the angle of co-creation, citizens are not merely consumers but producers and collective builders of their worlds. Government is often a key partner, and government resources

can greatly assist collaborative endeavors, but citizens are at the center and the goal is to unlock and enlist their energies to solve common problems and create public goods.

Citizen as co-creator is a robust identity. As an agent of change, the citizen is a "political" actor, and requires political savvy. A note of clarification regarding the meaning of politics is important. These days, many people the world over find the idea of politics mildly to intensely repulsive. It has become associated with polarization, corruption, the abuse of power, and, in the worst cases, violence and war. It has also come to be understood as a separate sphere of life, the domain of government, political parties and career politicians. A core element of Civic Studies with its focus on the citizen as co-creator is promoting a broader understanding of democratic politics. Instead of being seen as a bitter, zero-sum fight over power and scarce resources—"who gets what, when and how?"—according to a famous definition by the political scientist Harold Laswell, politics can be understood as the ongoing work of citizens to negotiate different interests in a plural environment and co-create a life together. This conception of politics represents a retrieval of a much older understanding, suggested by Aristotle and further developed in Civic Studies. It acknowledges that diversity, tension, and conflict are part of the stuff of life. The effort to differ decently and arrive at constructive compromise is creative work that enlarges those involved.[32] In my experience, this broader understanding of politics can be extremely empowering for citizens, helping them to read the world in new ways, understand power relationships differently, and imagine a role for themselves in co-creating a way forward.

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[32] Bernard Crick calls politics an ennobling activity. See Bernard Crick, *In Defence of Politics*, 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993). Similarly, Grundtvig, in envisaging the encounter between citizens of all stripes in the folk high schools, frequently uses the word "ennobling." See Grundtvig, "The School for Life," 157. Also Grundtvig, "The Danish High School," 162.

Recognizing other people's self-interests and acknowledging one's own is a key political skill. Essentially this requires attentive listening, including an ability to "hear" what is often unstated and to assist people in identifying their deep sources of motivation. Self-interests spring from people's individual life stories and their relationships. The political work of organizing people on the basis of their self-interests involves helping them to see that they are not alone, that their self-interests often have a public dimension, and that they can work with others to address common concerns. Successful negotiation between different interest groups involves satisfying *some* self-interests on *each* side. It involves compromise—people can't always get everything they want. If they cannot accept this, they cannot move forward. In our training, helping people to learn to "think politically" in their everyday lives helped them to think strategically when organizing their communities. Thus, subtending the fundamental question of the citizen as co-creator, "What should you and I do?" is the question, "How can we make this work for you and for me, as well as for the others around us?"

A third skill that participants in the schools for democracy found particularly useful was distinguishing between public and private relationships. The way broad-based community organizations think about this does not deny a link between the two realms. Indeed, self-interests, as noted above, are often based on people's desire for the well-being of those closest to them. However, people come to understand that fruitful public relationships are based on respect, a common interest, mutual accountability, and a desire to get things done in order to build a better community. By contrast, private relationships are based on friendship and love, and satisfy a range of more personal needs from entertainment to emotional support and intimacy. People with whom one has public

relationships can sometimes become one's friends, but this is not essential. While respect is of paramount importance, people do not have to like each other in order to work together effectively in a public setting.

These political skills can only be learned in practice. As much as possible, we used situations in the classroom to apply them, and then challenged participants to focus on honing these skills while organizing their communities. We extensively debriefed their experiences to draw out relevant lessons. Having a clear conceptual language to talk about what they were experiencing was extremely helpful, especially as the idea of citizen as co-creator represents a distinct paradigm shift, including the fact that people can be "citizens" in many different settings, including the church.

How does a "political" understanding of human beings as co-creators, and the idea of Christians as citizens of the church push us to rethink ecclesiology? This question forms the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

A CIVIC ECCLESIOLOGY

I began this thesis argument in the Chapter 2 with an exploration of what it means in theological terms for human beings to *be* created co-creators. This is an ontological argument, which I approached from a trinitarian angle, thus rooting the idea of humans as created co-creators in the relational being of the Triune God. In Chapter 3, I argued that being created co-creators is an identity that humans have to *learn* to appropriate. In so doing, they gain the confidence and skills to begin to *live* self-consciously as co-creators. This is a life-long process, and much of the learning happens through life itself, that is, through experience and work in the world. In particular, in Chapter 3 I focused on a pedagogy that draws together the identity of co-creator with the identity of citizen. In this view, the fundamental identity of human beings as created co-creators is not a solitary identity. It gains meaning in relationship with others, and in particular in relationship with other human beings conceived as *citizens*. In other words, the identity of the created co-creator as citizen is enacted in public, in the civic realm. I adopted a broad definition of citizens as co-creators of their communities, thus explicitly moving beyond narrower legalistic and state-centered definitions of citizenship, and the dominant view of citizens as voters and volunteers.

In this chapter, I propose that the ideas from the two previous chapters can be integrated and embodied in a civic understanding of the church, or a civic ecclesiology, with emphasis on the church's work in the world. "Civic" is a freighted term, often used

in ways that are idealized, sentimentalized, and inattentive to power, conflicts of interest and value, and the tragic and ironic dimensions of the human condition. In a civic understanding of the church as I propose the concept, the church is a *political* site. Christians *learn* what it means to be created co-creators who are effective agents of change in a world full of injustices, bitter divisions, enormous challenges, and despair.

I begin by exploring a definition of civic ecclesiology in terms of the different categories used by two theologians, Avery Dulles and Craig Van Gelder. Then I consider the idea of the "church as servant" in greater depth, in particular in terms of what is at stake for the "internal" life of the church and for its life in the world. Finally I propose a new way of thinking about the church as the "messianic fellowship of co-creation."

