

**MAKING A PLACE ON EARTH:
PARTICIPATION IN CREATION AND REDEMPTION
THROUGH PLACEMAKING AND THE ARTS**

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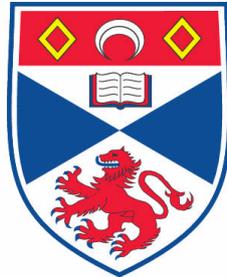
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UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS
ST MARY'S COLLEGE
INSTITUTE FOR THEOLOGY, IMAGINATION AND THE ARTS



**MAKING A PLACE ON EARTH:
PARTICIPATION IN CREATION AND REDEMPTION THROUGH
PLACEMAKING AND THE ARTS**

A THESIS SUBMITTED BY:

JENNIFER ALLEN CRAFT

UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF TREVOR HART

TO THE FACULTY OF DIVINITY IN
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DECLARATIONS

1. Candidate's declarations:

I, Jennifer Allen Craft, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 85,593 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in September 2009 and as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in April 2010; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2009 and 2013.

Date: _____ Signature of candidate: _____

2. Supervisor's declaration:

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of PhD in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

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The image of a quilt seems an appropriate metaphor for a project like this. Many pieces have to be sewn together to make a complete picture. And while sometimes you get to the end and you notice it's a little lopsided, the process of making it—the love that is poured into it—allows you to relinquish all other possibilities and perfections that could have been.

Like a quilt is made up of many pieces, there are a number of people who contribute to a work like this. The entire faculty of the Institute for Theology, Imagination, and the Arts has been encouraging and helpful along my journey. My supervisor, Trevor Hart, has been indispensable in directing my thoughts and (often muddled) writing into a cohesive project, and without his guidance I most certainly would have failed to “find my place” in the discipline of theology and the arts. David Brown, Gavin Hopps, and Michael Partridge were also formative influences on my thought on place, art, and theology.

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*For Brandon,
my faithful partner in place*

ABSTRACT

This thesis will explore a theology of place and placemaking that is focused on the participatory role of humans in both creation and redemption, while suggesting the central and paradigmatic role of artistry in our construction of and identification with place. Building on the most recent theological and philosophical engagement with place, this thesis will argue for a theology of place that takes seriously the doctrines of creation and incarnation, focusing on a particularly redemptive understanding of placemaking in the material world. In its study of scripture and theology, it will focus on God's blessing of people to participate in the making of places, along with the role this human making has in relationship to divine presence and the divine plan for creation and redemption. After developing a theology of place and placemaking more generally, the second half of this thesis will consider the practical, constructive, and transformative capabilities of placemaking as witnessed through the arts. Relying on theological engagement with the arts, it will argue that artistic making of all kinds and attention to place go hand in hand. Exploring a selection of artistic genres, including the photography of Marlene Creates, the quilts of Gee's Bend, and the literature of Wendell Berry, this thesis will suggest that imaginative and "artistic" placemaking practices can give us a deeper understanding of the creative, redemptive, and transformative work of Christ in Creation, while also elucidating our calling to redemptively participate in it.

Keywords: place, placemaking, creation, redemption, incarnation, art, theology of the arts, Wendell Berry, Quilts of Gee's Bend, Marlene Creates.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Everything we do happens in a place. Philosopher Edward Casey reminds us, “To be at all—to exist in any way—is to be somewhere, and to be somewhere is to be in some kind of place.”¹ While the profundity of this statement may at first glance seem absent —*of course* we exist in place!—Casey’s writing reminds us that even as society moves towards increasingly global, universal, and abstract concerns, we cannot escape the essential fact of our emplacement and embodiedness in this world. Our modern view of place has been significantly influenced by philosophical thought since the Enlightenment. While place and particularity were once valued as significant features of human life, the philosophical and scientific move towards universalism changed the overall shape of human inquiry and affected, among many other things, our understanding of place and space.² Modern society has since been characterized by a disinterestedness in place and often neglects the local and particular in favor of the global and universal. It has remained overwhelmingly influenced by individualistic notions of the person as well as homogenistic ideas of the way society should be structured. We can now, more often than not, be characterized as a “placeless” society, building and spending time in what anthropologist Marc Augé calls “non-places”—airports, waiting rooms, (inter)national chain stores.³ For Augé, these places are not really places at all; they have no particular character and exist as holding tanks for individual and unconnected people who are merely passing through. What results is a lack of identity, structure, connectedness, and unique character.

There has, however, been a reinvigorated attention to place in the past few decades, resulting, at least partially, from the desire to balance the turn towards abstract space. In

¹ Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), ix.

² Progress in the sciences, especially, altered the way we think about space and place. Newtonian physics and changing views of the universe suggested a wider view of space than had previously been assumed. See Max Jammer, *Concepts of Space: The History of Theories of Space in Physics* (New York: Harper, 1960).

³ Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995).

response, contemporary philosophers and theologians have begun to re-introduce a more relational or communal understanding of both places and personhood,⁴ emphasizing the importance of particularity and place as valued characteristics of the way humans experience the world. In most cases, place is viewed as both a physical and a social reality. To value place is to reflect environmental concerns for the planet as well as communal and vernacular ones for human societies. Place, in this sense, can be understood as a location, an experience, a community, a set of relationships and memories, a measurement of time and history. Because we are embodied creatures, we cannot separate any of these things from the physical. But place is not just a piece of ground—it is the undeniable fact of our existence *in relationship with* the whole of creation.

What has perhaps been given less attention, though, is an extended study into *placemaking*, that is, the practical nature of our engagement with place—how we actually make places and actively identify with them. This is not to say that placemaking has been totally neglected, but that it remains a relatively uninvestigated area, especially in the field of theological studies.⁵ If place is as important as scholars argue, though, then negligence of the ways that places are made will hinder the potential renewal of these wider place-based concerns. Of course place and placemaking go hand in hand. “Getting back into place,” as Casey argues, will require acknowledging both the importance of place itself, as well as the ways that we go about making and identifying with places.⁶

⁴ While we will discuss the relational aspect of places later in this chapter, for further reading on a relational understanding of personhood, see John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961); Jean Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, Contemporary Greek Theologians No. 4 (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985); Alistair I. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁵ Craig Bartholomew has recently published one of the most helpful studies for placemaking from a Christian perspective. But while he covers many areas in the form of overview, he fails to explore any of these more practical applications, such as the arts, in an extended way. Craig G. Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011). As placemaking goes, Keith Basso has influenced much of the wider academic interest in the concept, and his work forms a backdrop, though implicit, for my own work. See Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

⁶ Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

The practice of placemaking can be defined in all sorts of ways and encompasses a wide variety of actions in the world. Here, I take it to mean the dynamic human ordering of the world in which we live, including both physical and symbolical engagement with the created world.⁷ Linda Schneekloth and Robert Shibley define placemaking as such:

Placemaking is the way all of us human beings transform the places in which we find ourselves into places in which we live. It includes building and tearing buildings down, cultivating the land and planting gardens, cleaning the kitchen and rearranging the office, making neighborhoods and mowing lawns, taking over buildings and understanding cities. It is a fundamental human activity that is almost invisible and sometimes dramatic. Placemaking consists both of daily acts of renovating, maintaining, and representing the places that sustain us, and of special, celebratory one-time events such as designing a new church building or moving into a new facility. It can be done with the support of others or can be an act of defiance in the face of power.⁸

We can physically make places through architecture, city-planning, or by forming communities in place, but placemaking is also a reflexive activity, a making of the self.

Placemaking is about finding *who* we are in relation to *where* we are, and thus contributes to the formation of human identity. From a distinctly theological perspective, this aspect of placemaking can be further interpreted in terms of our relationships with other people, the non-human creation, and ultimately, with God.

While this is a helpful way to conceptualize our actions in place, I will press this understanding of placemaking further by evaluating it in relationship with human artistry. Specifically, I will argue that placemaking might be better understood through artistic practice and suggest that the arts play an important and paradigmatic role in human placemaking practices. This is not to suggest that every place that is made is a work of art, nor that placemaking must always happen through what we typically identify in the modern

⁷ Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion Limited, 1976), 143. Placemaking as a term has largely been taken over by the disciplines of city-planning and often makes reference to place-based or site-specific artistry. While work in this discipline will be referenced occasionally, I borrow the term in order to suggest a more basic definition of human practice.

⁸ Lynda H. Schneekloth and Shibley Robert G., *Placemaking: The Art and Practice of Building Communities* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1995), 1.

world as “the Arts.”⁹ Rather, my starting point will be the fact that all humans are called to engage creatively with and add value to places in the world, and that this creative engagement might best be understood through the image of the artist. This will, of course, require us to alter our image of the artist as modern society has often construed her. A broader account of human artistry is needed that includes a variety of “making” actions, not just the kind with paint or poetically arranged words. The artist in this view is expressed in the notion of *homo faber*, “man as maker.”¹⁰ All humans engage in artistic practice in the sense that they rearrange and rework the given materials of creation to make fitting dwelling places in community.

This project will contribute to the contemporary return to place-based studies by suggesting not only that places form the very fabric of our being and shared experience—that place is part of the human economy—but also that engagement with place (i.e. placemaking) is, at its core, a matter of participation in creation and redemption through Christ. My thesis for a renewed attention to the practice of placemaking will ultimately be a matter of practical theology as it seeks to define some of the key ways through which we are called to actively participate in the life and work of Christ. I will identify the significance of place in the whole community of creation, as well as the way place factors into the divine-human relationship, focusing throughout on the nature of what it means to make and re-make God’s gift of place. Finally, by suggesting that artistry, broadly conceived, is an embodiment of and paradigm for placemaking practice, I will also develop a broad scheme for a “place-based theology of the arts,” which suggests that through *artistic* practice in place, or a properly *placed* artistry, we

⁹ For a brief overview and critique of the modern art system, see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Towards a Christian Aesthetic* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980).

¹⁰ See Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (London: Penguin Books, 2009). See also Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

might also participate in the creative work of God as we take divine gifts of creation and offer them back with “value added.”¹¹

It will be helpful, first, to understand the wider theoretical framework for place and placemaking, so chapter one will seek a definition of place through engagement with the fields of philosophy, sociology, anthropology, and the arts before turning to specifically theological concerns. Here, I will seek to answer the question, “What is Place?” by evaluating it in terms of shared experience, while also exploring the most relevant issues to a sufficiently grounded concept of placemaking as a shared practice. Because “place” is such an expansive subject, as shown by the vast variety of literature in the area, devising a strict or linear definition of place will be insufficient if we are to grasp its true character and value. J.E. Malpas notes that when we speak of place, most often we are only working with one or two definitions at a time.¹² For our purposes, though, place can be understood as particular, physical, and communal, whereas space is understood as universal, abstract, and infinite. Both terms, however, bear literal and metaphorical meanings, and these will be taken into consideration. I will also argue for the tension and relief provided by understanding places as both “given” and “made.” Placemaking should always be understood as responding to what is already there and simultaneously participating in a sort of re-making of places.¹³ After establishing a wider structure for conceptualizing place, I will explore several issues relevant to the topic of placemaking. Human action in place, the body and dwelling in place, memory, narrative, identity, sense of place, and our imaginative constructions of and associations with places will be explored in terms of the shared practice of placemaking. In the final section of chapter

¹¹ This phrase is borrowed from Trevor Hart, “Through the Arts: Hearing, Seeing and Touching the Truth,” in *Beholding the Glory: Incarnation through the Arts*, ed. Jeremy Begbie (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000). There are, of course, also various ways to understand human participation in the creative work of God. Some examples of theologians who deal with this subject in differing ways include: Jeremy Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise: Towards a Theology of the Arts* (London: Continuum, 1991); Steven R. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit: The Holy Spirit and the Art of Becoming Human* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011); W. H. Vanstone, *Love's Endeavour, Love's Expense: The Response of Being to the Love of God* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1977).

¹² J.E. Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 173-4.

¹³ Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 174.

one, I will begin to focus on how the arts might factor into our perception and making of place, while foregrounding my later argument for practical modes of placemaking as witnessed through and embodied in the arts.

Chapter two will begin a theological evaluation of place by looking to the creation narrative of Genesis in order to identify the importance of place for humans, along with the nature of human participation in the creative work of God as established through God's calling us to performative modes of placemaking. Here, I will suggest that a reading of Genesis 1-3 reveals the significance of particular place for human flourishing and life, as well as forming the meeting point and accommodation for divine-human encounter. Furthermore, a close reading of Genesis will suggest the divine invitation and calling to humans to creatively participate in, rework and add value to the life of the world. In all this, we will read Genesis with a decidedly Christological focus, understanding Christ as already at work within the creation story.

Moving from general creational or ecological issues, chapter three will focus on the ways that God chooses to meet people in humanly constructed places like the tabernacle and temple. Like the last chapter, it will take a Christological perspective, suggesting that the avenues through which God chooses to meet people in the Old Testament points towards the New Testament focus on divine-human meeting in the particular place of the Incarnation. Furthermore, this chapter will develop and add one further element to our theological evaluation of placemaking: that is, it will argue that most often human placemaking has a decidedly artistic element and that art can be conceived as an embodiment of and tool for placemaking practice. The artists in the tabernacle, as placemakers, will be seen as a paradigmatic image as they respond to God's calling and simultaneously invite God's indwelling presence on earth in a fittingly-made place.

Chapter four will bring together all these themes in order to develop a Christian theology of place enfolded in the person and work of the Incarnate Christ and actualized in the development of community in place. I will argue that even as the New Testament focuses on more “spiritual” aims, that the importance of particularity (and thus particular place) is intensified in the Incarnation. Particularly, I will argue that the Christian sacraments of Eucharist and baptism, along with the establishment of local congregations and communities of believers, suggest that Christ as the “concrete universal”¹⁴ allows us to share in the *universal* redemptive aims of God by making *particular* places on earth.

Section two will turn from scripture and theology to a more “applied” focus, exploring the significance of Christian placemaking practice as it is embodied in the arts. In chapters five and following, I will argue for the relationship between art and place in terms of three main areas: particularity, physicality, and community. This comparison will suggest several things about the arts: first, that artistry is a central shared practice among human beings; second, that the arts are an integral component of placemaking and should be understood as a paradigm for embodied placemaking practices; third, that human artistry can participate in divine creative and redemptive work; and fourth, that a theology of place and placemaking might also contribute to the field of “theology and the arts” by highlighting a central theological component of human artistic practice as a “placed” activity. Bringing together a theology of place and a theology of the arts in this chapter will allow for the development of a “place-based theology of the arts,” which I will argue accounts in a constructive way for the role of the artist (i.e. all humans as makers) as participants in making fitting dwelling places for God with us, as well as suggesting the potentially—though not necessarily—redemptive significance of human artistry as an embodied placemaking practice. A more theoretical and

¹⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Word Made Flesh*, Exploration in Theology 1 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 170. See also Edward T. Oakes and David Moss, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs Von Balthasar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 19-22.

theological argument will be followed by looking at three specific examples of artists in chapters six through eight who use different mediums to reflect on their relationship to place. Drawing attention to the photography and land installations of Canadian artist Marlene Creates, the quilts and domestic crafts of the women of Gee's Bend, Alabama, and the literature of American author Wendell Berry, I will suggest that the broad range of human artistic activities in place can give us a deeper understanding of our shared participation in the creative, redemptive, and transformative work of Christ in Creation and might further help us fulfill our own calling as makers of place. But before we engage with issues of a theological or artistic nature, let us turn now to wider perspectives in the field of place studies.

CHAPTER 1

THE WIDE HORIZONS OF PLACE: AN INTRODUCTION TO PLACE AND PLACEMAKING

“Space” versus “Place”

Most disciplines distinguish between the terms “space” and “place.” While the terms are used in many different ways (what one writer means by the word “place,” the other might be suggesting through the use of the term “space”), most agree that space tends to be universal in character, whereas place is particular.¹⁵ Walter Brueggemann, speaking from a theological perspective, notes the essential difference between space and place in *The Land*:

‘Space’ means an arena of freedom, without coercion or accountability, free of pressures and void of authority. Space may be imaged as weekend, holiday, avocation, and is characterized by a kind of neutrality or emptiness waiting to be filled by our choosing....But ‘place’ is a very different matter. Place is space that has historical meanings, where some things have happened that are now remembered and that provide continuity and identity across generations. Place is space in which important words have been spoken that have established identity, defined vocation, and envisioned destiny. Place is space in which vows have been exchanged, promises have been made, and demands have been issued. Place is indeed a protest against the unpromising pursuit of space. It is a declaration that our humanness cannot be found in escape, detachment, absence of commitment, and undefined freedom.¹⁶

Brueggemann provides a helpful, and very particular, picture of what “place” looks like in relation to “space.” The geographer Yi-Fu Tuan writes it more simply: “‘Space’ is more abstract than ‘place.’ What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value.”¹⁷ Space, in the sense that these authors convey it, tends to be thought of as logically prior to place; space is a container that becomes filled with places.

However, while Brueggemann and Tuan helpfully point out some very basic differences

¹⁵ French philosophers tend to reverse these terms, however. See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

¹⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Places as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 4.

¹⁷ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), 6. For similar view from a novelist’s perspective, see Wallace Stegner, *Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs: Living and Writing in the West* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993).

between space and place, the antecedent character of space may not be the best way to think about the categories within the realm of human shared experience.¹⁸ Philip Sheldrake warns readers that by advocating the priority of space, we are in danger of presuming that the universal supersedes the particular. Picturing place as merely the compartmentalization of space assumes an objective reality to nature prior to and apart from experience and tends to make particular stories secondary to a single, more universal, narrative.¹⁹ Rather than thinking about space as prior to place, Sheldrake argues that the *experience* of place actually precedes space and gives a sense of what abstract space is.²⁰ Because place is particular and tangible, then, we actually come to understand it *before* the abstract notion of space.

Many philosophers who prioritize experience in human understanding of the world share this phenomenological perspective on place.²¹ Edward Casey argues perhaps most forcefully for the antecedent character of place in the way that we experience and understand the world. Knowledge is first particular, he says: “To live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the places one is in.”²² What one knows and perceives is first particular, and then general knowledge stems from this more local knowledge.²³ Though wider space may indeed be *ontologically* or *structurally* prior to place as Tuan suggests, people’s actual experience of the two categories suggests the reverse derivation, at least in terms of human perception.

¹⁸ This is not said to diminish what Brueggemann says in relation to place, but merely to suggest that the *antecedent* character of place, which Brueggemann’s language suggests, is not the only way to picture it.

¹⁹ Philip Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory and Identity* (London: SCM Press, 2001), 6. Furthermore, Sheldrake argues that recent advances in the sciences show that space, or the arena in which all things exist, may now be thought of differently. Space is no longer considered “objective” and can even be compressed; it is more subject to perceptions. Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, 6. The complicated nature of the sciences does not permit us to go into much depth here. Sheldrake cites the point rather quickly in order to prove his point without much basis for scientific claims. Despite this, his point does serve to show the variety of conceptions about place/space, as well as the relationship between scientific thought and the humanities, which developed alongside each other in their understandings of space and place. A helpful guide to the concepts of space in modern science can be found in Jammer, *Concepts of Space: The History of Theories of Space in Physics*, chapter 5, in particular.

²⁰ Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, 7.

²¹ See Martin Heidegger, *The Question of Being*, trans. William Klubek and Jean T. Wilde (London: Vision Press Limited, 1958); Edward S. Casey, “How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena ” in *Senses of Place* ed. Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996); Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*.

²² Casey, “How to Get from Space to Place,” 18.

²³ *Ibid.*, 17-18. See also Martha Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), on the importance of the particular in our understanding of the world. The particular and the universal should ultimately be seen as mutually constitutive, working together to structure the way in which we experience the world.

Place is, then, perhaps best understood as being *phenomenologically* prior to space. Edward Relph helpfully makes this distinction between the structural and the phenomenological when he suggests “that space *provides the context for* places but *derives its meaning* from particular places.”²⁴ When humans experience the world around them, they are first experiencing the particular.

We are required to make certain delineations between concepts in order to properly define our terms, but we must also keep in mind that space and place are not so easily divided—that although in our elucidation of “place” we may desire to develop a set of independent concepts, “this temptation is one that ought to be resisted.”²⁵ Place and space, like the particular and universal, are always intertwined, and our re-imagining of place must always coincide with a simultaneous rethinking of space.²⁶

This phenomenological understanding of place and space is important for our understanding of placemaking. If space is understood as prior to place, then the problem of placelessness and placemaking is actually much simpler. If place is merely the compartmentalization of space, then methods could be prescribed for people to learn to make places within space. But if we hold to a communal rather than a compartmental view of place—if place is prior to space in experience, as Casey and others suggest, and if, moreover, space and place are indelibly bound together—then the making of place cannot be such a prescribed process.²⁷ Placemaking, from this phenomenological perspective requires not just learning a process, but rather, calls for a re-discovery of the priority of place again in human

²⁴ Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 8. Emphasis mine.