Defining Civic Ecclesiology

In his classic work, *Models of the Church*, Dulles proposes five different analogies as the basis for a comparative ecclesiology. The five models are church as institution, as mystical communion, as sacrament, as herald, and as servant. Dulles acknowledges the possibility of invoking additional models and breaking these into multiple sub-types, but he prioritizes simplicity. The differences between his five basic models are neatly drawn, and it is illuminating to compare and contrast them with each other. Importantly, he states: "[…] a balanced theology of the Church must find a way of incorporating the major affirmations of each basic ecclesiological type. Each of the models calls attention to certain aspects of the Church that are less clearly brought out by the other models."[1] I am mindful of this as I propose a new model.

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[1] Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1974), 9.

Dulles observes that since the 1960s, the field of ecclesiology has been dominated by proponents of the fifth model, church as servant.[2] He attributes this to a strong move towards a secular-dialogic method in theology, far different than the more prescriptive approaches to theology in earlier centuries. He explains:

> This method may be called "secular-dialogic: secular, because the Church takes the world as a properly theological locus, and seeks to discern the signs of the times; dialogic, because it seeks to operate on the frontier between the contemporary world and the Christian tradition (including the Bible), rather than simply apply the latter as a measure of the former."[3]

In proposing a civic ecclesiology, I situate my argument within the secular-dialogic approach to theology, bringing the secular concepts of democracy and "citizen as co-creator" to bear upon our understanding of the church. However, the proposal retains its theological origin in the image of the "church as created co-creator." I rule out the idea that this civic ecclesiology might constitute a sub-set of Dulles' "church as servant" model. I also hold to the idea of a distinctive civic ecclesiology, rather than merely an ecclesial vocation for churches.

Vocation, or *vocatio*, is an important category for Gary Simpson. He presents it as the call to Christians to participate in the Triune God's care for the creation by protecting and promoting the world's flourishing.[4] Viewed from this angle, a civic vocation for the church is certainly relevant to my basic thesis. As I see it, Simpson's proposal for the church's corporate vocation as "public companion" falls somewhere between the idea of church as servant and church as co-creator. He shares my desire for deeper public

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[2] Ibid., 95.

[3] Ibid., 92.

[4] Gary M. Simpson, "A Reformation Is a Terrible Thing to Waste: A Promising Theology for an Emerging Missional Church," in *The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry*, ed. Craig Van Gelder, et al. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007), 87.

engagement among Christians, and also a deeper awareness of sharing in God's creative work. However, I contend that a civic ecclesiology as I envisage it holds potential to strengthen both of these by reconceptualizing the church in terms of citizenship, specifically in terms of the citizen as co-creator. I also stress the potential of the church to be a powerful source of change across *all* the institutions of society, not only in and through civil society.

To flesh out the idea of a civic ecclesiology, I turn first to the categories used by Dulles to delineate his five models. Dulles poses three questions in regard to each of his ecclesiological models: What are the bonds of union? Who are the beneficiaries? What is the goal or purpose? In his account, in the model of church as servant Christians are bound together chiefly by a reciprocal sense of fraternity or "mutual brotherhood" as they respond to the needs of the world in Christian service. It is not only church members who benefit from the church's work; indeed, according to Dulles, they are not even the primary beneficiaries. He clarifies: "Rather they are all those brothers and sisters the world over, who hear from the Church a word of comfort or encouragement, or who obtain from the Church a respectful hearing, or who receive from it some material help in their hour of need."[5] Finally, the church's purpose is to serve humanity in concrete ways, thus pointing towards the kingdom of God and providing hope.

The difference between a servant and a citizen, especially the citizen defined as co-creator, holds profound implications for our understanding of the church. In contrast with the depiction of the church as servant, the bond of union in a civic ecclesiology is the shared bond of citizenship. This is a multi-layered bond. Individual church members

[5] Dulles, *Models*, 97.

can be conceived as citizens of their congregations and denominations. They are also citizens of numerous other communities, some overlapping and others not, such as neighborhoods and cities, workplaces and professional associations, provinces and countries, and even Earth itself. Similarly, churches can also be seen as corporate citizens of the broader society at various levels. The bond of citizenship differs from the bond of brotherhood or sisterhood in that it has a more public dimension. It can be a warm and friendly bond, but it also binds people who disagree with each other or hold prejudices towards each other. The shared identity of citizen as co-creator is primarily characterized by mutual accountability and a sense of joint responsibility for fostering the well-being of the community through participation in concrete tasks and the ongoing negotiation of a common life. Not only does the language of citizenship have potential to foster a sense of belonging, but also—from a democratic perspective—a sense of ownership and power, and appreciation for the public dimensions of work. Brotherly or sisterly bonds, by contrast, stress a more intimate feeling of relatedness and, as I argue below, tend to promote more therapeutic relationships in the church.

As far as Dulles' second question is concerned, I would suggest that "beneficiaries" is not the most appropriate category for defining a civic ecclesiology. It suggests a one-way and generally top-down relationship between benefactors and the recipients of their beneficence, between the enlightened and the ignorant, or between the church as servant and those, as in Dulles' description above, who are discouraged, marginalized or needy. Rather, in a civic ecclesiology, the emphasis is on partners and co-workers, and on developing their innate talents and capacities.

In a civic ecclesiology, the purpose of the church, Dulles' third category, is not merely to be of help to those suffering hardship, but to change the society for the better. In the power of the Holy Spirit, the church as created co-creator takes seriously its corporate role as an agent of change in the world and a catalyst of the kingdom of God. In the next section of this chapter, I explore further some of the implications of the contrast between church as servant and church as co-creator, but first I consider another set of definitional categories to clarify the idea of a civic ecclesiology.

According to Craig Van Gelder, "Ecclesiology helps define the essence of the church—its nature. It gives direction to understanding the work of the church—its ministry. And it identifies the forms and structures that shape the life of the church—its organization."[6] The categories of nature, ministry and organization bring to light some additional dimensions of a civic ecclesiology. As mentioned above, the identity of the church is that of corporate citizen and participant in the common life. In this respect, the church is profoundly contextual in nature. It is shaped by its context, and it also helps to shape its context. As such it reflects the social reality of the Triune God.