²⁵ Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 25.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁷ For theological references to this distinction, see especially Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

experience and imagination—it calls for a home-coming that bears ultimate significance for how humans perceive themselves as particular persons in relationship to the created world.²⁸

Multifarious Meanings of Place

Beyond drawing noetic distinctions between place and space, place as a concept on its own can also be conceived of in a myriad of ways. Malpas writes of the complexity of place, suggesting that place must be understood as “a structure comprising spatiality *and* temporality, subjectivity *and* objectivity, self *and* other. Indeed these elements are themselves established only in relation to one another, and so only within the topographical structure of place.”²⁹ There are, in fact, literal and metaphorical ways to refer both to the concept of place and to physical places themselves. The word “place” can be used to refer to physical geography, the community existing within a place, or the place of someone in a social group or network. Physical places can also become metaphors for theological, philosophical, social, or political ideas. For instance, when one visits Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, which exhibits Gothic motifs devised to emphasize the viewer’s experience of God through architecture, one experiences the beauty of the physical place itself, while also encountering the theological ideas associated with pointed arches or stained glass windows. The place becomes somewhere the visitor can indwell physically while also providing metaphors through architectural styles for different experiences of God’s transcendence or dwelling presence.³⁰ Similarly, the location Ellis Island is more often associated with immigrant emotions, ideologies, and experiences than with the physical geography itself, though

²⁸ For the notion of “homecoming,” see Wes Jackson, *Becoming Native to This Place* (Washington D.C.: Counterpoint, 1996); Steven Bouma-Prediger and Brian J. Walsh, *Beyond Homelessness: Christian Faith in a Culture of Displacement* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008). It should also be noted that “placemaking” is never *ex nihilo*, but is always a drawing on what is already there, a re-making, as it were. This is parallel with our understanding of human “making” more generally, a topic to be addressed in chapter two.

²⁹ Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 163.

³⁰ For good exposition of Gothic architectural principles, see A. Welby Pugin, *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* (London: Academy Editions, 1973).

certainly the physical still plays a primary role in one's understanding of the place—it is one of the first physical features one sees when sailing into Brooklyn Harbor.

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, in their study of metaphors that structure our lives, propose this relationship between ideologies and physical space. In fact, they suggest, “Most of our fundamental concepts are organized in terms of one or more spatialization metaphors.”³¹ Even those things that seem unrelated to place often find a relation in terms of metaphor. For instance, when someone says they feel a little down (meaning “sad”, “depressed”, or even “down on their luck”), reference is being made to a mode of orientation (“down”) that draws on the concept of place. Or, when one speaks of the “foundation” of an argument, one is appealing to the metaphor of a structural foundation, such as in a building. This metaphorical use of place consistently crops up throughout human language, art, and activity on a daily basis. But these metaphors are also rooted in both physical and cultural experience.³² The metaphor cannot be separated from the physical and cultural reality that exists behind it; the metaphor of “feeling down” is only understood because of our knowledge of a valley, for instance. Without this physical grounding, the metaphor is lost.

To speak of place, then, we must take into account both the metaphorical and literal. When we think of place in a physical way, we must always be aware that the literal carries metaphorical associations with it, such as with the Gothic cathedral. At the same time, though, the metaphorical is always grounded in the literal, referring back to something specific and often grounded in a particular physical place. This relationship speaks to the nature of our essential embodiedness as human beings and calls into question the modern prejudice against the physical in favor of a purely spiritual state. Linking physical and metaphorical understandings of place in this way might help us understand the particularity

³¹ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 17. They refer to orientational metaphors and container metaphors in particular in relation to the concept of place. See pp. 14-21, 29-30.

³² *Ibid.*, 18.

of human embodiedness and experience in place as *both* spiritual and physical while calling attention further to the significance of divine flesh-taking in the Incarnation and the specifically theological significance of place that it suggests, which I will explore further in chapter four.

A Communal Understanding of Place(making)

Despite the multitude of meanings for the term “place,” we are still able to identify some overarching concepts in place studies that will facilitate a clear discussion of the subject. The most common adjectives used to describe place are “social,” “communal,” or “relational.” All of these speak to the fact that the “conception of place is inseparable from the relationships that are associated with it.”³³ A place is thus understood as a community in a place. While these terms might be used interchangeably, I will opt most often for a “communal” understanding of place. This, I think, will allow us to reflect on the interrelated nature of people and places while also drawing on the theological nuance of the term, “community” as the place of Christ’s presence among his people. For now, though, it is important to identify how this human aspect of place forms a basis for a general understanding of placemaking.

Henri Lefebvre argues that place and human communities are mutually constitutive: “Space is permeated with social relations; it is not only supported by social relations but it is also producing and produced by social relations.”³⁴ Speaking in perhaps clearer terms, the American author Wallace Stegner avers:

At least to human perception, a place is not a place until people have been born in it, have grown up in it, lived in it, known it, died in it—have both experienced and shaped it, as individuals, families, neighborhoods, and communities, over

³³ Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, 26.

³⁴ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 286., as quoted in Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 41. Lefebvre reverses the terms space and place and is one example of the different ways in which the terms “space” and “place” can be used throughout the literature.

more than one generation...it is made a place only by slow accrual, like a coral reef.³⁵

Places are made, therefore, through relationships—through social interactions that shape both the community and place in relation to one another. Stegner lists several “placemaking activities” in his description, which communicates the importance of human agency in place. A place becomes what it is by a long history of actions performed there. As we perform and re-perform actions in a place, we are simultaneously drawing on that place’s history for our own understanding of ourselves, as well as adding back to the value of the place, re-making it over and over again in a sort of dynamic conversation.

Malpas, though he insists on the dynamic relationship between human agency and place, insists that places are not *solely* a matter of human response, however. “Of course, the existence of some particular place—of some set of objects or of some subject—will be *causally* dependent on a set of physical processes and structures, but this does not mean that place can be simply reduced to such processes or structures.”³⁶ We affect the places we are in, but those physical places that have often existed for longer than us always form the ground for our experiences and actions.³⁷ They produce and inform our actions, while at the same time being produced by them. Places are the ground of shared human experience as well as the product of shared human practice.

Place, therefore, is not only affected by human participation, but human behavior and action are affected by place. This notion resonates with the writing of Pierre Bourdieu who outlines a theory of *habitus* that can be described as personal, embodied motivation shared through practice.³⁸ Bourdieu sees this motivation and experience, as Mark Wynn describes, as “rooted in the primordial intentionality of the body in its enacted relationship with the

³⁵ Stegner, *Where the Bluebird Sings*, 201.

³⁶ Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 37.

³⁷ Timothy Gorrige also calls attention to the fact that place is more than just human society. See T.J. Gorrige, *The Common Good and the Global Emergency: God and the Built Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 79.

³⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

world.”³⁹ While he does not outline a theory of “place” as such, Bourdieu's understanding of human experience and knowledge finds itself practically rooted in embodied experience of the world. *Habitus* can be described as a set of personal dispositions, skills, and motivations that are embedded in structuring and organizing practice, in Bourdieu's words, “structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations.”⁴⁰ In other words, our actions and perceptions are rooted in the structures or places in which we dwell. But these structures or places are also “structured” themselves. While the nature of Bourdieu's *habitus* may have many other relevant connotations and implications for a social understanding of place, we will find two things are important here. First, perceptions, thoughts, habits, and actions find their foundations within the underlying social system and practices (which includes place). That is, places form not just the backdrop for actions and experiences but structure the very ground of them.⁴¹ Second, those places and structures are themselves structured by our own experiences and actions. They are “made” or “constructed” by both individual and corporate actions and imagination.⁴²

A thoroughly complex understanding of placemaking, then, must always keep in mind this inherent multiplicity and tension of places. In this respect, the theological language of “givenness,” and the relationship between places as “given” and “made” may better communicate the nature of places that these authors seek to represent. While humans “make places,” they are always making with what is already given. We are, in a sense, re-making that which is already there, while at the same time, adding something new or of value to it through our particularized actions. This language of “givenness,” or places as “gifts” from

³⁹ Mark R. Wynn, *Faith and Place: An Essay in Embodied Religious Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 123.

⁴⁰ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 72.

⁴¹ See also Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 173.

⁴² Charles Taylor's notion of social imaginaries, which bind together the shared practices of particular people in a group and are shared by a large group of people, perhaps even an entire society or nation, is relevant to note. See Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 24.

God, is mostly employed only in the theological realm. In calling attention to it at this stage, though, we can already begin to see the ways in which a theologically grounded understanding of place and placemaking can contribute to the field of place studies more widely in the way it conceives of a particularly vibrant, complex, and active understanding of place as both producer and product.

Relevant Issues for Placemaking

An understanding of placemaking and place(re-)making must often hold several issues in tension, then. It must, as we have suggested, apprehend placemaking as an important task in terms of responsibility with a gift already given. Furthermore, it must value the physical place itself while also acknowledging the spiritual and symbolical value that places represent. Along these lines, Schneekloth and Shibley suggest that above all, placemaking is not just a matter of physical construction or making. Rather:

It is about ‘world making’ in a much broader sense because the practice literally has the power to make worlds—families, communities, offices, churches, and so on. Each act of placemaking embodies a vision of who we are and offers a hope of what we want to be as individuals and as groups who share a place in the world.⁴³

The authors go on to identify this not just as an activity relegated to the professional or academic realm, but as a “shared practice” that all humans take part in. “As a shared practice, all engage in transforming the material world through making places and...by creating knowledge about places and their development.”⁴⁴ This highlights the central relationship of place to identity and human action. Edward Relph similarly describes place as “a center of action and intention.”⁴⁵ Two points about place can be gathered from these descriptions. First, without active participation, place might be described as an abstracted, empty space; but through human action in a place, memory and narrative are developed, and our particular stories become tied to the places in which we act. Places are made and develop

⁴³ Schneekloth and G., *Placemaking: The Art and Practice of Building Communities*, 191.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁴⁵ Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 42.

meaning based on these actions. Second, human knowledge, identity, experience, and action are affected by and situated directly within places. There is, then, a mutually constitutive relationship between place and human action.

The Body in Place

The most fundamental way to understand this relationship between place and human action is to focus on the body—the immediate context for human action and experience. It is an essential quality of humans to be embodied. “In this respect,” Edward Casey avers, “[the body] can be considered as a place of places—or more exactly, a *placer of places*.”⁴⁶ Casey describes two aspects of bodily place: *intra-place*, or the body as place itself which organizes the space around it, and *inter-place*, or the moving body that vehicles us between places.⁴⁷ Both of these concepts—the body as place and the body as vehicle to place—are significant. In them, we can identify elements that might help discern placemaking as a reflexive activity (organizing space for the self) and as a physical activity (the body as navigating physical places in the world.) We must be careful here though, and temper Casey’s understanding of the body as a sort of “vehicle.” This language can personify the body as a separate entity in an unhelpful way and can separate bodily experience from mental or spiritual experience. While our bodies do serve to move us through, and to situate us within place, we must hold onto the sense of *wholeness* that embodiment entails. The body is certainly both “place” and “placer,” but embodiment, like place, implies more than just the physical. If we focus on this relationship between the body and mind, or the physical and spiritual, we might open up further possibilities for our conception of place, especially from a Christian perspective.

⁴⁶ Edward S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 195.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 196. The artist Deborah Haynes similarly expresses a similar point in Deborah J. Haynes, *Book of This Place: The Land, Art, and Spirituality* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009), 46.

By holding the body and mind together, we might formulate an epistemology that is essentially derived from and related to embodied action in place.⁴⁸ In this view, one's mental life is essentially related to being embodied in place. Wendell Berry argues that action "can only be understood in relation to place; only by staying in place can the imagination conceive of or understand action in terms of consequence, or cause and effect."⁴⁹ Aside from the purely physical matter of the body existing in place, Berry suggests that we cannot *understand* our actions without their being centered in place. Even if we could act out of place,⁵⁰ we could not see the results, causes, or effects of our actions except as they happen in time and place. David Seamon also highlights the relationship between knowledge and place, developing an epistemological framework based on embodied experience. Analyzing how people move and act within space, how they find their dwelling and rest there, and how they interact with others in place, Seamon suggests that the body can actually "know" the environment it is in.⁵¹ How we process and understand the world is related to the place of our body within it. His approach is indicative of the more general move toward bodily experience of the material world as being the key way in which people understand their identity and develop a sense of place.⁵² Our physical bodies provide us with the first indicator that we belong in a world of places. Every experience is an embodied experience, and thus, our bodies serve to permanently place us.

Dwelling

⁴⁸ Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 135.

⁴⁹ Wendell Berry, *Standing by Words* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1983), 88.

⁵⁰ This phrase, "out of place," suggests that appropriateness of actions is tied to places. When an action is spoken of as "out of place," it generally means it is inappropriate. We say that actions should and should not be done *here*. Similarly, we speak of actions "taking place," another metaphor which suggests the spatial quality of our actions in the world.

⁵¹ Phil Hubbard et al., *Thinking Geographically: Space, Theory and Contemporary Human Geography* (London: Continuum, 2002), 101-2.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 102-103. Phenomenology as a branch of philosophy, beginning with Maurice Merleau-Ponty and perhaps made most popular through the writing of Martin Heidegger, argues for the primary role of human experience in the world as a source of knowledge and understanding. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962); Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971). Within place studies this branch of philosophy has been particularly influential.

The body's relationship to place is related to the concept of dwelling, the way we navigate and situate our bodies in relationship to the world. Casey argues that the "body has everything to do with the transformation of a mere *site* into a dwelling *place*. Indeed, *bodies build places*."⁵³ Casey's attachment of the body to dwelling is certainly related to Heideggerian influence. Martin Heidegger asserts that dwelling is the basis of our very Being and believes that man's relationship with place stems from this bodily dwelling.⁵⁴ Casey, pushing this concept of dwelling further, explores two ways in which we might dwell, which originate from two different roots of the word for "dwelling." First, dwelling can mean to "linger, delay, tarry," from the Old Norse *dvelja*.⁵⁵ This is probably the most widespread understanding of dwelling, and means staying put or residing in one place. Second, however, is the Old English root *dwalde*, meaning to "go astray, err, wander."⁵⁶ The second meaning is accomplished by dwelling in places for only a short period of time and wandering between them.⁵⁷ Time is not a factor in this second understanding of dwelling as it is in the first.⁵⁸ In either case, however, Casey suggests that to dwell requires some sort of making or building, whether or not it is permanent or temporary.

Places destined for dwelling are neither merely presented to us as already made—prefabricated in here a non sequitur—nor can they be built instantly or ex nihilo. Even caves that possess habitable caverns call for cultivation, e.g., by painting animal icons on the walls. In modern dwelling places, the arrangement and rearrangement of furniture, memorabilia, and paintings (i.e. Modern secular icons) are essential to achieving a sense of settled-in living.⁵⁹

⁵³ Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 116.

⁵⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971), 60, 157.

⁵⁵ Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 114.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 114. This second meaning of dwelling might also be related to the Christian understanding pilgrimage or sojourning. We will address this concept as it applies to a Christian notion of place in chapter four. Casey's word study recalls Heidegger's discussion of *bauen*, "to remain, to stay in a place," which he ties to *buan*, "to build." Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 144.

⁵⁷ This is most often exemplified by nomadic living, where the people move about in the land, yet are thought to dwell in the places they inhabit for short periods of time. For another interesting exploration of transitory dwelling and place-making, see Simon Unwin's Essay on "Constructing place...on the beach" in Sarah Menin, ed. *Constructing Place: Mind and Matter* (London: Routledge, 2003), 77-86.

⁵⁸ Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 179. Though dwelling itself and feeling comfortable in place may not require time as Casey suggests, we will see a bit later in our discussion of a sense of place that time is a significant factor in my understanding of placemaking.

⁵⁹ See *Ibid.*, 174.

To dwell both bodily and mentally in a place, then, we must build it up, make it into something new by means of cultivation, arrangement, or ordering. Building is the activity that helps us navigate the space of bodily dwelling.⁶⁰

Narrative, Memory, and Identity

Placemaking as a matter of active shared experience and producer of personal and shared knowledge relates to three additional aspects of human experience that are typically tied to place or location: narrative, memory, and identity. First, we can understand places as “texts, layered with meaning.”⁶¹ Rather than simply being a matter of geographical location, places are the result of a dialectical relationship to human narrative.⁶² Because people’s memories and stories are linked together over time through place, they can maintain a sense of continuity with others past, present, and future through the attachment to place.

Brueggemann expresses a similar idea with his notion of a “storied place,” or “a place that has meaning because of the history lodged there.”⁶³ Storied places gather memories and events into themselves, forming the thread throughout an entire history of people over time.⁶⁴ When one engages with a place, then, they are simultaneously engaging with the community and its accompanying narrative there.

Narrative has a close link to memory, as stories or narratives are maintained over time through acts of remembering. The memories themselves are also linked with place: memories are both fixed in places and are the means we use to access places in terms of their wider story or narrative. Gaston Bachelard suggests this in *The Poetics of Space*:

⁶⁰ Heidegger writes, “Man’s relationship to location, and through locations to spaces, inheres in his dwelling. This relationship between man and space is none other than dwelling, strictly thought and spoken.” Later he goes on to say that “poetically man dwells”, inferring that dwelling is the cause of some sort of building and poetic making or interaction. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 157.

⁶¹ Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, 17.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 1.

⁶³ Brueggemann, *The Land*, 198.

⁶⁴ Casey, *Remembering*, 202.

Memories are motionless, and the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are....For a knowledge of intimacy, localization in the *spaces* of our intimacy is more urgent than determination of dates.⁶⁵

To explore this “localization of intimate spaces,” Bachelard suggests the childhood home as the determiner of meaning and keeper of the most solid memories we have. “All really inhabited space,” he suggests, “bears the essence of the notion of home.”⁶⁶ More than causing nostalgia, the childhood home as a truly inhabited or *indwelt* space reveals something about our most basic impulses, holding the memories that form our identity and allowing us to imagine or daydream from an already inhabited space in the memory. Inhabited space, or intimately “made places,” can be understood to form the structure of our memory, identity, and imagination.

The way that people perceive and imagine places in the present, then, is a result of gathered memories of places in the past. Thomas Hardy writes about this perception of place through memory in *The Woodlanders*:

Winter in a solitary house in the country, without society, is tolerable, nay even enjoyable and delightful, given certain conditions; but these are not the conditions which attach to the life of a professional man who drops into such a place by mere accident.... The spot may have beauty, grandeur, salubrity, convenience; but if it lack memories it will ultimately pall upon him who settles there without opportunity of intercourse with his kind.⁶⁷

Historical memory, of course, is inseparable from narrative; connecting memories, stories, and human history with particular places helps us identify the extent to which we are part of a relational or communally-structured narrative. Places become “habitable” by having events take place within them and by remembering those events later. These memories connects us not only to the places themselves but also to the people and stories that take place within them. Paul Ricoeur suggests a connection similar to Hardy’s:

⁶⁵ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 9.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁷ Thomas Hardy, *The Woodlanders* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 112.

Places inhabited are memorable par excellence. Declarative memory enjoys evoking them and recounting them, so attached to them is memory. As for our movements, the successive places we have passed through serve as reminders of episodes that have taken place there. They appear to us after the fact as hospitable or inhospitable, in a word, as habitable.”⁶⁸

In Ricoeur’s picture, like Bachelard’s, place and memory are intertwined. Places form the sites of memories and memories engage us in the history of a place. If we understand place and memory as dialectical in this way, places might even be allowed into the structure of human narrative as events themselves. Places can be understood as events that happen rather than things which simple are.⁶⁹ Viewing place as an event situates it not just as the backdrop of human actions but as a dynamic part of human history and narrative. Places become players in our story, and we become players in theirs. The whole human world narrative, then, exists as a conversation and social relation between people and place.

If our understanding of both personal and communal narrative is structured in terms of places and the memories grounded in places, then our conception of our identity as it is situated within that wider narrative will also be tied to the story of place. Mary Warnock helpfully makes the connection between memory and identity, “neither concept being prior to nor separable from the other. The sense of personal identity that each of us has is a sense of continuity through time. We could not have this without memory, in the full sense of recollection.”⁷⁰ We might add to Warnock’s assertion that continuity in places adds to a sense of identity, and that this also is achieved through personal and collective memories. Without a physical grounding and “memory place,”⁷¹ we are unable to attain real connections between the past and the current places that we inhabit.

⁶⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 41.

⁶⁹ Casey, "How to Get from Space to Place," 27.

⁷⁰ Mary Warnock, *Memory* (London: Faber & Faber, 1987), 75.

⁷¹ Casey, *Remembering*, ch. 9.

Perhaps the most helpful way to make the link between identity and place, though, is to discuss the notion of *placelessness*. Placelessness and its effect on human identity, thought, and action has been an ever-widening topic of contemporary discussion on place. Noting the lack of a sense of place in modern society may clue us into the various ways that a theology of place can contribute positively to unique character and identity. Several factors are designated as contributors to the overwhelming problem and feeling of placelessness in modern society. Marc Augé, in his discussion on society's placelessness, notes the contribution of globalization and urbanization to the homogenization of society.⁷² Edward Relph also adds the rise of mass communication, mass culture, big business, central authority, and the economic system to the list of factors that contribute to an attitude of placelessness.⁷³ Business and architectural styles are transmitted globally, so that one can go halfway around the world and feel "at home" in one's favorite coffee shop. In addition to the homogenization of cities and towns, the world of the Internet provides its own place where there is only the global; information can be accessed from anywhere within a matter of seconds. James Howard Kunstler argues that Western culture, and America in particular, suffers from a loss of place and identity—that, effectively, we now live in a "geography of nowhere."⁷⁴ All places are the same, and thus, there are no real places at all. This homogenization affects local culture and identity, as more and more societies lose a historical sense of local pride and, instead, identify with mass culture and a set of global ideals, which hinge on a contemporized form of Platonism that suggests ultimate uniformity of space and experience. While there may be Internet "communities" awaiting everyone at the click of a button, they do not provide a

⁷² See Augé, *Non-Places*. John Inge also comments on the problem, and says: "[Since] the Second World War the importance of place has been ignored in practice as much as in theory for the sake of economic values such as mobility, centralization or rationalization." Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, 17. See also Lewis Holloway and Phil Hubbard, *People and Place: The Extraordinary Geographies of Everyday Life* (Harlow: Prentice Hall, 2001), ch. 2.