In its work as created co-creator, the church's ministry takes many concrete forms, some of which I will elaborate below. Briefly put, this church empowers and equips its own citizens to be effective citizens beyond the walls of the church, in all the communities to which they belong. This ministry has a strong educational dimension informed by the pedagogy of co-creation that I explored in Chapter 3. The focus of ministry is less on meeting individual needs both inside and outside the church than on encouraging joint action to meet shared needs, find solutions to common problems and

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[6] Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000), 46.

create things of public value to build strong communities. Importantly, while the church's work includes prophetic critique, it does not stop there. Rather, it strives to work collaboratively with other churches and organizations to build a better society.

Analyzing a civic ecclesiology in organizational terms offers potential to reimagine the church in powerful ways as it is based explicitly on the principles of democracy understood not simply as a system of government, but as a way of life. This understanding of democracy puts citizens at the center, not elected leaders. As such, in a civic ecclesiology, the chief focus is not on the church as organization, which is how Van Gelder presents the contemporary denominational church.[7] The emphasis is less on mechanisms for democratic representation (although this remains relevant) and more on expanding participation and exercising mutual accountability; less on democratizing structures of power (although this is important) and more on building the power of the people. Membership is voluntary in that it is uncoercive—another aspect of the denominational church as analyzed by Van Gelder—but it does not encourage the kind of consumerist church hopping that is so common today: "If [the church] is no longer meeting our needs, why shouldn't we move on to some place that can?"[8] Rather, a civic ecclesiology based on the citizen as co-creator directly challenges the consumer mindset and promotes a culture of shared responsibility and mutual accountability.

While considering various ecclesiologies for comparative purposes, Van Gelder concentrates mainly on developing a missiological ecclesiology. This provides another framework for reflecting on a civic conception of the church. The missional church

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[7] Ibid., 69.

[8] Ibid., 66.

understands its nature, ministry and organization as being grounded in the mission of the Triune God, that is, God's work of *creation, re-creation* and *consummation*. As Van Gelder notes, "To some extent, every historical ecclesiology has functioned as a missiological ecclesiology, even if it has not defined itself as such. There are not multiple missions of God. God is one. His mission in the world is one."[9] However, a church with an explicitly missional identity in Van Gelder's scheme adopts a holistic missional approach that undergirds every aspect of its ministry as well as its organization. This idea is compatible with the idea of church as co-creator, especially with its emphasis on the church's participation in the Triune God's ongoing work of creation in the world. In fact, I would suggest that the emphasis on citizenship and co-creation holds potential to strengthen the idea of the missional church.

In the next two sections of the chapter, I present an argument for shifting beyond the dominant model of church as servant to a civic ecclesiology. I build mainly on Moltmann's ecclesiological thinking, in particular his concept of the church as the "messianic fellowship of service for the kingdom of God in the world."[10] I first present a critical reflection on the impact of the service paradigm on the church, as well as the broader society. I then offer a constructive proposal for an alternative model of the church based on citizenship understood as co-creation.

Church as Messianic Fellowship of Service

According to Dulles, one of the main objections to a servant ecclesiology oriented towards the needs of the larger world is that it does not have a firm biblical foundation.

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[9] Ibid., 37.

[10] Moltmann, *Church*, 189.

He writes: "While service is often extolled, the Bible does not seem to envision the task of the church as service."[11] Presumably this is a matter of concern to biblical fundamentalists, who might consider that some churches over-emphasize the call to service. Dulles observes that although the word *diakonia* appears frequently in relation to the church in the New Testament, it refers to all aspects of the church's ministry, including word and sacrament, and inasmuch as it includes service to the poor, they are mainly if not always members of the church. He claims, "It would not have entered the mind of any New Testament writer to imagine that the church has a mandate to transform the existing social institutions, such as slavery, war, or the Roman rule over Palestine."[12] However, Dulles does point to an "indirect" biblical foundation for the servant church in that the "servant songs" in Isaiah can be applied to both Christ and the church, in particular the words from Is. 61:1 that Jesus himself uses to describe his mission in Lk. 4:16-19. It is interesting that in spite of these objections regarding a servant ecclesiology, today most churches of all denominations take the work of service to the sick and the poor extremely seriously. It takes a multitude of forms, whether within their own communities or beyond. As mentioned above, Dulles confirms in his study that by far the most prevalent model of the church in our time is church as servant.

Moltmann is one of many theologians who claim a servant identity for the church in openly political terms.[13] For him, "[…] ecclesiology can only be developed from

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[11] Dulles, *Models*, 99.

[12] Ibid., 100.

[13] Since the 1970s, political theology has called for the church to be deeply connected to the world and its problems. Johann Metz, a Catholic theologian, was the first to coin the phase "political theology," and many, including Moltmann, embraced this task. In Europe and the USA, political theology began to address problems related to secularization, democracy and economics, ecology and so on, calling the church to bear witness to the redemptive story of Christ's liberating work in real life situations. It finds a

christology, as its consequence and in correspondence with it."[14] He explains that he was "impelled theologically" to shift his perspective on christology, "the better to understand the wealth of God's liberating dealings with the world," from an emphasis on "'the resurrection of the crucified Jesus' in *Theology of Hope* to 'the cross of the risen Christ' in *The Crucified God.'*"[15] With the cross as his primary focus, Moltmann elaborates a description of the church that is centered on the proclamation of freedom to all those in bondage, resistance to forces of oppression, and fellowship with Christ through solidarity with those who live "in the shadow of the cross: the poor, the handicapped, the people society has rejected, the prisoners and the persecuted."[16]

Moltmann emphasizes that Jesus subverts the meaning of lordship through his radical identification with the suffering of the world, expressed in his ministry to the sick and the poor and especially in his death on the cross. The acclamation "Jesus is Lord" should in fact be the reverse, "the Lord is Jesus," to indicate the transformation of lordship into servanthood in the light of the cross. Moltmann writes: "True dominion does not consist of enslaving others but in becoming a servant of others; not in the exercise of power, but in the exercise of love; not in being served but in freely serving;

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parallel in the liberation theology that emerged from Latin America with a primary focus on poverty and liberation from political oppression. Liberation theology has since been reworked from the perspective of numerous subaltern groups. It includes work by feminist theologians as well as theologians working on issues of racism, homosexuality and other sexual and gender identities, people with disabilities, and others. In all of this theological work, the commitment to giving voice to the poor (and all other groups that suffer discrimination), as well as the call to churches to join their struggle for freedom, is of paramount importance.

[14] Moltmann, *Church*, 66.

[15] Ibid., xvi.

[16] Ibid., 97.

not in sacrificing the subjugated but in self-sacrifice."[17] This is the foundation for the work of the church. Seen in Moltmann's terms, the church as the fellowship of Christ becomes the fellowship of the poor and of those who have been converted through the "messianism of the poor," thus recognizing their poverty in spirit. This is a servant church that extends the fellowship of Christ by expressing brotherly solidarity with all those in the world who suffer injustice, and by working to meet their needs.

The major problem with the idea of church as servant is that it gives rise to acts of service and solidarity that are motivated chiefly by pity, solicitude, and a stance of selflessness. The "rich"—all those who find themselves in a better position than others, whether by dint of wealth, education, or other privileges and blessings—are moved to "rescue" the poor from their suffering. The impulse appears noble, but all too often it undermines the basic dignity of those who are at the receiving end of the helping efforts. Moreover, it renders invisible the capacities, talents, and potential of the poor and they end up internalizing the belief that they are pitiable. This creates complicated patterns of dependency, empowering those who serve and further disempowering those who are served. Moltmann is not unaware of this problem, although he does not dwell on it. He admits, "The dialectic of lordship and servitude in society is many-faceted. There is dominion through the enslavement of others. But there is also dominion through service, and through taking on the burdens of others."[18] This problem is far deeper than Moltmann's very brief treatment allows. What is more, I argue that the idea of "selfless

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[17] Ibid., 103.

[18] Ibid., 103-4. Moltmann also touches fleetingly on the problem elsewhere. For example, he mentions that disabled people are "robbed of their independence by solicitude and protective care." See Moltmann, *Spirit*, 192.

service, which is solely out for the human rights and the dignity of the other,"[19] is not a genuine alternative in this world.

The church does not have a monopoly on offering services to the poor. Although it is possibly true, as Dulles argues, that "The Christian faith can motivate men, as perhaps nothing else can, to employ their power for service,"[20] the fact is that service has become an "industry" in today's world. This reflects a larger problem of technocracy—rule by experts—itself a product of the modern Western preoccupation with controlling reality through technological efficiency. In our time, every single service profession, from health and welfare to education and even the church, has become more technocratic as higher education has trained increasingly specialized professionals to take better charge of every aspect of the work. For the most part, this has only exacerbated the problem of pity and solicitude. Now, more than ever, the poor and the suffering are seen in terms of what they lack or have lost. They become clients who need to be "fixed," and countless professionals in government as well as other institutions earn their living by doing the fixing work.

Technocratic culture interacts in complicated ways with contemporary consumer culture. Among government agencies and NGOs, the notion of basic "service delivery" to the poor has become widespread, based on their socio-economic rights. In South Africa, these services are dispensed with plenty of pity and little respect. The poor increasingly manifest consumer behavior by criticizing the services and mounting public protests to demand more. Rich Christians who feel called to express solidarity with the poor, pity

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[19] Moltmann, *Church*, 103.

[20] Dulles, *Models*, 98.

them—usually in the name of justice—for the inadequate services they receive, and the protests grow louder. There is something profoundly wrong with this pattern.

Is it possible that the shift in Moltmann's christology towards prioritizing, in a certain respect, the cross over the resurrection, represents a kind of thinking that has the effect of entrenching the church in an "Exodus" mentality with its victim consciousness, as I described in the previous chapter? In all fairness, Moltmann cannot be accused of ever losing sight of Easter, although he does return constantly to Good Friday. The call of the cross is loud and clear, and I am in full agreement with him that the resurrection cannot allow Christians to turn their gaze away from the suffering that surrounds them. Remembering the resurrection of Christ is simultaneously a remembrance of the crucifixion—they are inextricably linked. However, in Moltmann's work as I have encountered it thus far, I believe that there is something missing in the treatment of how believers can live into the history of Christ. For example he writes: "Hope for the coming of the risen one […] forbids us to confine ourselves to a lament over suffering and earthly misery, and keeps us from simply attacking its causes without rejoicing in its future transformation."[21] Lament and critique are clearly insufficient, but co-creation is absent here. Hope cannot merely be invoked as a reason—and an often unconvincing one at that—to rejoice in the face of trouble. It must be generated through agency and constructive work that brings forth new realities and holds the promise of further change. Another statement illuminates the problem. Moltmann claims, "[The Easter victory] works on the possibilities of the creative Spirit in the world of death in a twofold way: it

[21] Moltmann, *Church*, 112.

produces attitudes of both resistance and consolation."[22] Although here he hints at the creative powers of the Spirit of the resurrection, the work of the church is expressed through solidarity in struggle—resistance—and through comforting support—consolation. Again, the idea of co-creation—the collaborative work of *building* a better world—is invisible. I argue that the church as servant needs to be reconceptualized as the church as co-creator. However, before I develop this argument, I highlight another aspect of the service conundrum in the church.

Both the trends of technocracy and consumerism as I described them above have insinuated themselves into the church. As consumer culture has conditioned our minds, churches have been reconceptualized—either explicitly or unwittingly—as providers of services in response to market pressures. Thus, congregations focus increasingly on offering programs to meet ever-diversifying needs, and members behave like customers who readily choose another product if not satisfied.[23] In the church as in countless other spheres, consumer culture has been reinforced by technocratic trends, especially the professionalization of services. This has meant not only a *narrowing* of the professional training of clergy, but also the narrow professionalization of Sunday School, youth ministries, counseling services, chaplaincy and so forth. This has taken various forms, from the training and remuneration of staff to the professional production of materials for teaching, preaching and other aspects of ministry. The overall result has been a trend

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[22] Ibid., 113.