⁷³ Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, ch. 6.

⁷⁴ James Howard Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-Made Landscape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993).

substitute for the sense of belonging and identity that results from a physical relationship with particular place and community.

Steven Bouma-Prediger and Brian J. Walsh approach this issue of placelessness from a specifically theological perspective in *Beyond Homelessness*. Here, they argue, as other non-religious writers have done, that our society suffers from an overwhelming sense of homelessness, and that this can be conceived as both physical homelessness as well as an existential homelessness resulting from the postmodern condition in which we live. The authors approach the topic from various levels, including physical homelessness in cities, ecological homelessness, postmodern homelessness, and the Church's understanding of itself as a "sojourning community."⁷⁵ When taken from a theological perspective, human identity as a "people of place" is tied up in the mental, spiritual, *and* physical connection of people to this world as well as to the redeemed world promised to us in scripture. The authors carefully explore the nuance involved in being called to dwell on earth and participate in the care of creation, while also hoping for the kingdom to come, our home that is "not yet." As Christians, we are called to be "wayfaring dwellers," sojourners that put down roots in the places we live, but who are always ready to respond to the call to go elsewhere.

This point will be understood more fully as we explore the issue of place and placemaking from a biblical perspective in chapters 2-4. Bouma-Prediger and Walsh's multidimensional treatment of the issue of placelessness, though, is important to note here as we suggest the connection between our identity as humans to dwelling in places. We are not meant to *simply* be wayfarers, and in fact, we cannot take care of places properly in the long-term in this sort of lifestyle. Wendell Berry suggests that places require care over a long period of time, and that this requires fidelity to a place for that time. Furthermore, our sense of place, Berry argues, is dependent on this relationship. He writes, "[O]ur sense of wholeness is

⁷⁵ Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, *Beyond Homelessness*, ch. 8.

not just the sense of completeness in ourselves but also is the sense of belonging to others and to our place; it is an unconscious awareness of community, of having in common.”⁷⁶ By being placeless, humans are unable to understand the complex nature of their identity as it relates to other people and the physical world. But being placed engages the person not only with a present community, but also with a history of community in place, which provides continuity and a shared sense of identity and belonging in the wider “storied place” or narrative.

Sense of Place

A “sense of place” is ultimately what we call all of these various associations and understandings of place, including a sense of communal narrative, memory, and identity. A sense of place ultimately has to do with the nature of *belonging*, how one belongs to a place or community in both actuality and imagination. How this sense of place is conceived, we will see, is directly related to the action of placemaking. The way that one conceives of his belonging to place is directly related to how he goes about “making” it. Likewise, how one makes a place is related to how he conceives or imagines his belonging within it. There are varying uses of the phrase, “sense of place,” but generally it can be characterized as the ways in which people experience, describe and act upon their personal attachment to and identity within physical places. A sense of place is thus reflexive and active—it is the sense that what one knows about oneself is known in relation to a place or places, and this sense determines one’s action in those places.

Edward Relph famously advocates an “authentic” sense of place, and his observations are a helpful starting point for any discussion of the topic. What constitutes a sense of place, for Relph, is not one’s insider/outsider label, but whether one has an “authentic” attitude towards place. An authentic attitude to place, he says, “comes from a full awareness of places

⁷⁶ Wendell Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry* (Emeryville: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2002), 144.

for what they are as products of man's intentions and the meaningful settings for human activities, *or* from a profound and unselfconscious identity with place."⁷⁷ The authentic sense of place, then, can be either a self-conscious product or unselfconscious producer. Though Relph distinguishes between these two modes of place discovery, he does not seem to regard one over the other, but addresses the value and difference in each approach to belonging in place. It is the main difference between these two, though, that suggests placemaking might actually be a more fruitful starting point for worthwhile place studies in the modern world.

Relph describes an authentic and unselfconscious sense of place as "being inside and belonging to *your* place both as an individual and as a member of a community, and to know this without reflecting on it."⁷⁸ Relph suggests that this way of thinking is most normally ascribed to "unspoiled primitive people," who depend on the land and tend to view places as related to both the spiritual and the physical. Contemporary Western people may unselfconsciously move about and act within their place, however, their relationship to it tends to be less about the sacred quality of the place and more about the utility and functionality of it, which is interchangeable with other secular places.⁷⁹ Though Relph emphasizes that an unselfconscious and authentic sense of place "provides an important source of identity for individuals, and through them, for communities," he notes the fact that most people cannot claim this type of relationship to place.⁸⁰ Spatial mobility has made it so that few people remain in relationship with a single place from birth, or for any significant length of time for that matter, and as a result, the symbolic quality of a single, particular place is lost on most individuals. Furthermore, the tendency in today's society to reflect on one's own identity makes it so that even the "insider" must self-consciously choose his place.

⁷⁷ Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 64. Emphasis mine.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 65. Note also the way that we "inhabit" various frameworks of meaning without necessarily being conscious of them. See Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), for his understanding of "tacit knowledge".

⁷⁹ Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 65.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 65-66.

Wendell Berry reflects on this when he says of his return to his native place: “before, it had been mine by coincidence or accident; now it was mine by choice.”⁸¹ Though Berry already had a relationship to his family land as an “insider,” he made the self-conscious decision to return to it and acknowledge his identity within it.

For these reasons, Relph avers that it is more likely in today’s society that people self-consciously acquire a sense of place. “In unselfconscious experience places are innocently accepted for what they are; in self-conscious experience they become objects of understanding and reflection.”⁸² Self-conscious experience of place tends to be related to the “outsider” who makes a place somewhere where he may not have been born or grown up, but yet learns and later maintains a sense of connectedness and identity within the particular community. It is just as often, though, that an insider, often upon leaving her place for some time, comes to reflect on it in a self-conscious way and chooses to return and belong within it in a new or different way. It is through this degree of self-awareness that we should understand the way most people find identity within places.⁸³ An authentic sense of place requires openness, reflection, and intentionality: “The more open and honest such experiences are, and the less constrained by theoretical or intellectual preconceptions, the greater is the degree of authenticity.”⁸⁴

Intentional thoughts, actions, and placemaking practices are the most important part of cultivating a sense of place, according to this account by Relph. And if, as Relph suggests, the self-conscious attitude toward place is the primary way that most modern people engage with the world of places, then attention to the practices themselves, rather than the “sense of

⁸¹ Berry, *Art of the Commonplace*, 7.

⁸² Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 66.

⁸³ See also Anne Buttner, “Home, Reach and the Sense of Place,” in *The Human Experience of Space and Place*, ed. Anne Buttner and David Seamon (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 184-85.

⁸⁴ Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 66. Exactly how to determine the measure of authenticity is not clearly outlined by Relph, though, as the matter is largely personal in nature. This may be criticized by some as one weakness of Relph’s argument for constructing a sense of place, since he depends so heavily on the concept.

place” they achieve, may be a more fruitful inquiry. It deserves note however, that Yi-Fu Tuan remains critical about Relph’s notion of a self-conscious sense of place and believes that trying to evoke a sense of place is often too deliberate and conscious.⁸⁵ A sense of place becomes clichéd and marketable, related not to one’s actual belonging to a place, or even their perception of belonging, but to an idea the person “buys into.” Tuan writes, “Being rooted in a place is a different kind of experience from having and cultivating a ‘sense of place’.”⁸⁶ His description of place suggests that one’s *actual* belonging to place is separated or distinct from a *cultivated sense* of belonging. Location, then, does not necessarily equate rootedness. For Tuan, a sense of time is more important in regard to a sense of place.⁸⁷ Humans acquire a sense of place and become rooted and accepted in places through experience over stretches of time.

Tuan rightly reasserts the importance of time for our understanding of a sense of place. However, the relationship between time and a sense of place is not counter to the suggestion that placemaking is the primary activity by which people achieve a sense of place. Rather, we can bolster Relph’s notion of self-conscious cultivation or making of place by including a sustained relationship with a place over time in order to know and identify with its geography, history, memories, stories, and the people that inhabit it. The terms “outsider” and “insider” are modifiable (the outsider may become an insider, or the insider may become an outsider), and a sense of place must, in fact, be cultivated in some way. But in order for this to happen, there must be a sustained relationship with or “submission” to a place over a long period of time.⁸⁸ Stegner argues that we do not need to be born into a place in order to be a part of it, but we must submit to its needs and character and see ourselves in relationship with it over time. If we are merely passing through, then we do not get a true sense of the

⁸⁵ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 198.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁸⁸ Stegner, *Where the Bluebird Sings*, 206.

land, people, and story involved in a place. But time cultivates relationship, and the self-conscious perception of place and one's relationship to it are suggestive of the more basic ways that we begin to "make places."

Kent Ryden identifies some of these actual practices involved in cultivating a sense of place, including the learning of place names, speech, artistry and craft, building, and memories—in other words, practices related to knowing the place through living, loving, working, and participating in a place over time. While he identifies several "layers of meaning" that can be understood and expressed by those who actually belong to that place, he suggests more finally that the main difference between the insider and the outsider is love for the place, which is exhibited in both perception of the place and one's action within it.⁸⁹ Ryden's conclusion that love is the main proof of a sense of place and belonging is interesting in light of our comprehensive project. A Christian sense of place, as we will argue in the following chapters, will be tied to love for the creation as a whole, a proper sense of community within it, and thankfulness for and responsibility with the gifts that God has given in gracious love.⁹⁰ This account will not only allow for a view of nature in receipt of God's care apart from human participation, but also enables and invites human communion and participation with it. Places are particularized rather than being subsumed into a mass, homogenized entity where there is actually "no-place." The biblical parallels to these issues

⁸⁹ Kent Ryden, *Mapping the Invisible Landscape: Folklore, Writing, and the Sense of Place* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), 58-67.

⁹⁰ Here, the idea of belonging also finds theological parallels in the notion that Christians residing in the world are pictured as sojourners or outsiders, while their ultimate home or place of belonging is heaven. See Frederick Buechner's essay, "The Longing for Home," in Leroy S. Rouner, ed. *The Longing for Home* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), for the notion of longing for home in heaven. Cf. also Hebrews 11:13-14, regarding the patriarchs who were displaced and exiled, and who sought a homeland on earth and in heaven. This paradox in Christianity reminds us that one might also be perceived as belonging to a place without having an immediate physical relationship with it. We see this idea in the person who cannot go home because of exile, immigration, destruction, or some sort of other displacement, but yet who still finds identity in the place they left. These people often still belong to a place in the imagination. They reside in one place, yet long for another. While the other place may still have physical qualities (or at least, once did), they now "belong" to a world in the imagination that they can go back (or forward) to in time and memory. On a sideways note, Lucy Lippard notes the tendency of some artists to prefer displacement and placelessness as fuel for their artistic imagination, whether as a freedom, or as stimulating imagination and feelings about the home. I note this here not to advocate such tendencies, but to call attention to the connection between physical displacement and imagination about place. Lucy R. Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 269.

will become apparent as we explore the scriptural witness to places and placemaking. One final point requires mention, however, before we turn to those theological issues. As a matter of general introduction, I suggested that placemaking might be identified in terms of its relationship to artistry. It will deserve some space, then, to further expound on the imaginative and creative component of placemaking, along with outlining a broad scheme for human artistic action in place and its implications.

The Art of Making Places

Appealing to artistic practices to discuss placemaking is common in the area of city-planning or governmental use of place. In these cases, advocates plead for the practical use of the arts on a public scale.⁹¹ In more academic arguments for the primacy of “place,” though, the arts provide merely a passing example to make a more general point, as opposed to saying something about the essential relationship between artistry and placemaking itself.⁹² Here, I wish to draw attention to some of the underlying reasons for these general appeals, while highlighting the points where this study will expand on the particular intersection between the arts and placemaking. While I will set up a more theological framework in chapter five, here, I will note some of the basic connections between art and place and begin to flesh out the definition of human artistry that will be used throughout the following chapters.

First, I will suggest that all the arts are related to place in some way, and I will briefly mention some of those before moving on to my more general point. As one might assume, architecture and the built environment have received perhaps the most attention in place studies, as the physical structures within which we live and do our business are one of the first

⁹¹ For place-making on a social or governmental level, see especially Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa, "Creative Placemaking," *A White Paper for The Mayors' Institute on City Design, a leadership initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with the United States Conference of Mayors and American Architectural Foundation*.(2010). This refers to the USA National Endowment for the Arts scheme on “creative placemaking.” See also the ArtPlace America organization for place-related public arts: <http://www.artplaceamerica.org/> (accessed 29 March 2012). In the UK, similar plans have been set out. For an example in Glasgow, Scotland, see the account portrayed in Rhona Warwick, *Arcade: Artists and Place-Making* (London: Black Dog, 2006).

⁹² In these cases, the aesthetics of place is more often the issue at hand.

features we notice about a place. This is not just a modern development in thinking about place, though. Vitruvius's *The Ten Books of Architecture* outlines the ways in which we determine dwelling and building sites in relationship to the natural environment.⁹³ Later Alberti and Le Corbusier wrote similar manifestos for an architecture related in varying ways to the environment, though the authors differ greatly in their views on the matter.⁹⁴ Even modern and postmodern philosophies of architecture, while they express different things about their relationship to the environment, suggest that there is *some* relationship between building and place and that this relationship matters to the way we conceive of ourselves in relation to it.⁹⁵ Architecture can also reflect ethical concerns and place-related issues such as poverty, justice, and empowerment.⁹⁶

Literature and poetry are also often directly related to place, not least in terms of plot setting and places of events or narratives. But beyond this, there is the notion that literature can most strongly convey a sense of place, describing the landscape and environment in ways that make readers believe a place is real or imagine one's place within it. Thomas Hardy, who we have already quoted, is one good example of this, though there are countless others.⁹⁷ Poetry can also convey a literal presence of place, but most often invites us to imaginatively engage with the world in new ways. As a medium, poetry can help us see places differently through new metaphors and ways of thinking. A poetry of place is one that not only recounts features of the world around us, but also invites us to rethink them.

⁹³ Vitruvius Pollio, *The Ten Book of Architecture* (Huntington: Empire Books, 2011).

⁹⁴ Leon Battista Alberti, *The Ten Books on Architecture* (London: Dover Publications, Inc., 1987).; Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (BN Publishing, 2008).

⁹⁵ Much of this history and several examples are recounted in David Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). For other examples of works on architecture and place, see Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Architecture: Presence, Language, Place* (Milano: Skira, 2000).; Michael Pollan, *A Place of My Own: The Architecture of Daydreams* (London: Penguin Books, 2008).

⁹⁶ Karsten Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997).; Timothy Gorringer, *A Theology of the Built Environment: Justice, Empowerment, Redemption* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁹⁷ For studies of literature and place, see especially Jeremy Hooker, *Writers in a Landscape* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996).; Leonard Lutwack, *The Role of Place in Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1984).; Gillian Tindall, *Countries of the Mind: The Meaning of Place to Writers* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1991).

While we might list several other examples, I will save the reader and get to the more pressing question at hand. To suggest that placemaking is in some way an artistic practice and that artistry is a paradigm for placemaking practice will largely contradict the modern systemization of the arts. To cling to this modern view of art as it impacts our view of place would either elevate placemaking practice above those actions performed by ordinary individuals or compromise the integrity of the arts as modern theory conceptualizes them. But neither of these is a necessary end. An alternative view of art might reflect a more complete picture of what the arts are actually for and re-situate them in the realm of ordinary life practices. I will suggest that an alternative understanding of art that focuses on human “making” gives it back its rightful place at the center of life rather than relegating art to the edges of society.

If we look at the history of Western art, we will see that modern art theory is a relatively new way to understand the arts and role of artists.⁹⁸ Throughout history, artistry and craft practices have dwelt closely near the lives of ordinary people. Art and craft were the ways that people made the things they needed, built their homes, adorned them, made them beautiful, and took pleasure in the places in which they lived.⁹⁹ While I do not wish to dismiss modern art theory in its entirety, I do wish to broaden it significantly to include these historical art practices.¹⁰⁰ As a working definition of art, then, I will use one posited by Wendell Berry which I think begins to reveal the nature of art as a placemaking practice as I have defined it. “By ‘art’,” he says, “I mean all the ways by which humans make the things they need.”¹⁰¹ While I will explore how Berry’s fiction provides a good example of placed artistry in chapter eight, his theoretical observations in his essays will help us here to develop a more holistic art

⁹⁸ For an overview of this history, see Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought 2: Papers on Humanism and the Arts* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965). Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, ch. 2.

⁹⁹ See Edward Lucie-Smith, *The Story of Craft: The Craftsman’s Role in Society* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1981).

¹⁰⁰ Wolterstorff similarly argues that the modern idea of art for contemplation is but *one of many* uses of the arts.

¹⁰¹ Wendell Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom, & Community* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 108.

theory. While Berry is an artist and farmer by profession, his more critical writing has certainly informed the work of much academic thought on the issue of place.¹⁰²

Berry's essay, "Christianity and the Survival of Creation," is perhaps one of his most well-known, and it is here that he not only sets out a Christian approach to Creation, but also an argument for the religious significance of human artistry. He says here:

If we understand that no artist—no maker—can work except by reworking the works of Creation, then we see that by our work we reveal what we think of the works of God. How we take our lives from this world, how we work, what work we do, how well we use the materials we use, and what we do with them after we have used them—all these are questions of the highest and gravest religious significance. In answering them, we practice, or do not practice, our religion.¹⁰³

There are several important points we can glean from Berry's description here and which he elaborates on throughout the rest of his essay. First, artists are not elevated by profession above the rest of society. Rather, we are all "makers" and therefore, all artists. Berry later writes, "If it is true that we are living souls and morally free, then all of us are artists."¹⁰⁴ We all make something of our lives, one another's lives, the places that we are in, and the things we need within them. Richard Sennett also expresses this broadened human compulsion towards making or craftsmanship as a "basic human impulse, the desire to do a job well for its own sake."¹⁰⁵ Second, Berry suggests that as makers, we are all responsible to the materials we use, to our neighbors, and ultimately, to God.¹⁰⁶ Responsibility with materials is latent within contemporary discussions of creativity and craft. Wolterstorff draws attention to this responsibility when he distinguishes between craftsmanship and a tour-de-force. "The tour-de-force is a sign of exasperation with one's material; craftsmanship, the sign of respect."¹⁰⁷ Artists have a responsibility to the materials—to the physical world and all its aspects they are

¹⁰² Norman Wirzba, Ellen Davis, and Craig Bartholomew have all used Berry's work extensively in their own theological approaches to place.

¹⁰³ Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom, & Community*, 108-9.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁰⁵ Sennett, *The Craftsman*, 9.

¹⁰⁶ Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom, & Community*, 112.

¹⁰⁷ Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 93.

working with—to “converse” or “dialogue” with them in a way that shows they recognize their limits and respects them. Like a farmer’s use of his land, artistic rendering of materials should never be a diminishment, but should always result in something with value added¹⁰⁸ or an “enhancement”¹⁰⁹ of some kind. W. H. Vanstone also constructs a theology of divine creativity that uses the image of the human artist working with materials in dialogue and response, so that the artwork is a participatory act that includes both artist and materials.¹¹⁰

Finally, from Berry’s initial point, we see the allusion to artistry’s potential for creational transformation. Berry later says in the essay, “everybody is an artist—either good or bad, responsible or irresponsible. Any life, by working or not working, by working well or poorly, inescapably *changes other lives and so changes the world.*”¹¹¹ This has the implication that art can be a means of human placemaking and community service, while suggesting the potentially transformational or redemptive role inherent in both. The concept of art as a tool for placemaking is fleshed out further in Berry’s *Life is a Miracle*:

Science and art are neither fundamental nor immutable. They are not life or the world. *They are tools.* The arts and the sciences are our kit of cultural tools...The only reason, really, that we need this kit of tools is *to build and maintain our dwelling here on earth...* Our dwelling here is the proper work of culture. If the tools can be used collaboratively, then maybe we can find what are the appropriate standards of our work and can then build a good and lasting dwelling—which actually would be a diversity of dwellings suited to the diversity of homelands. If the tools cannot be so used, then they will be used to destroy such dwellings as we have accomplished so far, and our homelands as well.¹¹²

Art, as Berry has expressed it here, is a primary means through which we make, transform, and actively dwell in places in the world.¹¹³ And here we reach our main point: artistry and

¹⁰⁸ Trevor Hart describes this notion of artistry as giving back something with “value-added” as a response in obedience to God’s call for human participation in creation. We will deal more specifically with this view of the arts in chapter five. Hart, “Through the Arts: Hearing, Seeing and Touching the Truth.”

¹⁰⁹ Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 35.

¹¹⁰ The comparison is made between an artist’s work and the divine granting of human participation in creative processes. Vanstone, *Love’s Endeavor*.

¹¹¹ Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom, & Community*, 110. My emphasis.

¹¹² Wendell Berry, *Life Is a Miracle: An Essay against Modern Superstition* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2000), 121-22. My emphasis.