[23] Van Gelder highlights the contemporary understanding of the church as a voluntary organization, explaining that this places the emphasis on individual members and their right to freedom of association. Because of this individualistic approach, the church tends to focus on "the rights and privileges associated with membership, not on a covenantal commitment to the community and its values." Whereas a covenant implies reciprocity and shared responsibility, members who focus on their right to have their needs met by the church reflect the consumer behavior of the society at large. See Van Gelder, *Essence*, 67.

towards specialization in ministry, increasingly polished "products" to satisfy "consumers," and all too often the sidelining and even silencing of lay people in the church. This is a complicated phenomenon since most changes have been motivated by good intentions, and church members have been complicit through their expectations for "better services" and their willingness to hand over responsibility to people "in the know." One example can be found in the fact that today Christian parents take less and less responsibility for the spiritual formation of their children, expecting churches to do this work for them. Parker Palmer highlights the problem:

> Many laypeople are reluctant to speak for themselves on religious matters preferring instead to have the trained and ordained leader to "do their religion" for them. […] Laypeople who want the clergy to do it all […] are not, for the most part, lazy, dependent, or ignorant. Instead, their voices have been diminished by the same cult of expertise that diminishes students in classrooms. They have been conditioned to believe that they have nothing worth saying about things theological […]. Laypeople, like students, suffer from a wound inflicted by a culture that fails to help them find their voices.[24]

In a technocratic culture, everyone—both rich and poor—is diminished and ends up feeling impotent in one way or another. Many people feel impotent in the face of a highly competitive consumer culture. Even the rich feel "acted upon" by institutions all around them, especially government and corporations. They also feel overwhelmed by world's problems that seem to multiply and become more intractable by the year. Both rich and poor search for escape routes in all directions, including the church. Thus many churches have become anemic by increasingly focusing inwards: "[…] their contribution has been circumscribed into a task of gathering members and providing personal

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[24] Parker J. Palmer, *Healing the Heart of Democracy: The Courage to Create a Politics Worthy of the Human Spirit* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 140.

meanings for those members to help them tolerate the ambiguities of public life."[25] People immersed in a therapeutic culture expect personal therapeutic support from the church. They also dream of better government that will make life easier for them. Thus, Moltmann observes, "Many people gladly take flight into a kindergarten mentality, quite content to be secure and safely provided for, and to make over their freedom to 'Big Brother' and 'Mother Church.' Protests against their authority and retreats behind their sheltering cloak are often not very far removed from one another."[26]

The servant church takes seriously the call to service in any form. Ministry is understood as a response to needs, both inside and outside the church.[27] This servant ministry is modeled on Christ's self-giving love. It is generally fuelled by tremendous faith and devotion, and a deep sense of care. It provides solidarity and solace, but it does not do enough to *change* the world. I believe that retrieving the idea of human beings as created co-creators holds potential to move the church into a new paradigm.

Church as Messianic Fellowship of Co-creation

Dulles observes that the understanding of the servant church is closely related to a particular understanding of the connection between the church and the kingdom of God. Remarking first that eschatologies are as numerous as ecclesiologies, he summarizes by stating, "[…] practically all Christians hold to some kind of partially realized

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[25] Jack L. Seymour, Robert T. O'Gorman, and Charles R. Foster, *The Church in the Education of the Public: Refocusing the Task of Religious Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 128.

[26] Moltmann, *Spirit*, 104.

[27] Richard W. Rouse and Craig Van Gelder, *A Field Guide for the Missional Congregation: Embarking on a Journey of Transformation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008), 24.

eschatology."[28] He then matches up his five ecclesiological models with corresponding understandings of eschatology. In servant ecclesiologies, according to Dulles, there is a strong emphasis on the idea of the church as a forerunner of the kingdom of God. For some theologians, the understanding of God's close involvement in history—through the church as well as countless other agencies, both secular and religious—almost makes the eschaton disappear in the shared work of realizing the kingdom of God on earth.[29] Moltmann's treatment of eschatology, by contrast, displays a greater tension between the present and the future, and this shapes his ecclesiology.

Moltmann describes the whole of his theology as "messianic theology."[30] This leads him to explore the tension between the remembrance of the history of Christ, and the eschatological person of Christ. The church's existence in the present is placed within this field of tension. Christ's lordship mediates between this world and the kingdom of God. Moltmann attributes the term "messianic" to this mediating work. He writes:

> Through his mission and his resurrection Jesus has brought the kingdom of God into history. As the eschatological future the kingdom has become the power that determines the present. This future has already begun. We can already live in the light of the "new era" in the circumstances of the "old" one. Since the eschatological becomes historical in this way, the historical also becomes eschatological. Hope becomes realistic and reality hopeful.[31]

Moltmann challenges the church to see itself in terms of the future that Christ has opened up for the world, rather than in terms of its present state. But what does it mean to

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[28] Dulles, *Models*, 109.

[29] Dulles names John A. T. Robinson, Harvey Cox and Gibson Winter among the "secular theologians" whose work reflects this view. See Dulles, *Models*, 118.

[30] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), xiii.

[31] Moltmann, *Church*, 192.

participate in the life of this world in the light of the "new era," that is, in the light of the kingdom of God? Moltmann suggests that the role of the church within the largely secular order of today's world is not merely to display ethical commitment to justice and healing in the society, but also to bring the presence of faith. Accepting that there are "institutions and processes which can neither be ecclesiasticized nor Christianized,"[32] including economics, politics and culture, Moltmann proposes nevertheless that Christians can discern ways to act in response to these institutions and processes based on "the will to live," "the power of hope," and "the capacity for suffering"[33] that spring from their faith. While I do not dismiss any of these motivations for Christian action, I believe that the *capacity for civic co-creation in the power of the Holy Spirit* is far more promising in terms of actually changing the world for the better and living concretely into the future of the kingdom of God. This is what makes hope realistic, and not merely an abstract point of faith.