¹¹³ Berry’s discussion of art and place reveals what he thinks about the wider relationship between nature and culture. Though Berry is a strong advocate of the natural environment, he never suggests that it must be preserved apart from human culture. In order to live in the world at all, we must necessarily change it.

placemaking are kindred practices, mutually influenced and defined by one another. Artistry is itself the *result of* our practices of placemaking; our various efforts to know and imagine our life in Creation inform our creative making and re-working of it.¹¹⁴ But artistry is also conceived here as a *tool for* placemaking. In these terms, artistry might thus be understood as an *embodiment of* or a *paradigm for* placemaking, and placemaking construed as an essentially “artistic” practice.

Yi-Fu Tuan makes a similar connection between art and place, suggesting in his small book, *Place, Art, and Self*, that art is itself a sort of place, a virtual place.¹¹⁵ While Tuan addresses each major art in their turn, he also suggests eight more general points where art and place correspond:

1. Art and place both function as a center of meaning, “primarily positive meaning.”
2. Art and place have multiple meanings.
3. Art and place both re-present meaning.
4. Art and place invite pause, reflection, and imagination.
5. Art and place are temporally related and unfold over time.
6. Art and place both capture a mood.
7. Art and place both have a “presence.”
8. Art and place are both related to and affect self-identity.¹¹⁶

Tuan’s observations will remind readers of many of the points about place suggested earlier.

The relationship to time and narrative, the effect on self-identity, and the multiplicity of meaning are but a few obvious connections. If we take Tuan’s suggestion at face value, art can be seen as a sort of place itself, and therefore art-making will be likened to a form of placemaking. As we explore the theological implications of placemaking further in the next section, these final observations should be kept at the back of one’s mind, as it will be helpful to continue to understand placemaking in relationship with human artistry in distinctly theological terms.

¹¹⁴ See Berry on the imagination defined by one’s relationship to place. Wendell Berry, *Imagination in Place* (Washington D.C. : Counterpoint, 2010), 48.

¹¹⁵ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Place, Art and Self* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 3.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 20-38.

Summary

I have explored the distinctions present in the wider discussion on place and space, both in- and out-side the field of theology, including the multiplicity of meaning that places body forth and represent. Despite the complexity of defining terms, I advocated a broad definition of place as particular, physical, and communal, even as the concept suggests universal, spiritual, and individual characteristics as well. I have argued that places are not just a matter of shared experience, but also have a component of shared practice. Places are made by human action in them, which includes but is not limited to the issues of bodily dwelling, memory, narrative, identity, and sense of place. Furthermore, I have identified the relationship between discussions of placemaking and human artistry by noting the similarities in both objects and practices, as well as the main issues involved in defining placemaking as an artistic practice and artistry as a form of placemaking. We saw that while the practices remain distinct in many ways, they are also mutually influential and might even be construed as undifferentiated in their basic *telos* to “make the things we need.” Therefore, as we proceed, we will see that theological reflection in one area will necessitate engagement with the other. As we turn to the biblical text for a theological discussion on place and placemaking, we will not simply read these modern perspectives into ancient worldviews. Rather, examining the biblical text in the next section should serve to give the adequate biblical and theological underpinning needed to account for the importance of place and placemaking in human life and experience as we have seen it expressed so far, while also granting it further or more enhanced meaning.

§ 1: INTRODUCTION TO A THEOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH PLACE AND PLACEMAKING

The turn to place recounted in chapter one has also been a significant feature of biblical and theological study in the past few decades. In light of the ecological crisis and other global concerns such as housing or food shortages, theologians have attempted to formulate a biblical answer to the problems of modern society, turning specifically to issues of rootedness and belonging in place. From a theological perspective, being in place should be held as a central element in the divine-human relationship and understood as what Bourdieu calls the “structuring structure” of the relationship between humans with each other and the non-human creation.¹¹⁷

In chapters 2-4, I will explore three accounts in scripture that give insight into the nature of place and placemaking, along with its role in the divine-human encounter: the Creation account of Genesis, the tabernacle and temple narratives of the Old Testament, and the doctrine of the Incarnation. Each suggests that humans are called to participate in both creation and redemption, and this will be my overall focus even as many other related issues arise. I will draw again on a wide range of scholars who suggest that scripture and theology present a multifaceted picture of place and placemaking. Attention to the land itself,¹¹⁸ to the sacramentality of place,¹¹⁹ to the relational quality of human placemaking,¹²⁰ and to the spiritual and incarnational aspects of place,¹²¹ will become key lenses through which we discover the theological significance of place and placemaking. I will focus more directly on contemporary studies of place and placemaking to limit my study, though some allusions to

¹¹⁷ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 576.

¹¹⁸ Brueggemann, *The Land*; W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); Ellen Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

¹¹⁹ Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*; Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*; Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*; Wynn, *Faith and Place*.

¹²⁰ Gorringer, *Theology of the Built Environment*; Louise J. Lawrence, *The Word in Place: Reading the New Testament in Contemporary Contexts* (SPCK, 2009); Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, *Beyond Homelessness*.

¹²¹ Geoffrey R. Lilburne, *A Sense of Place: A Christian Theology of the Land* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989); Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell*.

historical sources will no doubt present themselves as relevant throughout.¹²² This contemporary focus will benefit the “practical” application in section two, as we look to the ways in which human artistic practices can contribute to our re-discovery of place in contemporary life and thought. We may begin to realize the various ways in which humans are called to make something of the gifts of creation, participating in both creation and redemption by making a place on earth.

¹²² Craig Bartholomew provides an excellent overview of historical depictions of place in theology. See Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell*, section 2.

CHAPTER 2

PLACEMAKING IN THE COMMUNITY OF CREATION: THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PLACE AND HUMAN MAKING IN GENESIS 1-3

Scripture presents God's relationship with humans as being centered on a series of significant and strategic places. While scholars often begin their studies of place in scripture with the Abrahamic calling both *out of* and *to* a place (Genesis 12), or with the wider Old Testament focus on landedness, exile, and return, it is perhaps better to start, "In the beginning." The creation story in Genesis 1 and 2 provides a striking picture of place and particularity as it factors into both God's actions and human experiences in the created world. In this account, we see not only the *origination* of creation, but also clues as to how we might conceive of both divine and human work in *continuing* and *completing* creation.¹²³ The creation account, thus, opens up the concept of placemaking by setting the stage for how the human making of place is conceived of and practiced throughout Genesis and the rest of scripture, as well as how God tends to use particular places in his interaction with us.

Of course, a Christian theological reading of Genesis will suggest a Christological focus on creation, even from the outset. While this relationship between creation and incarnation will be explored further later, it is important to note the significance of a Christian reading of Genesis in terms of what it suggests about humans' relationship to creation itself along with any participatory and possibly redemptive value our own work might have in light of Christ's making a place among and for us. Already in the Genesis story, God provides a place for humans to participate in creation and redemption, which is made possible through Jesus Christ as both Creator and Redeemer (Col. 1:15-20).

¹²³ Terence E. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 5-9. Fretheim, is of course, drawing on the wider patristic distinction between *creation ex nihilo* and *creatio continua*. Basil of Caesarea, Irenaeus of Lyon, Augustine of Hippo, and St. Thomas Aquinas all made the distinction.

In this chapter, I will introduce the topic of place in the creation account by noting the prominence of spatial features in both the act of creation itself as well as the gifting of a dwelling place in the garden. The majority of the chapter, however, will focus on the topic of placemaking—God’s calling of humans to participate in the making of creation. As a foundation for this discussion I will address the distinction between divine and human creativity in the vocabulary used in the creation account (*bara* and *asah*), which will introduce the debate about *creatio ex nihilo* and the relationship between Creator and cosmos. While this is not the ultimate subject of this chapter, the debate does form the backdrop to my account of placemaking.

After this brief background on theological issues related to divine and human creativity, I will address a central element of the call to placemaking—the *imago dei*—and its close relationship to the dominion mandate, physical procreation, and the doctrine of election more generally. Here, I will note the link between divine command and human making, especially as it is witnessed in the call to “till and keep” and the invitation to Adam to name the animals. All of these elements will be situated within a theology of stewardship more broadly, suggesting that the Genesis narrative calls us to be good stewards in the “community of creation.”¹²⁴ As a matter of conclusion, I will introduce the redemptive aspect of placemaking, and suggest that humans are called to participate in both creation and redemption through the making of places in the world. First, though, a brief note on the authorship and intent of the Genesis narrative will help to set the context.

Authorship and Intent

The Bible begins with what appears to be two separate accounts of the creation of the world by God, found in Genesis 1 and 2. The two accounts are historically argued to

¹²⁴ Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, ch. 1.

originate from different sources—P, the Priestly writer (Gen. 1:1-2:4a) and J, the Yahwist writer (Gen. 2:4b-25), and, no doubt, have different emphases in their accounts of creation.¹²⁵ The accounts are typically differentiated in terms of their purpose—Genesis 1 is understood to have a theological function whereas Genesis 2 has more of an historical function. While we may see a shift from “heavens to earth” in chapter one, and from “earth to heavens” in chapter two, it is best to read the two accounts as a whole when developing a theology of creation.¹²⁶ Regardless of whether they argue for multiple authors or one redactor, most scholars will still acknowledge this necessary theological unity.¹²⁷ Bartholomew suggests that Genesis 2 represents “a *continuation* of the place differentiation in Genesis 1,”¹²⁸ while von Rad argues that both accounts are “at one in understanding creation as effected strictly for man’s sake, with him as its centre and objective.”¹²⁹ Because the two chapters address one theology of creation in varying ways, then, we will look at the two chapters thematically rather than in chronological order of the scriptural narrative itself. Both of these accounts strategically describe the process of God’s creation, the placement of creatures in the world, the commands and blessings given to them, and the characteristic actions of both God and humans within the world. Approaching the text thematically and as an integrated whole will help us think about the way that “place” is presented in the opening chapters of Genesis while drawing the reader’s attention to issues that might be related to an understanding of placemaking more widely throughout the Christian tradition, including its potentially

¹²⁵ For discussion on various sources and authors of Genesis, see Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks (London: SCM, 1956).

¹²⁶ Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell*, 24.

¹²⁷ Fretheim argues that the authorship debate is wrongly conceived when it delineates the accounts according to the two individual authors and separates them according to a theological versus a more primitive emphasis. Instead, Fretheim avers that P is actually the redactor of the two accounts, drawing them together from other sources and keeping the two stories distinct in order to provide a multifaceted and complex theology of creation. The two accounts, in this view, are best read in interaction with one another. Fretheim, *God and World.*, 33. For a similar view, see Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001).

¹²⁸ Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell*, 25.

¹²⁹ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology: The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), 150.

redemptive significance. By exploring the text of Genesis, we will see that humans are placed in the gift of good creation, but they are also invited to be makers of place in various ways.

Boundaries of Place in Creation

While Genesis 1 begins with a universe that is “formless and void,” we quickly see the ordering of space and time as part of the first acts to bring about the world as we know it. This is not simply the backdrop to more important action later, though. At least part of the chapter’s theological significance seems to lie in the fact that God orders creation precisely in regard to spatiality and chooses to act in the world through particular places. The demarcation of days in chapter 1 will suggest such a reading—the whole message of God’s originating and sustaining creation is told within a spatial and chronological structure. Most often the exegetical focus in Genesis 1 is on time, but Richard Bauckham suggests that the marking off of the days of creation is a scheme that is “primarily spatial.”¹³⁰ In the first three days, God creates and separates environments, and in the next three days he creates inhabitants for these environments. However, construing the scheme spatially does not suggest the temporal aspect of creation should be relegated to the background. Space and time are integrally linked.¹³¹ To focus specifically on the spatial ordering of the world, though, suggests the significance of boundaries and abodes for the various creatures of God and provides the first instance of God’s ordering the world in terms of places. It also establishes from the very beginning a *relationship* between creatures with each other and their abodes, as well as places in relationship to other places.¹³² Places and creatures acquire their identity in relationship to others; the water stops where the land begins.

This relationship between regions of space and environments in the world is retold in more place-specific terms in Genesis 2:4-24. Here, the writer suggests that physical place is an

¹³⁰ Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 14. See also Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell*, 11.

¹³¹ Fretheim, *God and World*, 61f.

¹³² Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 14.

important feature of human life on earth. In Genesis 2, man is created and then put in the garden (vv. 8, 15). The garden was made as a gift and blessing *for humans* rather than being associated with God's garden, or a "garden of the gods," as is often reflected in other ancient myths.¹³³ The environment here is fit for human habitation rather than construed strictly as a playground for the gods.¹³⁴ But while the garden was not made *specifically* for God, he chooses to dwell there with his creatures, indicating the role of place in the divine-human relationship. "Eden is," Fretheim persists, "a genuinely earthly place within which God has chosen to dwell."¹³⁵ The importance of Eden as "a genuinely earthly place," is demonstrated in the author's description of geographical features of the land and garden in Genesis 2. The garden is particular and localized; it is Eden to the east. Westermann observes, "there is both limitation and distance."¹³⁶ Four rivers are described as flowing out of the garden, which sets Eden in relationship to other places or regions (vv. 10-14). Bartholomew also draws attention to the fact that "place names begin to accumulate in Genesis 2," which clues us into the concreteness of the place and its relationship to other places.¹³⁷ Whereas the initial boundaries for creation were delineated in Genesis 1, in Genesis 2 we see the ordering of specific human abodes on earth in relation to one another.

Perhaps more important than its physical boundaries, though, is the fact that the garden is presented as a significant place of both divine and human dwelling and becomes a

¹³³ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (London: SPCK, 1984), 208. von Rad, *Genesis*, 76.

¹³⁴ See also Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell*, 12.

¹³⁵ Fretheim, *God and World*, 47.

¹³⁶ Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, 208. See verse 2:8.

¹³⁷ Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell*, 25. Despite its emphasis on place as such, it is difficult to say for certain whether the garden should be conceived of as a real place. Bartholomew suggests the importance of regarding Eden as a real place in opposition to the imaginary readings many scholars now maintain. ———, *Where Mortals Dwell*, 26. Bartholomew follows Karl Barth here. See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958), 252. For Bartholomew, it is the importance of the place's particularity that draws him to a literal conclusion.

One reason for the imaginary reading of the garden is the description of the garden as a sanctuary. But G. J. Wenham makes the connection of the garden and sanctuary while maintaining that the garden should still be understood as a real place in light of various other stated features. See G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 61-2. The theological aims of our discussion of place should not be harmed by the ambiguity of defining the historicity of Eden, though. There is no way to really know whether Eden was an actual location in the Near-Eastern world or not, but we can say for certain that its account in Genesis communicates clearly the theological significance of particular places for humans in the created world.

primary point through which the divine-human relationship takes place. Before the Fall, God dwells freely amongst humans in these “earthly places.” Eden is a meeting point between the human and divine, and God chooses to dwell there with humans, “walking in the garden” (Gen. 3:8).¹³⁸ While humans were invited to creatively make places before the Fall, only after the Fall do we see the need for humans to make places that are particularly “fitting” for divine special dwelling. The vocation of humans will now be to decipher how to work with the land and non-human creation to develop the creation “into a more welcoming and gracious place” for both themselves and for God’s presence with them.¹³⁹ After humans are expelled from the garden, we see the importance of human symbolic action and sacrifice to invite the special and holy presence of God in fittingly made places, such as was the case in the tabernacle. This does not negate the fact that humans “make places” pre-Fall, only that they are attached to divine dwelling in a different way.¹⁴⁰

God’s indwelling with humans in the garden sanctuary is also certainly foreshadowing of God’s indwelling in the Incarnation later, a point John draws our attention to in his Gospel when he refers to God’s “dwelling among us” (Jn. 1:14).¹⁴¹ It is perhaps in the Incarnation that we see another paradigm shift in terms of divine-human relationship in place. While the Incarnation does not signal a “return to Eden,” it does, especially as John depicts it, present a

¹³⁸ The correlation between this view of the garden as meeting-point and the tabernacle and temple (both recapitulations of the garden) as the meeting-place of the divine and human realms, is especially relevant. We will address this in terms of the tabernacle and temple in chapter three, but it is interesting to note the way in which the initial creation sees human and divine dwelling as being simultaneously “fit” to the garden of Eden.

¹³⁹ Fretheim, *God and World*, 271.

¹⁴⁰ It should also be noted, though, that after the Fall, God does occasionally show up unannounced or without specific human invitation in places, such as in Bethel (Gen. 28:10-22). In every case of divine-human encounter in the Old Testament, the care required of humans is stressed in relation to the often-dangerous presence of God. The Ark of the Covenant and its codes for handling is one relevant example.

¹⁴¹ Importantly, John uses the term *skenoō* in this passage. The term here, unlike perhaps some of its other instances in scripture and ancient literature where it refers to the “in-betweenness” or episodic quality of dwelling in a place, instead “is designed to show that this is the presence of the Eternal in time,” not in some temporary way, but in terms of “staying put.” Gerhard Friedrich, ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. VII (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 386. This term is also used in Rev. 7:15, 12:12, 13:6, and most importantly, 21:3.

Throughout the rest of John’s gospel, though, he repeatedly uses the term *meno* (“to remain in a place, to tarry, to dwell,”) to refer to the abiding of Christ with us. In these same instances, he refers to the “immediate possession of the divine presence as opposed to the merely eschatological promise of the divine presence with us. Gerhard Kittel, ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. IV (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1967), 576. *meno* is used 33 times in John’s gospel and another 20 in his letters.

physical place (in people and communities in places) for the divine presence to dwell and abide with us. Rather than consisting of a transitory place for divine-human relationship, Christ's abiding presence with his believers (14:23) suggests the *permanent* abiding of Christ in us. There is both permanence and particularity in our relationship with Christ, even as we continue to look forward to New Creation and the universal presence this entails in the time to come.¹⁴²

Placemaking in God's Creation: The Relationship between Divine and Human Creativity

While place itself is a significant and basic feature of the way creation is established, it is perhaps the action of *placemaking* that receives closer attention in the Genesis account. The biblical writers more often address the appropriate means by which to use, act within, and understand various aspects of the world and culture. In order to understand what I mean by a biblical understanding of placemaking, it will be helpful to first address the nature of creativity and "making" more generally in the Genesis account.

The terminology used in the creation account to describe both divine and human activity is a good starting place. Here, the Priestly writer records the ultimate creative act: God brings his new creation into being. There are two main verbs used throughout the Genesis creation narrative: *bara*, "to create," (vv. 1:1, 21, 27-28; 2:3, 4) and *asah*, "to make," (vv. 1:7, 11-12, 16, 25-26, 31; 2: 2-4, 18). The opening verse of Genesis designates God's activity by the term *bara*, which is, "on principle, without analogy," and is used exclusively of God's activity.¹⁴³ Because Yahweh is always the subject of this type of creation, and the text never suggests a material out of which God creates, it is typically understood that the Priestly

¹⁴² Kittel, ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 580. In 14:23, John uses the term *monē*, "to stay, tarry." Its only other instance in the New Testament is 14:2 just before it.

¹⁴³ von Rad, *Genesis*, 47.

writer is suggesting the difference of God's creative activity from that of humans.¹⁴⁴ For the same reasons (subject and lack of material), the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is associated with the text.¹⁴⁵ On the other hand, creation by "making" (*asah*) invites the participation of the rest of creation and here implies something more akin to an artist working with materials.¹⁴⁶

Analogies are thus often made between human action and this particular "making" action of God. "Making" (to be distinguished from the typical sense of "creating") suggests, then, not the sense of *creatio ex nihilo*, but rather, "an immediate, imaginative creating," where God forms and reacts to his creation in a dialogical way, giving the creation its character while at the same time working *with* that character in the creative process.¹⁴⁷ Creation is subjected to perceptions, evaluations, naming, and other participatory activities of the creatures alongside and in harmony with God.¹⁴⁸

The suggestion that God gives his creatures a participatory role reveals a central claim about God's relationship to his creation. While God may have a singular role in the act of Creation itself, he chooses to share creativity with humans and the rest of creation so that they may be involved in the continuing of this divine project. This activity falls under what theologians have called *creatio continua*, or "continuing creation," that aspect of creation that extends beyond the birth of the cosmos into the wider purposes for the world, especially as those purposes are related to redemption and future eschatological transformation.¹⁴⁹ God does not create the world as finished product, but rather, "the creative activity of the human,

¹⁴⁴ Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, 98-99. Terence Fretheim, on the other hand, suggests that even here in the first verses of Genesis, that an analogy between God's creativity and human creativity might be drawn. The term *bara* indicates, he suggests, that "no analogy drawn from the human sphere can *exhaust* the meaning of God's creative activity." Fretheim, *God and World*, 37.

¹⁴⁵ von Rad, *Genesis*, 47. Von Rad advocates such an understanding of *creatio ex nihilo* and draws attention to II Macc. 7:28 as the first formulation of the doctrine. See von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 143. Claus Westermann, on the other hand, notes the fact that we do not have to understand the text in this way. See Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, 100.

¹⁴⁶ Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, 26, 89. See also von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 142-3.

¹⁴⁷ von Rad, *Genesis*, 51-52.

¹⁴⁸ Michael Welker describes the process as "equally reactive." Michael Welker, *Creation and Reality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 12-13.

¹⁴⁹ See footnote 25.

in particular, has the potential of significantly enhancing the ongoing life of the world and every creature therein, indeed, bringing into being that which is genuinely new.”¹⁵⁰ In this sense, God’s creativity is not a one-off act, but something he chooses to share with his creatures in love.