A civic ecclesiology offers the possibility for Christians to rediscover their identity as created co-creators by claiming their *citizenship in the kingdom of God*. I have only once encountered the use of the word "citizen" in Moltmann's work. Reflecting on Jesus' words, "Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God" (Matt. 5:3), he writes: "The gospel does not merely *bring* the kingdom of God *to* the poor; it also *discovers* the kingdom of the poor, which is God's kingdom. […] It also shows that the poor are God's fellow citizens, like the children to whom the kingdom of God already

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[32] Ibid., 163.

[33] Ibid., 165-6.

'belongs' (Mark 10:14; Matt 19:14)."[34] At first glance, if only children and the poor are called citizens, this might seem to exclude many people from citizenship in the kingdom. However, Moltmann here develops the argument that the poor become participants in the messianic mediation of Christ. As people enter into community with the poor by becoming poor themselves, "the kingdom of God is thrown open"[35] to them and, by implication, the identity of God's fellow citizens becomes theirs too. Moltmann calls this the "messianism of the poor" and it has become one of his most influential ideas. Although this holds insights about the values of the kingdom, I contend that there is also an inherent danger in over-emphasizing the requirement that the rich "lower" themselves in order to identify with the poor. If the church is conceived only as a messianic fellowship of poverty, and the focus is on servanthood as shared suffering, the giftedness of God's created co-creators and their calling to participate in the re-creation of the world disappears. Sharing suffering does not suggest sufficient resources for sustained action that generates lasting change in people's lived realities. As I argued in the previous chapter, it too often fails to equip people with the skills needed to be effective agents of change in every setting. A focus on shared suffering, articulated in prophetic critique, can easily lead to their becoming stuck in the present, with a growing sense of grievance. It violates the deepest truths of the church for the people of the kingdom of God to become trapped in this pattern.

Rethinking the idea of human beings as created co-creators in trinitarian terms, and combining this with the definition of the citizen as co-creator offers a different

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[34] Moltmann, *Way of Jesus*, 100. Original italics.

[35] Ibid., 103.

perspective on what it can mean to be a citizen of the kingdom of God. In particular, it brings the work of the Holy Spirit to the fore. Liberated by the Son and empowered by the Spirit, the created co-creator has the freedom and develops the capacity to participate in the Father's ongoing work of creation in this world, in anticipation of the kingdom of God. When the life of the triune God is understood not only as *communio*, but also as *cooperatio*, God's created co-creators become part of the life of the open Trinity by participating in God's work in the world through the Spirit. The Spirit's work of new creation is to bring forth the kingdom of God. In the newly-creating power of the Spirit, God's created co-creators live into their identity as citizens of the kingdom of God through the church in the world. Thus a civic ecclesiology acknowledges that in the church, the created co-creator is both a citizen of the kingdom of God and *also* a citizen of the *world*.

To be a citizen of this world is a multivalent identity. As I have observed, it can convey membership of and productive participation in communities of different scales, especially at the local level, from churches and clubs to neighborhoods and cities. From the vantage of civic co-creation, the church cannot shift directly from the local level to "global citizenship" and neglect the ongoing work of building a democratic society, as is the tendency of many professionals today. While citizenship is always contested, the concept of citizen as co-creator opens new possibilities for all those living in a country together, whatever their legal status, to recognize their interdependence in the work of creating a common, democratic narrative. As the "messianic fellowship of citizens in the kingdom of God," the church needs to understand its work as preparing its members to be

co-creators of a better world at every level. This work has an inescapably political dimension, conveyed by the concept of "citizen."

There is also a corporate aspect to a civic ecclesiology. Congregations can be conceptualized as corporate citizens of the local communities in which they are situated, and also citizens of the broader structures to which they are affiliated. For instance, Luke Bretherton describes the collaboration of Christian congregations of many stripes and also Jewish and Muslim congregations in the context of the broad-based community organization, London Citizens.[36] He refers to the collaboration as a seedbed for a "common life politics [which] is distinct from an identity politics and from multicultural approaches because recognition and respect is not given simply by dint of having a different culture or identity. Rather, recognition is conditional on one's contribution to and participation in shared, reciprocal, and public work."[37]

For the church and its citizens to begin to play this civic role requires a new way of thinking and acting. It involves congregations becoming sites of democracy education and organized citizen action, shaped by a pedagogy of co-creation such as I described earlier. This will enable Christians to learn a new language of citizenship to describe their work of co-creation in the world, skills to do this work well, and a new habit of mind: to choose hope over victimhood and despair, shifting from an Exodus mentality to seeing themselves as people of the covenant, created co-creators working with God to address concrete problems. Pastors and lay leaders deepen their existing work within an overarching framework that reframes and reshapes every aspect of the church's ministry

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[36] London Citizens is based in London, Great Britain, and is an affiliate of the Industrial Areas Foundation, the largest of the broad-based community organizations in the USA.

[37] Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy*, 92.

in the understanding that members are created co-creators of the church and the world. Worship and the ministry of word and sacrament remain central. In fact, people's identity as created co-creators will be constructed and nourished when the idea of citizens as co-creators becomes the organizing concept of the congregation and is consistently expressed in its Sunday rituals and weekday activities, through its formal curriculum as well as its hidden curriculum. For example, rather than treating pastoral care as an end in itself, from the perspective of a civic ecclesiology, caring for members is a way of assisting them to discover their identity as created co-creators so that they become empowered to play an active, transformative role in the life of the church and the society. If pastoral care leads to the identification of trends in a congregation (for example, unemployment in a particular age group; multiple occurrences of teen depression; difficulties faced by elderly members leaving their own well-loved homes for nursing homes; etc.), it can become possible to "organize" collectively to address these problems more broadly, tapping into the experience and insight of many.[38] The goal is to develop an internal public sphere and a culture of agency that can be projected out into the world through hopeful work. If the objective is to change the world, not only resist and provide consolation, the church's work is to develop people's agency so that they will be up to the task.