This will call into question a doctrine of God as isolated from and unaffected by his creation, as opposed to, on the other hand, a God who is affected, responds to, and indeed, may even be able to suffer by, the actions of his creation.¹⁵¹ If God truly invites his creatures to engage with creation, and if our work (whether it be placemaking, artistry, prayer, or so on) can be understood to call upon, invite, repel, or otherwise affect God’s presence and action in the world, then we must re-consider our image of the classical God. W. H. Vanstone writes of the precariousness or the “risk” of God’s love, suggesting that God’s love requires a “self-emptying” or kenosis in order to allow humans the full freedom of response.¹⁵² While divine kenosis itself is not at odds with a classical doctrine of God, Vanstone goes further to suggest that God opens himself up to “need” his creation,¹⁵³ though not in the same sense as a strict “process theology” which understands God to be in a state of constant “becoming,” unfulfilled *except by* his creation and its continuing process.¹⁵⁴ There are, of course, questions that arise in response to Vanstone’s notion of God’s risk. The eschatological implications seem the most pertinent, since if God risks too much, then his ability and desire to bring the world to eschatological fulfillment is put into question. *Too* much is levied on creatures in terms of creation and redemption in this sense.

¹⁵⁰ Fretheim, *God and World*, 9.

¹⁵¹ The former represents a classical doctrine of God where the latter is represented of some level of “process theology.” As we will see, a middle ground remains available and we need not adhere to total process through, but I here only present the most simplified scheme. For the latter idea of creative suffering, see Paul S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1988).

¹⁵² Vanstone, *Love’s Endeavor*.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁵⁴ As influenced by Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality : An Essay in Cosmology*, Corrected ed., Gifford Lectures 1927-28 (New York: Free Press, 1978).

Furthermore, the suggestion that creatures can “add to” creation suggests an associate claim: that we can *detract from* God’s goals for creation. Vanstone writes of the tragedy or triumph inherent in the gift of creativity.¹⁵⁵ What ultimately, then, can we say about the eschatological implications of creaturely participation? I will suggest that faithfulness to responding to the divine calling in the here and now is really the main issue at stake in the Genesis narrative, and while we might speculate on the importance of human action for eschatological fulfillment or consummation, Christ ultimately provides the place of both creation and redemption, understood in most immediate terms in the Incarnation. It is perhaps for this reason that most theologians, historical and contemporary, who choose to focus on this participatory and communal model of creation seek a middle ground where God is emptied of some control but only as a result of self-limitation in Trinitarian terms.¹⁵⁶ The issue goes much deeper still, but a Trinitarian conception of cosmic kenosis suggests appropriately that God allows for a world where *both* parties are actors. God does not limit his own ability to act or his divine providential role in his kenosis,¹⁵⁷ but humans are invited to respond to the gifts of creation. By making places in the world, or making something of places, we participate with God in love, adding to and transforming creation in the places to which we are called. And while our work may also work against this ultimate goal, as I will address further in chapter five, the self-emptying of the Son to the Father in the Holy Spirit provides the ultimate place of both creation and redemptive transformation. We need not worry how God will go about concluding the drama of Creation, but the importance of our historical participation in that narrative is clear from the outset. One way that we might conceptualize this is by understanding our activities in terms of their significance in the here

¹⁵⁵ Vanstone, *Love's Endeavor*, 69.

¹⁵⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar frames a kenotic theology in Trinitarian terms, and J. Moltmann draws on Balthasar’s theology and Jewish mysticism simultaneously to account for a kenotic theology of creation. See Jürgen Moltmann, “God’s Kenosis in the Creation and Consummation of the World,” in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids: Williams B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001).

¹⁵⁷ See John Polkinghorne, *Science and Providence: God’s Interaction with the World* (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 1989).

and now. While some may stray from God's ultimate desires and resist his presence, our actions in the story of creation remain an important piece of the puzzle precisely as we respond to and invite Christ into *this place*, anticipating eschatological realities in microcosmic and historically placed terms.

The *Imago Dei* and the Call to Placemaking

God's invitation to creatures to participate in the making of the world can be further elucidated by drawing on the concept of the *imago dei*, which is introduced in Genesis 1:26-28.¹⁵⁸ While the term may have several meanings, here I wish to draw attention to the relational aspect of the *imago dei*, specifically as a calling to "make places." My own place-based terminology here can be understood within the wider theological tendency to interpret the *imago dei* as a descriptor of personhood (we exist in relational community) and calling (God gives us special tasks in the world).¹⁵⁹

Often the "artistic" component of humans' engagement with the world is called upon to explain the *imago dei*, and the image of the artist is especially relevant in terms of drawing an analogy between Creator and creature. Dorothy Sayers connects divine and human making specifically in terms of the *imago dei*, suggesting that the common characteristic of both God and man is "the desire and the ability to make things."¹⁶⁰ While Sayers perhaps links the actions of God and artist too closely in later claims, drawing heavily on modern notions of the artist, her point stands that humans' ability and invitation to "make things" is a significant

¹⁵⁸ The phrase "image of God" is found three times in Genesis (1:26-28; 5:1-3; 9:5-6).

¹⁵⁹ For a summary of interpretations of the *imago dei*, see Daniel L Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 139.

¹⁶⁰ Dorothy Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1987), 22. She acknowledges the essentially metaphoric quality of this statement, but believes that our view of both human and divine creation is aided through the metaphor. This understanding of the *imago dei*, however, can only really be situated within an understanding of the *imago dei* as a granting of personhood to creatures. "Desire" and "ability," as Sayers suggests, are ultimately situated within an understanding of the person as a conscious being with rational power and free will. It was Ryan Mullins who pointed this out to me after reading my manuscript.

element of understanding the *imago dei*. Here, I wish to retain Sayers' artistic analogy while broadening the arts to encompass the more general call to placemaking.

We might understand the relationship to placemaking further by simultaneously looking at the accompanying text in the creation story. The phrase "image of God" is connected textually with the dominion mandate, typically translated, "to subdue and rule over," (v. 26, 28), and to the male-female relationship—the call to physical procreation. Michael Welker highlights this in terms of the relationship between nature and culture.¹⁶¹ The natural procreation of humans in the male-female relationship ("multiply and fill") must be linked with their cultural relationship to the rest of the world ("subdue and rule over"). When we interpret these elements of the text in relationship, Welker suggests, the dominion mandate and the *imago dei* become, ultimately, about the interconnectedness of humans to each other with the rest of creation.¹⁶² Dominion does not mean overpowering, but participating in the membership of creation as both creatures and creators through various forms of making, including procreation, cultivating, ordering, and naming.¹⁶³

Welker's account says significant things about the possibility of creaturely participation in the divine project. "[W]e encounter in the classical creation texts," he says, "*a rich description of the creature engaged in the activity of separating, ruling, producing, developing, and reproducing itself.*"¹⁶⁴ The earth sprouts (1.11), the fruits yield seed (1.11), the stars give light (1.17), the animals multiply (1.22), and the earth itself brings forth creatures (1.24).¹⁶⁵ But what he fails to draw adequate attention to is the important link between divine command and human making. Both animals and man are *commanded* to "multiply and fill" the earth, and humans get a

¹⁶¹ Welker, *Creation and Reality*, 69.

¹⁶² Ibid., 73; Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 56.

¹⁶³ Fretheim also makes the connection between the image of God and humans as social, relational beings. Fretheim, *God and World*, 55.

¹⁶⁴ Welker, *Creation and Reality*, 10-11.

¹⁶⁵ von Rad, *Genesis*, 53, 55. Here, he notes the importance of the participation of animals and plants in the creation. See also Welker, *Creation and Reality*, 11, 41, for participation of whole earth in creation.

special command to subdue and rule over, to exercise dominion over the rest of creation. While human participation in creation is central to the divine project, we must not conflate human and divine roles or lose a sense of divine providence and plan. The dominion mandate is just that—a mandate—and the participation of creation is linked with divine instruction. Thus, we should see the commands to “fill and multiply,” “subdue and rule over,” and the later command to “till and keep” (v. 2.15) as a key to our description of the *imago dei*—humans engage in the action of making *as a result of God’s call to do so*.¹⁶⁶

This calling is perhaps better understood, though, when we take into account the *imago dei* as presented throughout rest of scripture. Norman Wirzba argues:

Genesis 1 merely establishes that the divine-human relationship exists and that it is constitutive for human identity and vocation. The rest of scripture will contextualize and develop the nature of this relationship and so better equip us to understand our place and our role within the created order.¹⁶⁷

If we take Wirzba’s suggestion to heart, the theme of God’s election of Israel can be flagged as a central element of the way we understand divine calling and vocation in the *imago dei*.

Nathan MacDonald argues this point precisely, suggesting that the *imago dei* should be understood within the context of divine election. MacDonald’s account also further connects the *imago dei* in Genesis to “the elect man, Jesus Christ,” the image of the living God, and nods in the direction of the Incarnation as *the place* of divine-human meeting.¹⁶⁸ He draws this conceptual framework from the “frequent anticipations of God’s covenant relationship with Israel” in Genesis 2,¹⁶⁹ and argues for a connection between God’s choosing of Eden and his choosing of Canaan.¹⁷⁰ By linking the *imago dei* with the calling of Israel, the dominion mandate which accompanies the text can be better construed as a special vocation that

¹⁶⁶ See also Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 181ff.

¹⁶⁷ Norman Wirzba, *The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 124.

¹⁶⁸ Nathan MacDonald, “The *Imago Dei* and Election: Reading Genesis 1:26-28 and Old Testament Scholarship with Barth,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10, no. 3 (July 2008): 319.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 319. MacDonald is dealing specifically with Karl Barth’s interpretation of the *imago dei* here.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 319.

carries with it responsibility with the blessings God has given through his elective purposes.¹⁷¹ The *imago dei*, “rather than being a possession, turns out to be a calling, a task definitive of our humanity.”¹⁷² This task is relational in the sense that we carry it out only as we are in relationship with God, each other, and the rest of the creation. And as this relational calling refers to our engagement with place, it identifies the action of placemaking as some essential part of human identity and vocation.

The idea of election as vocation, or “election for” something, is indicative of the scriptural paradigm of divine command in relation to human making.¹⁷³ God calls us for specific tasks not as a result of human merit, but as an extension of his divine generosity. Brueggemann suggests that command is “perhaps Yahweh’s defining and characteristic marking.”¹⁷⁴ Throughout the Old Testament God commands his people in all sorts of ways: the prophets are to engage in symbolic actions; the Israelites are to travel to and use their land in specific ways; the earthly kings are to abide by the rules of God’s kingdom.¹⁷⁵ While

¹⁷¹ Indeed, the “election” motif in Genesis 2 may help explain the gravity of the betrayal in Genesis 3. Humans were chosen not based on their own merits, but elected *for* certain responsibilities. But in Genesis 3, the humans began to think that they *deserved* to be like God and achieve a certain status based on something akin to merit. My thanks to Dr. Holly J. Carey for drawing my attention to this connection.

¹⁷² Wirzba, *The Paradise of God*, 128.

¹⁷³ The link between divine command and human making can also be noted in other instances such God’s calling of Noah to build the ark, the specification for the tabernacle, or the Sabbath and Jubilee commands later in the Pentateuch. For the importance of the latter, see especially Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*. For the notion of “election for” see H. H. Rowley, *The Biblical Doctrine of Election* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952).

¹⁷⁴ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 182.

¹⁷⁵ Jeremy Begbie suggests, however, that the language of “command” can become problematic in numerous ways if we are not careful. First, he suggests that if humanity is defined solely in terms of obedience, then the relational or covenantal aspect of the divine-human relationship is frustrated. We cannot grasp the full measure of our relational covenant with God if we consider the relationship to be only about our rote obedience to divine law. (The text, however, seems to mitigate against this type of reading, even when we understand “command” in the harshest of ways. For instance, the text God aligns himself with humans in relationship—he walks with Adam and allows his freedom to name the animals. Though their relationship in the garden is accompanied by commands, it also allows for relationship through obedience and responsibility.) Secondly, Begbie suggests that by weighting obedience to divine command or law too heavily, we lose the sense of creation as an outflow of divine grace and fail to live in the love and freedom God intends for us in the created world. Begbie suggests, instead, that the notion of divine command in the context of the *imago dei* and dominion mandate should be conceived in terms of “blessing.” Genesis 1:28 links God’s mandate with God’s blessing: “God blessed them and said to them.” Blessing, here, is best construed of in terms of “a command which carries with it the power of fulfillment, or, better still, a gift which includes a demand.” This argument, however, seems to be simply a matter of semantics. While it is important to understand “command” in a way that allows for, rather than precludes, relationship, it does not seem to be the case that the term “command” should simply be replaced with “blessing.” While command may carry a blessing with it, to do away with the language of command entirely seems problematic when accounting for God’s interactions with humans in the rest of scripture. Understanding command as *including* blessing, will, however, allows us to focus on the bond between divine gift and human making, particularly as it relates to place. Begbie, *Voicing Creation’s Praise*, 151. For the notion of blessing as relational, see Kent Harold Richards, “Bless/Blessing,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

the Genesis narrative represents humans as involved in making something of the world in various ways, this is always understood within the wider notion of the God's initial *gift* of creation. "Life in the world is made possible," through instances of God's command and initial gifting.¹⁷⁶ Human making is always with divine gifts. Fretheim, while he prefers the term "blessing," gets at this same sentiment. "To bless others," he says, "is an act of giving power and potentiality to them; it is another dimension of the divine power-sharing activity...it enables creatures to participate in the ongoingness of creation."¹⁷⁷ By calling them in the form of both command and blessing, God gifts humans with the freedom to enjoy, change, make, and transform the world. In these activities, our life in the world is further rooted in and more richly related to the rest of God's creation.

Cultivating the Garden

The divine call to placemaking is further extended in the injunction to work with the land in Genesis 2:15, what might be understood as a continuation of the command given to humans in 1:26-28 regarding dominion and procreation.¹⁷⁸ In Genesis 2, the writer links the placement of man in the garden with the command to "till and keep it" (v. 15), and the language used here is again repeated in 3:23, communicating "a basic continuity in human responsibility for the care of the earth."¹⁷⁹ The repetition of the latter phrase both pre- and post-Fall should indicate a couple of things about both the similarity and difference between the two states. First, it suggests that work is part of the human economy; it is called forth of humans from the very beginning and does not simply begin after their expulsion from the Garden. While the calling may suggest continuity in the two parts of the story, the nature of

¹⁷⁶ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 201. Jonathan Sacks relates the two terms in Jewish theology in Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), ch. 8.

¹⁷⁷ Fretheim, *God and World*, 41-2.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 53. See also Norman Habel's Theocratic Land Ideology where land is seen as a conditional grant and connected with divine command. Norman C. Habel, *The Land Is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), ch. 3.

¹⁷⁹ Fretheim, *God and World*, 54.

human work after the Fall is necessarily different from the prelapsarian state, though.

Humans must now keep the thorns and thistles at bay, in addition to laboring more heavily in relation to the place.

A second issue that arises is the relation of human work to divine dwelling or presence. Divine dwelling in place is conceived differently after the Fall, and part of humans' work in cultivating the land outside of Eden might be understood as making places "fitting" for divine presence. One indicator of this connection to divine presence may be assumed from the context of the phrase later in scripture. In other places, the two terms (*abad* and *samar*) are not used together for agrarian purposes, but rather to describe the act of worship in relation to priestly duty.¹⁸⁰ This will call to mind the subject of the next chapter—man's work in the tabernacle to make a place for God's presence to dwell. But here, as the terms are used in the garden, the authors may already be calling our attention to the relationship between human work and divine presence. Ellen Davis, arguing for Genesis to be read as a liturgical poem, suggests, "its aim is in large measure *to enable us to discern the presence and action of God in our particular circumstances*, to seek and become receptive to the gifts of God *befitting this place and this situation*."¹⁸¹ Divine presence is always understood as a gift—we cannot simply conjure God's presence in some magical or mystical way—but he calls humans to participate in sharing the places of his presence through active and creative engagement. From the very beginning, God calls forth action and work from his people so that they may establish relationship with each other and participate in his abiding presence in fitting ways.

Westermann argues similarly for this interpretation of the command in terms of even more general human placemaking:

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 53. For other instances of the phrase, see: Num. 3:7-8, 8:25-26, 18:5-6; I Chron. 23:32; Ezek. 44:14. Beale discusses this in G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 67.

¹⁸¹ Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 45. My emphasis.

He [the biblical writer] is concerned with the duty which God has laid upon and entrusted to his people in the living space assigned to them....It can be said that *every human occupation* shares in some way in this ‘tilling and keeping,’ The narrator, in using these two verbs, has given *a basic definition of human activity*.¹⁸²

The command in Genesis 2:15 is not only agrarian or liturgical in focus, but a basic definition of all human work in the world. It reflects the mutuality of humans and place.¹⁸³ Humans are depicted not just as passive dwellers, but as active makers of the world around them. We see a picture of placemaking that takes into account the givenness of places in creation while acknowledging the extent to which places must be responded to, re-made and added to in order to reach their full God-given potential and fittingly participate in the sacredness of divine presence.

Placemaking through Naming

This picture of placemaking as participation in creation can also be clearly identified in the particular case of the naming of the animals in Genesis 2:19-20. In the act of naming, humans solidify their relationship to the rest of God’s creatures and give them each a place in relationship to one another. Humans’ engagement in name-giving, then, can be seen as a “distant echo” of the divine naming of creation in Genesis 1.¹⁸⁴ Where God gives the creation its purpose and task in his naming, man gives the animals a place in his world:

He names the animals and with the name determines the relationship they have to him....The meaning is not, as most interpreters think, that man acquires power over the animals by naming them...But rather that the man gives the animals their names and thereby *puts them into a place in his world*.¹⁸⁵

Through naming, man not only gives the named animals a place in the human world, but also defines his own place within a larger relational system.¹⁸⁶ In this regard, placemaking—here represented in the action of naming—is an epistemological activity; it is through this

¹⁸² Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, 221. My emphasis.

¹⁸³ Fretheim, *God and World*, 54.

¹⁸⁴ von Rad, *Genesis*, 53.

¹⁸⁵ Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, 228. My emphasis.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 229; von Rad, *Genesis*, 81.

activity that humans acquire knowledge of their own place and identity in the world in relation to other places and creatures.¹⁸⁷

It is especially important to notice here that man orders his world through language.¹⁸⁸ “Naming” is seen as parallel to “creating” both in the opening chapter of Genesis and other ancient texts such as the *Enuma Elish*.¹⁸⁹ This echoing of God’s activity from Genesis 1 establishes them as special participants in the creation and recalls the command to humans to have dominion in Creation.¹⁹⁰ Language becomes one very significant way that humans participate in God’s created order. They construct “place” by naming and describing its elements. Through language, as Wendell Berry poetically suggests, man “affirms and collaborates in the formality of the Creation.”¹⁹¹

Of even further importance is the relationship between language and perception. Adam’s naming of the animals in the garden required his perception of other creatures as part of his own place in the world. This link between perception and action is embedded in the text of Genesis, both in reference to God and humans. “And God saw that it was good” is a recurrent evaluation of the individual parts of creation, and the Priestly narrative concludes with the final judgment that the whole creation is “very good” or “completely perfect.” Ellen Davis notes that while most exegetes focus on the *nature of* creation as good, she believes that it is God’s *perception of* the world as good that is of consequence for our understanding of the

¹⁸⁷ Fretheim, *God and World*, 41.

¹⁸⁸ Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, 229.; Claus Westermann, *Creation*, trans. John J. Scullion (London: SPCK, 1974), 85.

¹⁸⁹ Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, 114. For a modern study on the creative function of language as “reality making,” see also J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975). See also George Steiner, *After Babel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 144.

¹⁹⁰ While man was no doubt working under different conditions in his prelapsarian state, I will hold that his “poetic venture” is still a very clear account of placemaking through language rather than an exercise in rational reconstruction. Language should be understood as a creative activity here, rather than simply identifying the exact correspondence of things to their appropriate descriptors, as some modern language theories may suggest. It was Prof. Trevor Hart who brought this modern philosophy of language to my awareness.

¹⁹¹ Wendell Berry, *What Are People For?* (New York: North Point Press, 1990), 89.

human relationship to place.¹⁹² It is only rarely, Davis points out, that we see inside the mind of a biblical character, but in these instances, “We are invited to see how a moment of perception, human or divine, has lasting consequences for the characters in the narrative, and also for us who share their story.”¹⁹³ The way the characters perceive the world results in how they act within it. Of special importance is that God’s actions and perceptions become an exemplary model of our own placemaking practices.

Placemaking as Stewardship

The call to placemaking that we have witnessed in the Genesis creation account will call to mind the Christian concept of stewardship, often connected directly to the dominion mandate, the *imago dei*, and to the command to “till and keep” in the Garden. The meaning of “stewardship” has been called into question in the past several decades and related especially to the issue of ecology and the relationship between nature and culture. Lynn White Jr.’s essay, “The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis,” published in 1967 drew many theologians’ attention to the failure of Christianity in these ecological terms.¹⁹⁴ Here, he argues that Christianity should be held most responsible for the state of ecological disorder humans have brought to the planet. Identifying Christianity as “the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen,”¹⁹⁵ White argues that its emphasis on demythologizing nature and the idea of human dominion over the earth gives it “a huge burden of guilt.”¹⁹⁶ But he is not completely negative, for while he cites Christianity’s failures, he also suggests that the

¹⁹² Davis’s approach to Genesis gives her more hermeneutical leeway as she reads Genesis as a liturgical poem, which means that not only are the words thought to carry more power and intention, but also that they hold a “surplus of meaning.” See Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 44-45. This is different from more typical interpretations such as von Rad’s who says of Gen. 1 that “the language is succinct and ponderous, pedantic and lacking artistry.” von Rad, *Genesis*, 26.

¹⁹³ Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 46. See also Gen. 3:6, 6:2, and Ex. 2:2.

¹⁹⁴ Lynn White Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* 155, no. 3767 (10 March 1967).

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*: 1205.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1206.

religion should be, and can be, the remedy to the problem, citing how the work of St. Francis was inherently ecological.¹⁹⁷

Since White's article was first published, many theologians have begun to focus their attention on the ecological crisis, which is intimately related to the issue of place and stewardship. Perhaps one of the most helpful and approachable biblical studies of ecology, or ecological approaches to the Bible, is Richard Bauckham's *Bible and Ecology*.¹⁹⁸ While he is critical of the notion of stewardship and dominion, Bauckham argues that the concept is still useful despite its failures if linked to the rest of scriptural narrative and ultimately focused on a profound understanding of human responsibility to the "community of creation."¹⁹⁹ Rather than being hierarchal in its structure, the community of creation reflects the inherent *relatedness* of all creatures of God. Bauckham thus draws our attention to the triangulated relationship between God, people, and the non-human creation witnessed throughout the whole of scripture.²⁰⁰

This relational understanding of creation continues to bespeak man's special role, though; the dominion mandate is given solely to humans. But as Bauckham argues, ruling "on behalf of" God should not be confused with ruling "instead of" God.²⁰¹ While humans do have an active and participatory role to play in bringing about creation, it is *the result of God's*

¹⁹⁷ Rene Dubos references the Franciscan model of conversation versus the Benedictine model of stewardship in Rene Dubos, "Franciscan Conservation Versus Benedictine Stewardship," in *Environmental Stewardship: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, ed. R. J. Berry (London: T&T Clark, 2006). The main difference, Dubos suggests, is their understanding of the relationship between culture and nature. While Franciscan conservation would desire to leave the world as it is, the Benedictines focus on our inherent ordering of the world and the value of our *working within it*. While this seems to be an oversimplification of each order's attitude towards creation, it reflects an important consideration of the ways in which Christianity might understand humans' relationship to the world—whether nature is intended for preservation apart from human interaction with it, or whether humans fit and work within nature, "culturing" or cultivating it as it were, in a loving relationship.

¹⁹⁸ Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*. For a historical study of ecological approaches to theology, see H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985).

¹⁹⁹ Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, ch. 1. For a similar explication of this "relational model of creation," see also Fretheim, *God and World*, 269.; Douglas J. Hall, "Stewardship as Key to a Theology of Nature," in *Environmental Stewardship: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, ed. R.J. Berry (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 139. Hall contrasts his preferred phrase "humanity *with*," to "humanity *above*" or "humanity *in*" nature.

²⁰⁰ Some others who identify this three-way relationship in scripture include: Ellen Davis, John Inge, Christopher J. H. Wright, Norman Wirzba, and W.D. Davies.

²⁰¹ Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 30.

call and command to participate in a responsible way. The link between human making and divine calling remains a central paradigm for the context of stewardship; divine providence is always in primary focus, even as God gives humans the freedom to participate in creation.

In this view, as *members* of the community of creation rather than as lords above it, humans have the potential and responsibility to “enhance” or add value to the gift of nature through their own making and ordering activities.²⁰² We may participate not only in the creation itself, but also in the divine dwelling there, inviting and participating in his presence through community. As we call forth the divine presence in place through localized placemaking, our actions can be potentially transformational or redemptive. By reflecting on our unique role as humans in partnership with Christ as both Creator and Redeemer, we can identify the ways in which our own actions might enhance the whole community of creation, contributing to the redemptive and transformational work of God’s Kingdom on earth.

Conclusion: Placemaking as Participating in Creation and Redemption

The creation account in Genesis establishes a clear role for humans in creation. But creation is not a stand-alone theological concept—it is always linked with an understanding of God’s redemptive purposes within creation. Creation and redemption are mutually constitutive: “God’s work in creation provides the basis for God’s work in redemption; God’s work in redemption fulfills God’s work in Creation.”²⁰³ A Christian understanding of creation must suggest this link, as we are told that Christ is both Creator and Redeemer. Our reading of the Genesis account, then, must ultimately take into account Christ’s work on the cross and the meaning his resurrection has for Creation’s renewal. If we are called to participate in creation, as we told in Genesis, then that activity will potentially have redemptive significance, especially as we anticipate New Creation’s final transformation. In this sense,

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 34-5.

²⁰³ Fretheim, *God and World*, 112.

Christians are to “practice resurrection,” anticipating transformation and renewal through our own particular work in places on earth.²⁰⁴

What we see already in the Creation account, though, is that humans can participate in communion with God’s presence in place. And while humans do not experience God’s presence in precisely the same way outside the garden, communion with God in place remains a central desire and calling of God, illustrated in the calling of humans to build a dwelling place for the divine presence in the tabernacle and in his most central and decisive act of dwelling in the person of Christ and the Church. Scripture suggests that place has always factored into the divine-human relationship in some way, and as we learn further the implications of this for human participation in the work of God, it will be imperative that we bring “place” to the forefront of our theological inquiry. The renewal of a sense of place and a positive understanding of placemaking will ultimately depend on a renewal of the doctrine of creation and all that its story entails. Wirzba reiterates:

We are...cocreators with God, not in the sense that we have power within ourselves to bring about the universe, but because we are God’s agents called to participate in the redemption of a suffering creation. And so the doctrine of creation, rather than being of merely antiquarian or scientific significance, goes to the heart of what it means to be a person.²⁰⁵

Our study of creation, especially of our role in creation as placemakers and dwellers, has shed light not only on the importance of a renewed vision of place, but also begins to point to the redemptive significance that human making has in God’s overall plans for his creation. Our activities of “making,” especially placemaking, will acquire a profound theological significance as they participate in the overall aims of creation and the divine presence there, while looking forward to the ultimate “re-implacement” where we will understand more fully

²⁰⁴ "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front," Wendell Berry, *The Selected Poems of Wendell Berry* (Washington D. C.: Counterpoint, 1998), 88.

²⁰⁵ Wirzba, *The Paradise of God*, 18.

what it means that God calls us to participate in the making of places on earth.²⁰⁶ The redemptive potential of human work in creation will continue to unfold as we trace the significant role of human placemaking in relation to divine placemaking and presence in creation and redemption, while foreshadowing the incarnational aspect of humans' creative calling as witnessed in the Person of Christ himself.

²⁰⁶ Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell*, 31.

CHAPTER 3

DIVINE AND HUMAN PLACEMAKING IN THE TABERNACLE AND TEMPLE: PLACE, HUMAN ARTISTRY, AND DIVINE PRESENCE

The participation of humans in both creation and redemption can be explored further by looking to the tabernacle and temple texts of the Old Testament.²⁰⁷ The images of the tabernacle and the temple form a conceptual link between the doctrines of Creation and Incarnation as they ground their own purposeful narratives in the dwelling of God in humanly constructed places that represent creation and provide the means for redemption. This chapter, then, will allow us to identify some of the central Old Testament themes relevant to a theology of placemaking as participation in creation and redemption, while foreshadowing those same themes as they relate to the Person of Christ and his community in the New Testament.

The tabernacle and the temple texts, in their differing views of divine presence, suggest a myriad of possible readings for God's relationship to space and place and the nature of his dwelling there.²⁰⁸ Each biblical writer approaches the issues involved in divine dwelling in the tabernacle or temple from a different perspective and persuasion and with different readers in mind. The Deuteronomic writers emphasize the transcendent nature of God, insisting that only God's *name* can dwell in the temple, while the Priestly writers, on the other hand, attempt to hold onto a balance between God's transcendence and the simultaneous possibility of his *indwelling glory* in the temple, developing a licit theology of divine presence in humanly constructed places like the temple and throughout all of creation.²⁰⁹ Scripture, thus, leaves us

²⁰⁷ I will not deal directly with all of the texts in reference to the tabernacle and temple, but here refer to them as a unit in order to develop a general understanding of the issues involved in most texts. For a good overview of the specific biblical texts that refer to the temple and tabernacle, see Beale, *The Temple*.

²⁰⁸ Scholars differ in their view on the relationship between the tabernacle and temple. G. K. Beale suggests that the symbolism of the tabernacle is the same as that of the later Temples. *Ibid.*, 32. Sommer, on the other hand, suggests a distinctly different interpretation of the temple and tabernacle. Benjamin D. Sommer, "Conflicting Constructions of Divine Presence in the Priestly Tabernacle," *Biblical Interpretation* 9, no. 1 (2001).

²⁰⁹ See Moshé Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972); R. E. Clements, *God and*

with a multifaceted picture that furnishes, and often confuses, our theological understanding of God's relationship to place. But despite their divergence on issues of sacred space or divine presence, these traditions speak overall to a significant relationship between God, people, and place.

Alongside the theme of divine dwelling in place, I will draw attention to the significance of humanly constructed spaces and point especially to the image of the artist in the tabernacle as a paradigm of human placemaking. Here, I will suggest that God calls people to engage in artistic acts to construct fitting dwelling places for the divine presence. The biblical text reveals several important issues for understanding artistry as a paradigm of human placemaking practice: the artists in the tabernacle respond to divine calling, they reflect the universal presence of God in particular, physical materials, and they provide a place for both human community and divine engagement with his creatures. In addition to the particular artistic practices in the tabernacle and temple, the physical structures themselves reveal the nature of divine presence in place and allude to the significance of human action in the world for the extension of God's presence to all the earth. The temple, especially, as microcosm and center of the world, reveals the significance of particularity in God's dealing with the world to more universal aims.

Throughout the chapter, I will reinforce the notion that placemaking, which includes human artistry and creative making, is a calling by God, and that this calling bears a significant relationship to the particular and universal divine presence in places. Furthermore, responsibility and obedience to this calling allows humans to participate in God's creative and redemptive purposes on earth to fill creation with his universal divine presence and make his home "among mortals" (Rev. 21:3).²¹⁰ Engagement with the tabernacle and temple narratives

Temple (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965).

²¹⁰ Richard Bauckham outlines three significant aspects of any discussion of the temple and the New Jerusalem: place,

will help us formulate a Christian theological reading of God's presence in place as he actively reveals himself to his creatures by inviting them to make places on earth that provide the context for and partner in the divine-human relationship.

Tabernacle Construction, Divine Calling, and Artistic Placemaking

The wilderness tabernacle provides the first space constructed expressly for the divine presence to dwell.²¹¹ A third of the book of Exodus deals with the construction and other considerations on the tabernacle.²¹² Since scripture rarely ever develops issues at such length, this should clue readers into the significance of the constructed space in Israel's religious practice and give a clear point from which to develop a theology of place which privileges human making or artistry.²¹³ The tabernacle account in Exodus also provides one of the most explicit endorsements and longest descriptions of human artistic practice in scripture.²¹⁴ While the arts, especially music and dance, are described in other places in scripture, in Exodus the reader actually sees the process by which the artists are inspired and the specific relationship of their artistic actions to divine calling and subsequent divine dwelling. This passage, thus, tells us not only *that* God values the arts but it also shows us *how* to think about them, suggesting a relationship between human artistry and divine inspiration and calling.

people, and divine presence. These aspects not only refer to the New Jerusalem, but also to the temple structures that lead up to it. The traditions that speak of these holy structures can be seen as a progression of theological thought on *the relationship of God to people in place*. See Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 132-43.

²¹¹ One might suggest that Noah's ark was a constructed place where God's presence dwelt with his chosen people, however, as the ark was made for the physical salvation of the people and animals, and not specifically for *worship*, here I identify the tabernacle as the first *explicit* instance of constructed space made for the special divine dwelling.

²¹² Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), 263. The tabernacle construction is recounted in Exodus, chapters 25-40.

²¹³ For example, important events such as the creation of the world or Christ's birth and baptism receive much less textual space.

²¹⁴ This is often noted in regard to a Christian account and argument for the role of the arts. See Francis A. Schaeffer, *Art and the Bible* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973); Leland Ryken, *The Liberated Imagination: Thinking Christianly About the Arts* (Wheaton: H. Shaw Publishers, 1989).

In Exodus 31, we are introduced to Bezalel and Oholiab, artisans commissioned with overseeing and undertaking the main work on the tabernacle. Immediately the writer of Exodus tells us that the craftsmen are filled with the Spirit of God to make beautiful things:

I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts, to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship.²¹⁵

This is not just a call to artistic action of any sort, however. The artists are to make all that is *commanded* of them.²¹⁶ The craftsmen's actions are related in a very explicit way to the will and action of God. "Every detail of the structure," Brevard Childs suggests, "reflects the one divine will and nothing rests on the *ad hoc* decision of human builders."²¹⁷ It is through divine inspiration that the people create, and their actions do not result in just any creative product, but in a place meant to house the divine presence itself.²¹⁸

Bezalel and Oholiab are not the only two artists employed to construct the tabernacle and its accouterments, though. In Exodus 35-36, "all those of skill" are commanded to take part in the construction. While the writer does not make the same connection to divine inspiration in these cases, he does link the craftsmen's work with divine commandment. "As the Lord had commanded," is a constant refrain throughout the account, especially Exodus 39-40. The place of divine dwelling, we are told, would not be the result of human will or desire. This fact is emphasized in the account of the golden calf, placed noticeably just one chapter after the introduction of the divinely inspired craftsmen. But rather than creating in convergence with divine command, calling, or blessing, the people of Israel construct an idol to represent or house the divine while Moses is up on the mountain (32:1). The tabernacle construction and the golden calf accounts are similar in that both depict the people bringing

²¹⁵ Ex. 31:3-5.

²¹⁶ Ex. 31:6, 11.

²¹⁷ Brevard S. Childs, *Exodus: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1974), 540.

²¹⁸ C.f. Ezekiel 40-48 (temple) and Hebrews 8:2 (tabernacle).

their gold, earrings, other jewelry and precious belongings to contribute to the making of the artifact.²¹⁹ But the actions are noticeably different as well, the calf incident being the result of unholy humans' misplaced attempts to locate and manipulate God's holy presence. The story is reminiscent of the eating of the forbidden fruit in Genesis 3, when humans' desires to be like God resulted in divine anger and expulsion from the garden. In both cases, God commanded and called his people to participate in his presence in place, but the people's attempts of idolatry (in both the statue and their own desire to be like God in the garden) resulted in a loss of divine-human relationship.²²⁰

In contrast, the artists' actions in the tabernacle can be understood in positive relation to the divine presence and as engaging, furthermore, in the basic action of placemaking as defined in chapters 1-2. There, we saw that placemaking actions can not only orient us within places and in relation to God, but they can also contribute something *new* to the world God has given us. While placemaking is often understood in reflexive terms, as was the case with Adam's naming in Genesis 2, the action of placemaking in the case of the tabernacle might be understood even more explicitly: *the people are actually called to make a physical place for God to dwell*, and they continue to help spread that presence out from the tabernacle in ever new ways of making and engaging with other places in the world. The divine presence, then, is explicitly connected with the *constructed* space. The narrative communicates not only the importance of symbols like the tabernacle and temple for the life of Israel, but also points to the wider theological significance of *all* constructed space in the world. All places can be understood as "potentially sacred," as they wait for "the moment of encounter"—by both God and humans—which will reveal the presence of God in both event and community.²²¹ "There are

²¹⁹ Compare Ex. 32:2-4 to Ex. 35:22-24.

²²⁰ These incidents might be compared against acts of obedience to divine command, such as Noah's building of the Ark in Gen. 6. Noah is precisely an artist/builder who builds a place that preserves people from God's judgment and secures his future promise. The Ark that Noah builds becomes the "place of salvation."

²²¹ Gorringer, *Theology of the Built Environment*, 40.

no unsacred places,” Wendell Berry writes, “there are only sacred places and desecrated places.”²²²

Sacred Space as Relational Event

The building of the tabernacle, and the potentially sacred implications it has for all places, opens up further questions regarding the relationship between divine presence in place and acts of human making. Among them is the nature of divine revelation—why would God choose to reveal himself through specific places rather than in a general way? One answer may lie in the needs of God’s creatures.²²³ Structures like the tabernacle may be best construed in light of humans’ needs to meet and understand God—Moses was, after all, unable to view the full presence of God on the mountaintop (Ex. 3:6). Understanding the text in this way reveals that while the tabernacle may be understood as a place fitting for divine dwelling and related to the salvation and redemption of mankind (a Christological foreshadowing, no doubt), it might also, at a more basic level, be construed as a “social space,” and the divine calling to placemaking in the narrative might be understood as partly for the sake of the human community.²²⁴

Mark George suggests this social view of the tabernacle and seeks to re-interpret it in light of a modern social paradigm, specifically the philosophy of place outlined by French philosopher Henri Lefebvre. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre outlines three levels or types of space in human experience: spatial practice, representations of space (what George calls conceptual space), and spaces of representation (what George calls social space).²²⁵ Working

²²² Wendell Berry, "How to Be a Poet," *Poetry* 2001, 270. <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poem/30299> (Accessed April 25, 2013).

²²³ John Calvin makes reference to the need for divine accommodation as it applies to the shape and scope of human ways of knowing God. “And as when God descends to us, he, in a certain sense, abases himself, and stammers with us, so he allows us to stammer with him. And this is to be truly wise, when we embrace God in the manner in which he accommodates himself to our capacity.” John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1554), 201.

²²⁴ Mark K. George, *Israel's Tabernacle as Social Space* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009).

²²⁵ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*. Lefebvre uses the term space like I and many more contemporary authors use the term

from this structure, George considers the social and religious implications for actions regarding the construction and use of Israel's tabernacle space. While George's study is often overly dependent on modern social theory to describe the ancient Israelites' action, and thus engages in a sort of reverse derivation of Israel's attitudes from modern philosophy, he does make some relevant points for linking divine and human identification with constructed, relational places.

First, he draws attention to the physical quality of the place. The inventories, detailed descriptions, instructions about arrangement of items, the portability of the structure, and the orientation of the tabernacle space all speak to the embodied and tangible quality of the space with which humans will most readily identify.²²⁶ It is important that the tabernacle is an embodied practice as well as a spiritual discipline that is simultaneously divinely inspired and commanded.²²⁷ The fact that the tabernacle is taken apart and re-assembled on a regular basis speaks to this physical-spiritual relationship as well. The making and re-making of the tabernacle space provides an opportunity for Israel to re-orient itself, both physically and mentally to God.²²⁸ This spatial practice is "performed space;" human actions are required on a repeated basis for the space and people's relation to it to be realized.²²⁹ In this sense, the place can be understood as "event," as we suggested in chapter one.²³⁰ The tendency to present a totalizing focus on the *deity's* presence in the tabernacle must, then, be re-constructed in light of the story's focus on Israel's actual worship practice in community, along with its

"place." Therefore, his understanding space should be considered in the way that we have described place throughout. George takes up this usage of "space" in order to emphasize the fact that the tabernacle was a movable space and was not a grounded, permanent object as would normally be identified with a place. This terminology speaks again to the various ways in which the terms might be understood. For instance, a boat or ship is often understood as a place, a movable place, or Bedouin culture often speaks of their tents and movable homes as places rather than spaces. In the same way, the tabernacle might also be seen as a place, especially as it is associated with the creation, temple, and new creation, as we will later see.

²²⁶ George, *Social Space*, 56.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 82.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 86. See also Fretheim, *Exodus*, 274. Here, he claims, "Each time it is taken down and then erected again, the process of making and joining is renewed. It is in the ongoing dismantling and reassembling of the tabernacle, day in and day out, that the new creation is being formed and shaped." This suggests a key difference in the movable tabernacle and the stationary Temple.

²³⁰ Casey, "How to Get from Space to Place."

occupying its own very lengthy space in scripture, which reveals the important social role of human making and re-making of places *in relationship with* divine presence or dwelling.²³¹

What George highlights as the embodied, social needs of humans to experience God in their own particularity is related to a broader point about God's tendency to reveal himself through acts of election—the choosing of particular people and places for his divine purposes. Rather than always revealing himself in the same way to people in creation, God elects to be sometimes present in, and sometimes absent from, particular times and places.²³² He does not always reveal himself in the same ways, and often chooses particular people to experience his presence differently. Karl Barth writes in this regard:

God's revelation is a particular event, not identical with the sum, nor identical with any of the content of other existing happenings either in nature or in human history. It is a definite happening within general happening: so definite that, while it takes part in this happening, it also contradicts it, and can only be seen and comprehended together with it in its contradiction, without the possibility of a synthesis proclaimed and already fulfilled in itself. So too, the action of God that takes place in revelation is a particular action, different from any other happening, even in contradiction to it.²³³

For Barth, God's revelation of himself is both active “event” and “relation,” undeniably particular in places and people, yet universal in its scope. So while he is present to everything (omnipresent), that presence is “distinct and differentiated.”²³⁴ Furthermore, the particularity of God's presence is always understood in relational terms; presence is “presence as togetherness.”²³⁵ Divine election is a relational encounter, where humans are called to participate in the community of God as loving relation, a point that is reinforced in George's communal interpretation of the tabernacle narrative. T.J. Gorringer also draws helpfully on

²³¹ George, *Social Space*, 186. Taken together, these issues of divine dwelling and human making will suggest something of the *mutual indwelling* of God and people in a place and nods in the direction of the incarnation as the ultimate place of divine and human dwelling in the person of Christ.