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[38] Parker Palmer reflects on how congregations effectively give up on providing support to fellow members who require counseling by pointing them towards the privacy of the pastor's office. He proposes the model of the Quaker "clearness committee" as a way of empowering church members to participate more deeply in the work of assisting people to navigate their way through difficult waters in their lives. See Palmer, *Democracy*, 146. I appreciate Palmer's attempt to move beyond the pattern of professional "service delivery" in the church, and the clearness committee concept is a good way of doing this. However, it remains a support mechanism for individuals. I am suggesting that it might be possible, once people have received sufficient individual support, to involve them in collective action to address the problem, by collaborating with non-profits, organizing neighborhood support groups, making the problem more visible through public education, or whatever course of action seems most strategic. The very act of working together with others to address a common problem can be a source of support and healing. Obviously concerns about confidentiality have to be dealt with appropriately.

To illustrate concretely what it can mean for people to understand their work in hopeful, shared, civic terms, I offer a brief description of my recent work in Burundi which involved adapting an earlier democracy education program that I had developed with colleagues there to include policemen and women at the village level. The Burundi National Police embarked on a program a few years ago to introduce a holistic, citizen-centered and development-oriented community policing program. It aims to eliminate the distance between police and communities and encourage collaboration by proactively addressing a range of local development issues, rather than focusing only on conventional, reactive approaches to security. The training program brings together community police agents, known as *police de proximité*, and representatives of the communities where they are based. The primary focus is on developing a shared citizen identity, where the citizen is understood as a co-creator. From the perspective of democracy, these citizens are taking collective responsibility for building a safe and secure community. From the perspective of faith, God is working through God's created co-creators to bring new life in situations of poverty and fear.

It is hard to exaggerate the sense of possibility that this program began to bring to struggling communities. At the beginning of our pilot training workshop, police and other members of the community lined up on opposite sides of the room. The unease was palpable. Given the country's long history of insecurity, Burundians tend to view the police at any level with suspicion, and police in turn are guarded in their interactions with the people. I felt as though I experienced something apocalyptic, a true in-breaking of the Spirit's transforming power, when I witnessed police and lay citizens joining in pairs after only a few days and leaning towards each other in intense, respectful conversation,

identifying shared concerns and imagining how they might address them collaboratively. How else can one explain somebody saying, “I have seen this man in the street, but I never thought that we could talk like this and solve problems together,” or, “I cannot believe how resourceful this woman is; we can make a real difference if we work together,” except as an irruption of the life of God into those encounters, or a revelation of the life of God in the other? Although the words in themselves are positive, even more profound is the respect they convey for neighbors who, not long before, were seen as useless and having nothing to offer. The detachment of the police was dissolving and a new, unsentimental relationality emerging, focused on the hard work of addressing tough public problems.

Although in this instance the focus was on decidedly worldly issues, with the eye of faith it is possible to see the newly-creating work of the Holy Spirit, bringing life and hope. But is it only the believer who sees? Even in a secular setting, when those referred to condescendingly in French as *le petit people*, the “little people,” glimpse the possibilities of collaborative, developmental work based on mutual respect, I think they glimpse the Spirit at work without necessarily naming it. And when those who condescend to the “little people” dare to take seriously their gifts, ingenuity, and courage, rather than seeing them as helpless victims in need of rescue, they open themselves to revelation. In Burundi, I repeatedly saw educated trainers and top-brass police officers shake their heads in “disbelief” when seeing the energy unleashed in simple peasants in far-flung villages, and the steps they took together to become agents of change in their communities.

The unleashing of civic energies also provokes fear, however. Such energy cannot be scripted or controlled in a heavy-handed manner, in the same way that the life of faith sets the believer on a journey whose twists and turns cannot be discerned at the outset. In a public setting with diverse actors, unpredictability and risks are magnified. A training program such as the one for the Burundian police is riddled with risks, as I have seen in other contexts. Trainers run the risk of losing their sense of receptivity and responsiveness as the work becomes routinized. People yield to the temptations of power at every level: trainers, participants and community members alike. And there is no risk more common than those in existing positions of power reasserting themselves. Citizen-driven responses to crime that are tailored to unique situations based on local knowledge and capacities are too often seen as inadequate. It is tempting to take promising local solutions "to scale," to use a common expression in community development, resulting in a rapid return to top-down, one-size-fits-all approaches. It is all too easy for the imagination to become narrow again, stifled by more conventional ways of thinking that place human beings in static categories. The struggle between the Spirit and the flesh sets in—the antinomy of the new creation that J. Louis Martyn describes.[39] In short, community policing—a real example of how citizens can enact what it means to be created co-creators—is an extremely vulnerable strategy. In my own country, South Africa, it was abandoned. In the US, little if any mention has been made of it the recent explosion of protests against police.

Tragically, in the past year Burundi has experienced serious political instability and violence. Against great odds, the democracy education program for the *police de*

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[39] J. Louis Martyn, *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 120.

proximité continues, with trainers and local police alike insisting that it is more urgently needed than ever. Over the last several months, the government has forced dozens of NGOs to close. The Burundi Leadership Training Program (BLTP), my partner organization, displays remarkable political agility, but it too is at risk. Recent experiences of vulnerability in the NGO sector, as well as the many other risks that I mentioned above, all point to the fact that the church could make a real difference if it were involved in a deep way in this kind of democracy education work. A civic ecclesiology provides enormous potential scope for congregations to educate and support their members as citizens, and also help them to maintain a culture of accountability. Not only would that ensure a more solid and sustainable foundation for the kind of work I have described, but it would offer potential for the work to be significantly magnified. Moreover, the combined power of the churches as "political" institutions could provide a counter-weight to government power in a place like Burundi.