²³² Samuel L. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 321. This discussion of divine presence is not to be confused with philosophical discussions of God's omnipresence. While God may be everywhere in his creation, he chooses to reveal or hide his presence from people at different times for various reasons.

²³³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 2.1: The Doctrine of God* (London: T&T Clark International 1957), 264.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 473.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 468.

Barth's reflections to develop a Trinitarian theology of the built environment that reinforces my wider point. Here, Gorringer insists that God reveals himself in "special places," or places of "individual and community encounter."²³⁶ God chooses to make his presence known by having people *make a particular place* for him to dwell. He gives humans an active and participatory role in divine-human meeting. The tabernacle space becomes an event in the life of Israel, performed by the community and embodied in the memories grounded in the place and action itself.²³⁷ As a paradigm for human placemaking practices more widely, it suggests that wherever God chooses to encounter us, we are invited as individuals and communities to share in making a place fit for the divine presence to be revealed as particular event. Not only does this reveal who we are as humans—particular, physical, and relational creatures—but it also suggests the nature of God's own calling and desire for us to participate through our very particularity in his gift of Creation.

Furthermore, the Exodus narrative reveals that the artist receives a special role for the construction of a place of divine dwelling, which simultaneously situates God in the tabernacle space and orients the people towards God in a worshipping community.²³⁸ The artists' actions become a relational and revelatory event in the tabernacle narrative—they are called to create in conjunction with divine will so that God may be present among his people and the entire community can go and meet God in a physical place. The artist's actions are paradigmatic for the wider community's encounter with the revealed presence of God, seen especially in the particularity of their engagement with physical materials, along with their relational response to the divine call in place. We are all artists in this regard, producing and participating in "potentially sacred space" through placemaking actions, which call forth the "special" divine presence in particular places and events.

²³⁶ Gorringer, *Theology of the Built Environment*, 39.

²³⁷ See *Ibid.*, 40.

²³⁸ In relation to the beauty of artistic and divine glory, see William A. Dyrness, *Visual Faith: Art Theology, and Worship in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

Divine Placemaking and Active Presence

It is significant that the narrative suggests *both* human and divine work of placemaking. Divine dwelling in place is not a static occurrence or simple conjuring by human initiative. God himself acts providentially and actively in conjunction with the free creativity he has gifted humans. While human placemaking has been emphasized thus far in relation to the tabernacle and temple, it should not be done so at the expense of distinctly divine action. A theology of God's presence in both the temple milieu and throughout other dimensions of life should adequately account for the nature of both human action *and* divine action in places of meeting or presence.

The human experience of divine presence in place will suggest the need for a brief engagement with natural theology, the broad scope of which is much too large to tackle here. David Brown's recent work in natural religion may provide a helpful lens through which to address some of these main issues, though, especially since his work in *God and Enchantment of Place* brings together the themes of place and art with that of divine revelation. Here, he argues that because God is perfectly generous, we might expect to encounter him often in a myriad of places and contexts in the world.²³⁹ God's presence is not confined to particularly "sacred" places, but we can expect to encounter Him in "sport, drama, humour, dance, architecture, place and home, [and] the natural world," to cite a few of his examples.²⁴⁰ Brown's work expresses a "sacramental" view of the world.²⁴¹ That is, things in this world—both nature and culture—can be understood to mediate God's presence: in theological terms, places or the arts can be the "outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace."²⁴² He seeks to extend our view of what might be understood as "sacramental" by arguing from

²³⁹ Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 9.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 9. This book is part of a larger series on encountering God presence in the world. See also David Brown, *God and Grace of Body: Sacrament in Ordinary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). David Brown, *God and Mystery in Words: Experience Through Metaphor and Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.)

²⁴¹ Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 8.

²⁴² John Macquarrie, *A Guide to the Sacraments* (London: SCM Press, 1997), 4.

divine generosity, suggesting that “the more generously they are interpreted, the more it becomes possible to see specifics in nature and human creativity as a reflection of the divine, *there to be experienced as such even in advance of any specific revelation.*”²⁴³

While Brown notes the sense of divine action that the term “sacramental” carries with it, the question of *how* the divine presence relates to human experience and action remains unsettled. What readers may question throughout Brown’s work is the nature of divine presence—whether or not God’s presence rests statically in artifacts or places, to be experienced at will, or whether and how God *acts* dynamically through such places to reveal his presence to people. The more fundamental issue behind Brown’s work, then, is the particularity of God’s action and revelation—that is, how we experience God’s presence in particular or general ways. Brown rejects this dichotomy, however, suggesting, “Crude contrasts between the ‘specific’ and the ‘general’ or ‘universal’ need therefore to be avoided. Potentially, all may function as experience of God.”²⁴⁴ While certainly God is present in all sorts of ways, it seems preemptive to dismiss these distinctions so early. While he may not address them in theoretical terms, the rest of his study is investigating how God’s *universal* presence might be made known through *particular* objects and experiences. Therefore, the issue is never far out of reach. While Brown himself dismisses these dichotomies as irrelevant or ineffective, I will suggest that engagement with the theological issues of the one and the many, the particular and the universal, is *precisely* what is needed to ground the work further. The extended passage from Barth quoted earlier may be useful to recall here, as he develops a theology of divine revelation and presence in space as universal, yet “distinct and differentiated” in its particular manifestations.

²⁴³ Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 33. My emphasis. Interestingly, his views on divine action are much more “interactionist” in his earlier writing, especially David Brown, *The Divine Trinity* (London: Duckworth, 1985).

²⁴⁴ Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 33.

If we take into account God's elective actions among people, as scripture witnesses in both Old and New Testaments, we must find some central relationship between natural revelation and divine special action.²⁴⁵ While the "heavens declare the glory of God" (Ps. 19), God still acts through the Holy Spirit to bring about some kind of revelation and knowledge of himself. God need not be revealed or expressed through particularly "Christian" avenues—there are no "unsacred places"—but what structures God chooses to reveal himself with will still originate within the sphere of His own choice and action. There are of course, different levels of divine engagement with the world.²⁴⁶ But even if we place Brown's view under the most general of these, we will still have difficulty integrating what we know from the rest of scripture about God's *active* engagement with the world with a generalized sense of presence (or lack thereof) in places. In fact, Brown argues elsewhere that God is not *always* an agent (this is saddled with his attempt to preserve human freedom), and so "this cannot but mean an ability to frustrate the divine purpose, and frustrate it ultimately."²⁴⁷ The eschatological implications of this statement seem important in terms of God's ability to finally bring about the New Creation, and the lack of particular divine action raises questions regarding the nature of his presence in places. This point should be tempered with a selection from Brown's other works, though, where he suggests that God is necessarily an "interactionist" God—otherwise the Incarnation would be out of character for him—and that God acts specifically "over and above his general ordering of the world."²⁴⁸ Brown's wider incarnational focus seems enough to suggest that he does not wish to sidestep the issue completely in *God and Enchantment of Place*, but still, his focus on the generosity of God in the "sacrament" of the natural and man-made world would seem better paired with an explicit discussion of the particular nature of his action and incarnation there.

²⁴⁵ For a good explanation of the relationship between divine providence and human freedom or divine action and human creativity, see Polkinghorne, *Science and Providence: God's Interaction with the World*.

²⁴⁶ John Polkinghorne, *Science and Theology: An Introduction* (London: SPCK, 1998), ch. 5.

²⁴⁷ Jeff Astley, David Bown, and Ann Loades, *God in Action* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 27.

²⁴⁸ Brown, *The Divine Trinity*, x.

So, by dismissing the particularity of God's active presence in creation too early, Brown's work, and others like it, suffer from being overly general in their depiction of the human experience of God. Trevor Hart proposes a similar criticism to Brown's work, suggesting that for divine presence to emerge, "there must be both divine self-presentation and acts of human re-presentation, responses to that presence in terms of some more or less appropriate and adequate symbolics."²⁴⁹ God's presence is the result of his dynamic engagement with humans through places, objects, rituals and so on. And this action by God must be met by human acts of placemaking and response to that gifted presence.

The importance of divine action in place met by human response is suggestive of the more fundamental claim regarding God's particular elective purposes for creation, a point brought up earlier in relation to Barth. To speak of God actively revealing his presence leaves open the question of "the scandal of particularity." Brown's work sidesteps the issue, but any close study of scripture reveals the fact that God's universal purposes present themselves through acts of election—concentrations of His presence in particular times, places, and people.²⁵⁰ The Christian God, Hart argues further:

...deliberately excludes ubiquity, concentrating his presence, his purposes and his actions in a very particular place and time in a manner which may seem, *prima facie*, to an age of globalization an uneconomic and highly inefficient way of securing a supposedly 'universal' purpose.²⁵¹

God's particular presence, and the consequential scandal that it evinces in places like the temple or the person of Christ, not only intimate a fuller expression of God's universal creative and redemptive purposes in the world, but God's presence and revelation through experience as Brown calls for, can *only* occur squarely within the realm of particular places,

²⁴⁹ Trevor Hart, "Complicating Presence: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on a Theological Question," in *Göttliche Anwesenheit Und Abwesenheit*, ed. Nathan MacDonald and Isaak de Hulster (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 15-16. See also his argument for divine and human action in the Eucharistic presence, ———, "Calvin and Barth on the Lord's Supper," in *Calvin, Barth, and Reformed Theology*, ed. N.B. MacDonald and C. Trueman (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2008).

²⁵⁰ See Rowley, *The Biblical Doctrine of Election*; MacDonald, "The *Imago Dei* and Election: Reading Genesis 1:26-28 and Old Testament Scholarship with Barth."; Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: Sketches for a Missionary Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978).

²⁵¹ Hart, "Complicating Presence." 16.

things, people, and times. This is not to deny divine omnipresence but to suggest, rather, that as embodied and particular persons, we can only experience God in the location we are in. God, as Barth suggests, “is always *somewhere*—from there seeking man and there to be sought by man, there in his remoteness and from there drawing near, present here as the One who is there.”²⁵² Works like Brown’s, in bypassing the issue of election and particularity in search of more universal application, will lose the key feature of the divine-human meeting in the material world it seeks to convey. Divine-human meeting will always first be particular; as humans we do not experience things except through particular places—both physical and social—that we are in.

Gorringer’s work sits in close relationship to Brown’s, though he highlights in a much clearer way the particular and relational aspects of God’s revelation of himself in place. For Gorringer, who draws on heavily on Barth, “sacred space is bound up with event, with community, and with memory.”²⁵³ Divine presence in place is a matter of “togetherness” and suggestive of the “event of His action, in which we have a share in God’s revelation.”²⁵⁴ For all three (Brown, Barth, and Gorringer), humans are allowed participation in God’s own relational space as a result of his love and grace (generosity). Gorringer even highlights in a similar way to Brown that *all* space may be potentially sacred. But with Barth, we must temper this claim and suggest that God is “present *everywhere* in a *particular* way.”²⁵⁵ The particularity of God’s active and universal presence is the key factor here in terms of our theology of place.

The relevance of these issues to the topic of God’s presence in the tabernacle and temple should be quite clear. As an act of divinely elected, and indeed, localized,

²⁵² Barth, *C/D 2.1*, 471. My emphasis.

²⁵³ Gorringer, *Theology of the Built Environment*, 40.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 46; Barth, *C/D 2.1*, 263.

²⁵⁵ Barth, *C/D 2.1*, 472.

placemaking, God's presence in these humanly-made structures suggests the promise associated with divine election and covenantal relationship—that God's aims are expressed through exceedingly local avenues, yet are ultimately for the sake of *all* creation. The scandal of particularity is indeed no scandal at all, but a generous and loving calling of people to be involved in specific ways in the universal fulfillment of God's creative and redemptive purposes.²⁵⁶ We must wait for the eschatological fulfillment of creation in order to truly experience God "all in all," but the particular instances of God becoming present to people in a myriad of ways, as Brown suggests, points forward to this future presence in all of creation. The ethic of placemaking conveyed here, then, is ultimately an ethic of faithful responsibility; while the eschatological dimension of human placemaking is important, our participation in creation and redemption should first be understood as a faithful response to God's calling in the here and now, *particular* instances by which we participate in the universal, redemptive love of God in the world.

The Temple as the Particular Place of God's Universal Presence and Purpose

Several issues related to both tabernacle and temple themes speak perhaps even more clearly to this particular-universal relationship. These include, first, the link between temple and creation, and second, the temple as microcosm and center, the overarching issue in both being that of the connection between God's continuous presence in all of creation and His being "intensely" and actively present in particular places.²⁵⁷ The remainder of the chapter, then, will return to the Old Testament account to explore these broader theological issues further in relation to sacred space and place.

²⁵⁶ This also calls attention to the issue of divine absence, suggesting that the promise of God's "all in all" presence is implicit in the temporary notion of divine absence. Hart, "Complicating Presence," 11,16.

²⁵⁷ Fretheim, *God and World*, 25.

Creation and Cosmogony in the Temple Narratives

As noted in the last chapter, the creation theme extends beyond the pages of the Genesis account. In fact, the creation narrative has a striking connection to the tabernacle and temple texts, often understood in parallel to the construction and purpose of the dwelling places of God. Most scholars take at least a cursory glance at the relationship of the temple and tabernacle to the creation account and the Garden of Eden.²⁵⁸ For instance, often the days of creation are related to the stages of the tabernacle construction.²⁵⁹ While these structural parallels are interesting to consider, two more important points will concern us here regarding the relationship between temple and creation that are more relevant to our theology of place and placemaking. First, the focus on humans' actions in both the creation and temple narratives reinforce the claim that humans are participants in the divine creation and redemption project. Second, the fundamental connection between the temple and the world can be held up as an exemplary model for understanding the ways in which God's work has both universal aims and works itself out through particular situations and locales in the here and now. In this regard, I will suggest with Jon Levenson that the temple should be seen as a "rich and powerful re-presentation of creation."²⁶⁰

G. K. Beale, in *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, outlines the ways in which the temple and tabernacle can be seen as "reflections and recapitulations" of the first temple, the garden

²⁵⁸ The most explicit place in scripture where the connection is made is Ezekiel. Other authors who suggest the connection between creation and the tabernacle space include Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Fretheim, *Exodus*; John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006); Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (London: SCM Press, 1992); Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, trans. John McHugh (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961). However, as Levenson points out, de Vaux rejects this notion of the "cosmic conception of the Temple," or the relationship between the temple and the world. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 88.

²⁵⁹ Margaret Barker, *Temple Theology: An Introduction* (London: SPCK, 2004), 16-18. The connection between creation and the tabernacle is also referenced in Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch; Midrash Tanhuma 11.2*, trans. S.A. Berman (Hoboken: KTAV, 1996). The building of Solomon's temple also follows this "seven acts" structure in relationship with the tabernacle and creation account. See Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 79; Beale, *The Temple*, 61.

²⁶⁰ Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 95.

of Eden.²⁶¹ Both garden and temple are the place of God’s unique presence on earth: God walks with Adam in the garden, he comes to meet his people in the tabernacle, and he is known to dwell permanently in the temple.²⁶² Adam is understood as the High Priest of the garden sanctuary, a role that parallels both the priests in the temple and Christ as the first High Priest of all of Creation.²⁶³ This parallel is reinforced by the authors’ vocabulary used to describe man’s actions in both garden and temple (*abad* and *samar*). As noted in chapter 2, the phrase in the Genesis account should first be understood in light of its immediate context—as having an agricultural connotation. But as the words are used elsewhere in scripture they are most often understood as “serve and guard,” in reference to serving God’s word or keeping the tabernacle.²⁶⁴

The fact that the phrase is repeated in both contexts is significant, and we might read Adam’s task in the garden as one of both agricultural concern and the more general human task to serve God’s purposes in creation and keep his word. Adam’s activity in the garden, in these terms, should be construed as a priestly activity, key to providing for and inviting the relationship between God and people in place. Beale suggests in this regard:

While it is likely that a large part of Adam’s task was to ‘cultivate’ and be a gardener as well as ‘guarding’ the garden, that all of his activities are to be understood primarily as a priestly activity is suggested not only from the exclusive use of the two words in contexts of worship elsewhere but also because the garden was a sanctuary.²⁶⁵

In addition to the agricultural connotation, Adam’s placement in the garden and his invitation to participate in creation speaks to the importance of human making for God’s

²⁶¹ Beale, *The Temple*, 66. Ezekiel 28:13-18 is the most explicit place in scripture to refer to Eden as the first temple sanctuary. There are a number of points at which Beale makes this parallel, however I will address only the most significant of these here. Others include associating Eden with the first guarding cherubim (the angel at the gates of the garden), the first arboreal lampstand (the tree of life), the garden as the basis of imagery for Israel’s temple (wood carved to resemble flowers and palm trees), Eden as the first source of water and as the centre of the world (Zion is later seen as having all rivers flow from it in Revelation 21). See generally Beale pp. 66-80.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 66.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 66. See Heb. 4:14.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 66-67. For references to this linguistic pair, see Num. 3:7-8; 8:25-26; 18:5-6; I Chron. 23:32; Ezek. 44:14.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 68. This connection between the garden and temple will not negate the importance of the physicality of Eden. The general agricultural background always lingers, and the Old Testament preoccupation with land is ever-present.

creational vision and universalizing presence. This is no less the case for human actions in the tabernacle and temple context. Interpreting the accounts in relation to one another suggests that placemaking remains a central religious activity, continuing to call forth and participate in the particular divine presence in place. The intensified divine presence is understood here *in direct relation to and, in part, resulting from* the people's actions there. The presence of God is a relational event, tied to the community and actions of the people. Not only is meeting and revelation made possible, but furthermore, the reconciliation between God and people that takes place later in the temple context (and ultimately in Christ who is the embodiment of the temple) is understood as being accompanied by acts of human sign-making and sacrifice. Human placemaking works *in relationship with* divine placemaking in the tabernacle and temple so that God's presence can be made known and the people reconciled to both God and one another. This convergence of divine and human placemaking, of course, sees its ultimate relationship in the place of Christ, where God makes a place, by furnishing the place, for divine dwelling.²⁶⁶

Sacred Space as Center and Microcosm

This reference to the relationship between temple and creation will bring us to the second point: as God's image bearer and priest of the garden sanctuary, Adam was called to spread God's presence outward from the garden to the rest of the world.²⁶⁷ The hospitable sanctuary of Eden was understood, from this perspective, to move out in concentric circles to the inhospitable places of the world, eventually filling the entire earth with God's presence through his people.²⁶⁸ The image of God, then, as we saw in chapter two, has both a relational and a functional sense, denoting something about human createdness along with

²⁶⁶ One might link this theologically with the notion of the eternal kenosis of the Son and his role prior to the Incarnation in Creation itself. See for some reference, David W Congdon, "Creatio Continua Ex Electione: A Post-Barthian Revision of the Doctrine of Creatio Ex Nihilo," *Koinonia* XXII(2010).

²⁶⁷ Beale, *The Temple*, 83.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

the calling of humans to actually cultivate and make places, to spread the divine image throughout the entire earth.²⁶⁹ The placemaking actions in the garden were understood as a microcosm of wider human activity, integral to the widening of God's presence on earth.

The expansion of God's presence from the garden sanctuary is one aspect of the even broader suggestion that the temple and world are integrally connected—that the temple stands as both *center* of divine presence in the whole world and as *microcosm* of divine and human action on earth. Common among studies of sacred space is the conception of place as “center,” or the place “where heaven and earth meet.”²⁷⁰ The religious temple as *axis mundi*²⁷¹ is an idea carried throughout most ancient myths and traditions, including Jewish and Christian belief about Mount Zion and the temple.²⁷² Ezekiel 38:12 references the people who dwell at the center of the earth,²⁷³ and the Midrash Tanhuma states:

Just as the navel is found at the center of the human being, so the land of Jerusalem is found at the center of the world... Jerusalem is at the center of the land of Israel, the Temple is at the center of Jerusalem, the Holy of Holies is at the center of the Temple, the Ark is at the center of the Holy of Holies and the Foundation Stone is in the front of the Ark, which spot is the foundation of the world.²⁷⁴

All the major events of Jewish religious history are believed to have occurred in the same place at the center of the world. The “Stone of Foundation” which lies at the center of the

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 83. This functional understanding of the *imago dei* is also often understood as having political connotations. See Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*.

²⁷⁰ Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return or, Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 12.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 12.

²⁷² It should be noted that Mount Zion, the Temple, and the city of Jerusalem are commonly used interchangeably to denote the place of God's presence on earth. They often function the same way in Jewish and Christian literature and serve the same symbolic purposes for religious practice and belief. See Yaron Z. Eliav, *God's Mountain: The Temple Mount in Time, Place and Memory* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005). This understanding on temple as microcosm is found not only in the Judeo-Christian context, but extends to the general Near-Eastern understanding of temples as microcosms of a heavenly temple or the universe. Beale, *The Temple*, 51. Other important examples include Marduk's temple in the *Enuma Elish*.

²⁷³ This is noted in Davies, *The Gospel and the Land*, 6-7. See also the discussion on place as center in Jon D. Levenson, “The Temple and the World,” *The Journal of Religion* 64, no. 3 (July 1984): 283-84. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace, 1987), 44. Raphael Patai, *Man and Temple: In Ancient Jewish Myth and Ritual* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1947), 85. Harold W. Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House: The Phenomenology and Theology of Places of Worship* (The Hague: Mouton, 1979), 21.