Bringing the church as civic co-creator into the public sphere to collaborate with multiple institutional actors and large numbers of people from different backgrounds will inevitably be a complicated and often messy business. As Simpson observes, when engaging in this kind of public work, congregations become "encumbered with the moral predicaments of other institutions and with the colonizing influence of money and power."[40] Taking on this encumbrance, Simpson argues, can itself be seen as a way in which the church lives into Christ's liberating work on the cross and is freed to look beyond itself.

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[40] Gary M. Simpson, *Critical Social Theory: Prophetic Reason, Civil Society, and Christian Imagination*, Guides to Theological Inquiry (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 144.

Engaging with other people and institutions is not always and only burdensome. It is also a gift, an opening up of possibilities through new relationships, the sharing of wisdoms, and the expansion of collective agency. Above all, it is about participating in the work of continuing creation. Joint effort to build a better society, with all its ups and downs, draws the actors into the cooperative life of God and points however imperfectly towards the coming of the kingdom of God.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

To conclude, let me suggest how conceiving of human beings as co-creators—and, in theological terms, created co-creators—can enrich and deepen broad-based community organizing, one important setting where civic agency, a different kind of politics, and a range of democratic practices have taken root and shown powerful impact.

Broad-based community organizations have long understood that the church holds unique resources for effective political organizing around issues in the broader society. Saul Alinsky, who began organizing his neighborhood in the late 1930s and out of that experience proposed a gritty set of rules and practices for community organizers, recognized the importance of discerning the democratic possibilities in every community. He pointed specifically to congregations of diverse faiths, especially churches, as having potential power to engage in building a more equal and democratic society. Importantly, he also stressed that this democratic potential in the church would not evolve spontaneously. It needed to be catalyzed, formed and organized by bringing congregations and other groups together for concerted training, strategizing and action.

Alinsky's basic "rules" for organizing continue to provide the foundation for all the major community organizing networks in the US and in other countries, with the addition of organizers' own innovations and improvisations along the way. Over time, organizers have especially gained a deeper appreciation for the profound resources for democratic action to be found within faith traditions and practices. Christian

congregations form the backbone of this work, assuming a role in the public realm that contradicts the relegation of religion to the private sphere in modern Western societies. Bretherton observes that "broad-based community organizing has taught churches in membership to relax and occupy a genuinely plural space in which religious rhetorics and styles are as legitimate contributions to political life as any other, while at the same time demanding that religious voices cannot be the dominant or exclusive voice."[1]

A rich literature now exists on broad-based community organizing, and its practices and many of its achievements are well documented. In the US, the four major broad-based community organizing networks between them comprise hundreds of member organizations, each involving dozens or even hundreds of religious congregations, and sometimes other community-based organizations. The reach and impact of this work is significant. Many victories have been won, securing new relations between police and some low income and minority communities, as well as better housing, health care, schooling, jobs and more for poor and working class people in large and smaller cities around the country. Nevertheless, most middle class churches in the mainline denominations and the majority of evangelical churches still keep this work at arm's length. Too often it fails to speak to their own members' anguish about hyper-competitive careers, consumer life styles, and the hollowing out of human relationships, all products of today's society. Rather, middle class congregations see involvement in broad-based community organizing as simply another form of service to the poor.

My own congregation in Minneapolis provides a case in point. For many years, my church was a member of ISAIAH, the broad-based community organization in the

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[1] Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy*, 102.

Twin Cities. Two hard-working members of our congregation, both with a passion for justice issues, represented the church at meetings of ISAIAH and regularly provided short reports on their activities during our open prayer time during Sunday worship. Our pastor at the time made some effort to become involved in the clergy caucus, but found it frustrating and gave up. After a time the church ceased to be a member of ISAIAH, although we continue to describe ourselves as a liberal, activist congregation committed to a number of justice causes. Effectively, involvement in ISAIAH falls into the same category of service as the local food pantry, annual participation in a Habitat for Humanity project, assistance to newly-arrived refugee families, and the like. As a reconciling congregation, we have a long-standing and more political commitment to LGBT issues, and an emerging interest in climate issues that promises to take a more organized and political route. Nevertheless, my observation is that the life of the congregation and its work in the community was unchanged by its affiliation with ISAIAH. I have long puzzled over this situation, one that I believe is not uncommon.

The concept of co-creation helps to clarify what is missing. While groups like ISAIAH call upon the convictions of middle class Christians that they should act with compassion towards the poor, they do not tap into people's real creative energies. They may call people to "come out of Babylon," as Dennis Jacobsen urges, observing that this effort provokes "a perpetual state of internal exile […] always feeling unease with the disease of the culture […] a constant state of resistance to classism, racism, and militarism."[2] But the "disease of the culture" is not simply its *indifference* to the plight of the poor. It is the *devaluation* of the capacities of the poor, and all other human beings for

[2] Dennis A. Jacobsen, *Doing Justice: Congregations and Community Organizing* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 5.

that matter, by a society that puts a premium on celebrity, consumerism, and competitive success. Calling for self-sacrifice on behalf of the poor does not address this profound disease of modern society, nor does it create opportunities for many people to help build a society based on different values. Indeed, calls for self-sacrifice often can simply make people feel inadequate or even in the way.

In this paper, I have named and sought to flesh out the idea of human beings as created co-creators, and with it the idea of a civic ecclesiology. This grows from my conviction that the kind of power generated by faith-based community organizations can be greatly expanded and become relevant to everyone, everywhere, if the idea of co-creation is combined with the politics of a common life which Bretherton describes. Within broad-based community organizations themselves, the so-called "iron rule" of organizing—do not do for others what they can do for themselves—promotes personal growth, self-reliance, and self-confidence among marginalized people who never before imagined that they could participate meaningfully in political action and make a difference to the life of their communities. The concept of co-creation, taken as a framework to challenge *all* systems and institutions of the larger service society, takes this insight far beyond broad-based community organizations and the congregations that make up the bulk of their membership. It promises to help develop people's agency so that together they become willing to dare the utmost for the sake of the world.

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