²⁷⁴ Quoted in Jonathan Z. Smith, “Earth and Gods,” *The Journal of Religion* 49, no. 2 (April 1969): 111. (Originally from Midrash Tanhuma, Kedoshim, 10.)

cosmos, is considered the place where the following events occurred: where God stood at Creation and from which the waters and light came forth; where the dust came of which Adam was made; where the garden of Eden was located; where Adam was buried; on which Adam and his sons offered their sacrifices; where the flood waters of Noah came forth from and where they receded in to; on which Abraham was circumcised and on which he ate his meal with Melchizedech; where Isaac was to be sacrificed; where Jacob slept (and used the stone as a pillow) when he had his vision of the ladder to heaven; where God stood to send out the plagues of Egypt; where the foundations of the temple were dug; and where the Messiah will return to in order to inaugurate the new creation.²⁷⁵ Furthermore, Christian belief places Golgotha at the center of the world, where Adam is also buried.²⁷⁶ This symbolic history of the world suggests that “every construction or fabrication has the cosmogony as paradigmatic model.”²⁷⁷ The temple, in this sacred model, is built on a place identified as “center,” or a place already deemed to contain the divine presence in the initial creation of the world. The divinely ordained space organizes the rest of the world around it through its role as the center of meaning.

Place as “center” and place as “microcosm” are, then, interrelated ideas. As a microcosm of the more universal presence of God, the temple serves as a center of meaning and action. Mark Wynn suggests that a place “epitomizes or bodies forth in miniature some fundamental truth concerning the nature of things in general.”²⁷⁸ While the temple is one very specific example of this, Wynn argues that places more generally can be understood to have microcosmic significance—that is, places can be understood to stand for something more universal. The particular, in this sense, is understood to reflect the universal, the part to

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 115; Patai, *Man and Temple*, 3.

²⁷⁶ Eliade, *Myth*, 17. An example of this tradition can be found in many Renaissance paintings or Eastern Orthodox icons of the crucifixion, which depict a skull at the foot of the cross.

²⁷⁷ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 45. See Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 189-213. As a particular example, take note of medieval maps of the world with Jerusalem at the center.

²⁷⁸ Wynn, *Faith and Place*, 36.

reflect the whole. Wynn indicates, further, that the significance of human action in place has this same sense of outward movement. While he seeks to relate this concept to the notion of God as “genius loci” or “genius mundi,” a move latent with questions regarding the *nature* of this dwelling in place akin to those addressed to Brown earlier, the most significant aspect of Wynn’s study is its attention to the aesthetic component of placemaking in relation to this microcosmic significance of place. Giving attention to poetry in particular, Wynn argues for the significance of “artistic” placemaking, suggesting that aesthetic engagement with place can give a sense of the wider presence of God as it pictures place in terms of its microcosmic significance.²⁷⁹ Our localized placemaking and aesthetic engagement with places thus contributes to the spreading out of God’s presence throughout the world, granting wider significance precisely through the particularity of local human action in place.

For both Wynn and biblical scholar Harold Turner, the ideas of place as center and place as microcosm are interrelated, along with transcendent and immanent views of God’s presence in those places.²⁸⁰ Turner ties the notions directly to the temple, suggesting that the temple as microcosm is both a reflection of the “heavenly prototype” and “the point on earth which came closest to the heavens, in distance, as well as in design.”²⁸¹ It reflects not only the heavenly abode in which God dwells, but also is a concentrated point of divine presence on earth *now*, which serves to symbolize God’s presence throughout the extended creation. As a microcosm of the more universal heavenly order and presence of God, the temple serves as a center of meaning and local dwelling place of God with us.²⁸² The notion of the temple as a miniature representation of the cosmos also makes a bolder and more central claim regarding

²⁷⁹ See especially the last chapter of *Faith and Place*.

²⁸⁰ Scripture never uses these terms “transcendence” and “immanence.” They are rather, notions typically applied to the theological understanding of God’s “presence” and corresponding “absence.” These latter terms are the ones I will prefer throughout.

²⁸¹ Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House*, 61.

²⁸² Even more minute aspects and features of the Jerusalem temple are seen to have microcosmic significance, as well. For instance, the priests’ clothing is understood as a microcosm of the whole creation. The colors and symbols corresponded to parts of the heavenly and earthly realm. Beale, *The Temple*, 48.

the interrelation of temple and world. Jon Levenson suggests, “The two projects cannot ultimately be distinguished or disengaged.”²⁸³ The temple is understood as an image of the world (it is the world in miniature), while the world is an extension of the temple. Wynn’s study is one example of how this idea might be applied: places can be conceived in terms of their wider religious significance as they suggest in microcosm the spirit of God (or genius loci) more generally present in all of creation.

Summary and Conclusions

These themes that emerge in temple and tabernacle scholarship are important for the current project in several important ways. First, they suggest the primacy of particularity in understanding *divine* placemaking and presence with us. God chooses to make himself known or “accommodate” the human condition through acting in particular ways and places.²⁸⁴ This turn towards particularity in contemporary scholarship in the past several decades, however, should not be likened to the dissolution of universal ideas, as is such in the postmodern agenda. Rather, scripture and theology tell us precisely the opposite—that the particular is always related to the universal. God’s elective and particularized actions are always related to his love and grace towards the entire world. We saw how God’s actions are decidedly unique and differentiated—a result of his election—yet related to his wider purpose and presence in the entire world. In terms of the tabernacle and temple, the themes of sacred space as “center” and “microcosm” convey this relationship between the particular and the universal, revealing the active and relational nature of God’s presence in the world.

Second, the significance of *human* placemaking is also understood within this particular-universal framework. The tabernacle and temple narratives suggest that divine placemaking

²⁸³ Levenson, "The Temple and the World," 288. Levenson notes two important texts that draw together the creation of the world and the Temple construction: 1 Kings 6-8; Is. 6.

²⁸⁴ Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*, 201.

and dwelling on earth must be met with human placemaking—re-presentations of God’s good gifts back to him, both symbolic and authentic offerings that are suggestive of the human vocation to “make” something of the world in which we are placed. We are invited to participate in creation in such a way that our actions reflect the needs, circumstances, and communities in which we are immediately located. But those actions also have wider significance to redeem, transform, and reconcile the whole world back to God and contribute to making the world a fitting dwelling place for God until his final “all in all” presence will be known in the New Jerusalem.

Finally, these particular and microcosmic actions might be best construed through the image of the artist. In the tabernacle narrative of Exodus, we saw some of the various ways that human artistry might be understood as a paradigm for wider placemaking practice. Not only do we see the artist making a particular, physical, and fitting dwelling place for God in community, but we also learn about the communal impact of the artist as she responds to divine inspiration and calling. This aesthetic and artistic dimension of the biblical theology of place is important microcosmically, as we learn that acts of human artistry can call attention to and particularize places for us, even while they communicate wider realities or aims. Just as the artists in the temple participated in making the place of divine dwelling, so other acts of artistry participate in creation and redemption through *particular* engagement with places of presence.

As the direction of worship changes from an emphasis on physical place to communities of people after the time of Christ, these more “constructive” placemaking activities will not dissolve into an outdated view of an “old” covenant or command, but will come into striking focus as communities continue to spread the presence of God outward through physical and symbolic actions grounded insolubly in the places of God’s kingdom on earth.

CHAPTER 4

MAKING A PLACE ON EARTH: DIVINE PRESENCE, PARTICULARITY, AND PLACE IN THE INCARNATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN PARTICIPATION IN CREATION AND REDEMPTION THROUGH PLACEMAKING

God's acts in the Old Testament come into particular focus in the New. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn. 1:14). John's statement, perhaps more than any other in the Gospels, suggests God's own placemaking action—his making a place on earth.²⁸⁵ In the Incarnation of Christ and the establishment of the Church as the Body of Christ, we see a decidedly theological emphasis on place and particularity, not just as reminders or symbols, but also as significant sites of redemption and renewal. Contrary to the often over-spiritualized interpretations of the New Testament, place and placemaking continues to be a definitive focus for the people of God, though in a less explicit way than the land or temple previously functioned. John Inge suggests in this regard: "In defining the locus of God's relations with humanity to be focused in one particular individual, the incarnation asserts the importance of place in a way different from, but not less important than, the Old Testament."²⁸⁶ We will see that Christ is the place of both creation and redemption, and that as the people of God, we are also called to participate in the transformation, renewal, and redemption of places through Christ.

Before examining the implications of the Incarnation for our own placemaking practices, it will be helpful to give brief attention to some major works on the spatiality of God from the last century. While my focus is not exactly on space in relation to God, it will be helpful to identify a few major issues that will apply to the Incarnation and place and that link the current discussion to those themes in earlier chapters. From there, we will turn to look at

²⁸⁵ See my discussion of John's use of vocabulary to describe Christ's dwelling in chapter 2. On a side note, St. Athanasius discusses the significance of God's indwelling presence in Christ by using a metaphor of a King dwelling in a city in *Saint Athanasius, On the Incarnation* (Lexington: Empire Books, 2012), 9-10.

²⁸⁶ Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, 52.

the Incarnation itself, but rather than muddying the water with centuries of debate on the divine and human natures of Christ, I will focus instead on Christ's sharing in the divine identity of God, linking the Hebraic theology of divine presence with the "tabernacling presence" of God in the person of Christ.²⁸⁷ By focusing on the Person of Christ in this way, we may avoid the pitfalls of approaching the natures of Christ from the "side of God" or the "side of man," while allowing for a clearer connection between the role of place in the Incarnation and God's interactions with people through place in the Old Testament. I will focus on the particularity of Christ as the culmination of God's elective acts within Israel and the universal significance of God's particular presence in Christ. This will call attention to Christ as both Creator and Redeemer, while also suggesting the possibility of humanity to enter into communion with God through Christ and participate in both creation and redemption. The Temple theme will re-emerge as Christ's redemptive role is explored in terms of his relationship to the Temple and his identity as God related to the Temple. Finally, Christ's role as both Temple and Temple-builder will be connected with his granting of similar roles to the people of God. Here, I will suggest that God's continuing presence on earth through the Holy Spirit is conceptually and practically linked with the placemaking practices of the church, especially its enactment of the sacraments and its coming together in local community.

This chapter will argue that even within a New Testament focus, we can maintain a clear theology of place and placemaking that focuses on God's calling of people to redemptive placemaking practices which are linked with the divine presence in place. What is typically understood as the move from place to people in the New Testament will be understood not as

²⁸⁷ See Terrien, *The Elusive Presence*, 416; Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008).

a replacement or eschewal of place, but rather an *intensification* of God's direct presence in his people in particular place.

Some Spatial Considerations for Theology

Sigurd Bergmann notes the “spatial turn” of theology in the twentieth century and suggests that it is necessary for theology to thoroughly engage with spatial concepts of God.²⁸⁸ Whether or not we believe it is *necessary* to conceptualize theology in this way, we would be unwise to neglect the recent focus on spatiality as it relates to God, especially as it concerns a theology of place and suggests something about our participation in the divine life through placemaking practices. Theologians emphasize the “spatiality” of God in different ways. Some use more explicit philosophical language, while others’ appeals to common Christological categories only hint at the inherent spatiality of talk of the Incarnation.²⁸⁹ While there are many theologians who take account of space and place in relation to God, T.F. Torrance and J. Moltmann will most readily help us consider some of the main issues at stake in relating God to place. We will also notice that while abstract spatial imagery and categories can be useful, our own exploration of *place and placemaking* in the Incarnation must take a rather different route.

Torrance’s *Space, Time and Incarnation* takes a philosophical approach to space and focuses on the issue in regard to the divine and human natures of Christ. While we do not here have the space to engage in a full critique of Torrance’s work, there are a few points that will be helpful to note for our current aims. Torrance highlights the influence of Greek philosophy on theology’s understanding of the hypostatic union and notes the importance of

²⁸⁸ Sigurd Bergmann, "Theology in Its Spatial Turn: Space, Place and Built Environments Challenging and Changing the Images of God," *Religion Compass* 1, no. 3 (2007): 353.

²⁸⁹ The whole discussion of the *homoousios* might be understood as an attempt to identify how two natures—divine and human—can be understood to occupy the same “space” of Jesus Christ as person. Jeremy Begbie has discussed the issue in a different, non-spatial way, by suggesting a musical, or aural, metaphor for the relationship between divine and human natures. See his essay in Jeremy Begbie, ed. *Beholding the Glory: Incarnation through the Arts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000).

differentiating between the Greek receptacle or *container* view of space, which suggests space as a container that is different from the things that it contains, and the *relational* view of space, which suggests that “spatial, temporal and conceptual relations were inseparable,” that is, that space is related to things within it and cannot be separated out as a distinct entity.²⁹⁰

These differing views of space, he suggests, affect our understanding of how God can dwell on earth, yet still remain transcendent in heaven.²⁹¹ Torrance’s language of “relational space” is helpful here, and John Inge has adopted the idea as a central element in his own theology of place. In this view, place can become a player in the story of God and humanity—a very real part of the divine-human communion in creation. Rather than the divine nature being “contained in” Jesus, or being somehow just beneath the surface of his skin, the divine and human natures exist in relationship—though we know not exactly how—in the *one* person and identity of Christ.

Torrance cosmically roots our conception of the divine-human relationship in Christ in Creation, appealing to the doctrine of *creation ex nihilo* to suggest that God’s *production* of the world implies his interaction and relationship with it.²⁹² Torrance suggests this is further driven home in the Incarnation itself:

Thus the miraculous activity of God in the Incarnation is not to be thought of as an intrusion into the creation or as an abrogation of its space-time structure, but as the chosen form of God’s interaction with nature in which he establishes an intimate relation between creaturely human being and Himself.²⁹³

God’s choosing to interact with creation in space and time is integral to our understanding of him, and the “intimate relation,” Jesus Christ, is *the* absolute point of contact between God

²⁹⁰ Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation*, 58.

²⁹¹ We saw these same issues at stake in the Old Testament’s description of the dwelling of God in the Jewish Temple and tabernacle. The issue of the apparent disconnect between God’s presence and absence in the life of Israel was ultimately relieved by focusing on the fact that God’s interactions with humans are definably particular—God’s universal presence in creation must be known through particular acts of dwelling, revelation, and relationship. And while the person of Christ is not “made with human hands” as the Temple was, these same philosophical issues of divine presence and indwelling contribute to the often spatially-confused theological discourse on the natures of Christ. Cf. John 1; Mark 14:58; Heb. 9:11,24. See especially John’s reference to the Virgin birth in order to drive home this point.

²⁹² Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation*, 23. Of course, the doctrine also implies some distance and distinction from his creation, as well.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 24.

and the world. Our understanding of places as the meeting point between God and his people comes to fruition in the person of Christ. Christ is:

...*the place* in all space and time where God meets with man in the actualities of his human existence, and man meets God and knows Him in His own divine Being...Without this vertical relation to God man has no authentic place on earth, no meaning and no purpose, but with this vertical relation to God his place is given meaning and purpose.²⁹⁴

Torrance not only affirms Christ's place and presence among humans on earth but he encourages readers to see Christ as the lens through which we understand our own dwelling and through which we make our own "place on earth." These two issues will contribute significantly to our theology of place and placemaking. The creative and redemptive significance of God's choosing to interact through earthly, physical, embodied place will remain paramount in our theological foundation for place, and the suggestion that man's relationship and *response* to place is grounded in the person of Christ as the ultimate place of contact between God and the world will be a central feature of a theology of *placemaking*.

While Torrance's concern is mainly with the Incarnation, Moltmann directs readers' attention to Christ's actions in Creation. Moltmann makes the same differentiation between philosophical views of space but instead of advocating a "relational" view, Moltmann argues for an "ecological concept of space."²⁹⁵ This is similar to Torrance's view, so I will not focus on further explanation. What is important in drawing attention to Moltmann's theology of space, though, is the way he conceives God's interaction with and relationship to space in the very beginning—in the act of Creation itself. Borrowing from Jewish mystical and kabbalistic theologies, he expresses a two-fold relationship of God to space. God is the "eternal dwelling place of creation" but he also dwells in the creation that he has made.²⁹⁶ These two views of

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 75-76.

²⁹⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1985), 142.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 150.

God's relationship to space are not mutually exclusive though: "God and the world are related to one another through the relationship of their mutual indwelling and participation."²⁹⁷ In this view, God can simultaneously make room within himself for his creation to dwell and be held or dwell within his own creation in a sort of perichoretic unity.²⁹⁸

Ultimately, the issue remains of an ontological nature that cannot concern us here. Rather than engaging in speculative theology of this kind, it may be more useful to "work out a more differentiated understanding of how God as Creator of space might be present and liberating in, with, and through space *at the places of the world*."²⁹⁹ Moltmann and Torrance provide a helpful philosophical starting point for exploring God and space. In order to determine avenues through which we might practically apply such knowledge to "the places of the world," however, we must exchange the more abstract language of "space" for particular "place" and focus on the way God makes contact with people in creation through his incarnate Son. This is not to say that an ontological grounding and explanation of God in space is not useful for Christian practice, but that our theology of place and placemaking will need much more to remain sufficiently full and grounded.

Christ's Divine Identity in Place

A more "grounded" vision of the person of Christ on earth still lends troubling spatial language, though, especially in regard to Christ's identification as both human and divine. In

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 150.

²⁹⁸ God's creative action is seen as a self-limitation in this sense: he gives his creation space to participate in the creative process and thus limits his control over them. This is linked conceptually with a kenotic theology of God's self-emptying in the incarnation. While I agree that humans are given freedom to participate in the divine creative and redemptive aims, I do not wish to limit myself to the complete view of God that Moltmann's theology entails. In this way, I tend toward the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar who suggests that humans have a distinct role to participate and engage with God, but who does not suggest that God's invitation to humans entails his "becoming" other than that which he already is in complete love in the Trinity. For this distinction between Balthasar and Moltmann, see Rowan Williams, "Balthasar and the Trinity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs Von Balthasar* ed. Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 37-8.

²⁹⁹ Bergmann, "Theology in Its Spatial Turn: Space, Place and Built Environments Challenging and Changing the Images of God," 358. My emphasis.

the early church's attempt to reconcile scripture's description of Christ as both fully God and fully man, they often depended highly on the language of "nature." The main issue at stake in the early church's Christology was the way in which the divine and human natures of Christ were conceived to relate in the one person of Christ.³⁰⁰ Christ must remain fully divine and fully human at the same time; only with both natures could he fulfill his salvific role and provide true redemption for all of creation.³⁰¹ These issues were related to how the two natures could exist in one space, and Christology reflects this spatial emphasis in the delineation of Christology from the "side of God" or the "side of man,"³⁰² "from above" or "from below."³⁰³ While one might assume that an emphasis on physical and particular place would suggest a theology from the "side of man," we will recognize that this approach is far too narrow. While approaching the topic from one side or the other may help in some ways to tease out specific issues related to Christ's natures, the issue of place, like the natures of Christ, will not be so easily divided. As we have seen, God throughout history has had an intimate relationship with place and has revealed its very central quality for human life and divine-human interaction. For this reason, we cannot just start on the "side of man" in order to address the issue of place in regard to the Incarnation. As we have seen evidenced so far, God is tied up in the space of his creation. Theology, then, as Jesus did, should "walk steadily on two feet."³⁰⁴ A properly incarnational theology must balance between the uncreatedness of God in Christ and his essential relatedness to the created world.

Richard Bauckham navigates the debate in a successful way by focusing on the divine identity in Christ while avoiding the morass of how exactly the divine and human natures exist simultaneously. The Chalcedonian category of *hypostasis* points in this direction with its

³⁰⁰ While we do not have space to expand on this debate here, a good introduction to the history of the early church's development of doctrine can be found in J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 3rd ed. (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1965).

³⁰¹ Reference Gregory of Nyssa's dictum: "What God has not assumed, God has not saved."

³⁰² H.E.W. Turner, *Jesus the Christ* (Oxford: Mowbrays, 1976).

³⁰³ Colin Gunton, *Yesterday and Today: A Study of Continuities in Christology*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1997).

³⁰⁴ Turner, *Jesus the Christ*, 104.

emphasis on two natures *in one person*. By focusing on the one identity of God (*who God is*), in the person of Christ, Bauckham accounts for God’s action in created places in a way that avoids over-spiritualizing the concept of place and preserves the presence of God in his creation. Bauckham argues:

Once we have rid ourselves of the prejudice that high Christology must speak of Christ’s divine nature, we can see the obvious fact that the Christology of divine identity common to the whole New Testament is the highest Christology of all. It identifies Jesus as intrinsic to who God is.³⁰⁵

By viewing Christ in this way, we might better account for the mediating role that Christ as the “place” of divine presence has in reconciling humanity to God, along with the implications that the incarnation suggests for *human participation* in the life and work of God through Christ, including participation, in some sense, in the redemption of Creation.

Particularity and Place

Bauckham’s identification of Jesus with the God of Israel speaks precisely to what Hans Urs von Balthasar calls “the ultimate expression of the divine involvement”— God’s elective choosing as manifested in the Old Testament, but this time concentrated universally in the one particular person of Christ.³⁰⁶ God “empties himself” in the Incarnation and becomes the “very embodiment of [His] mighty act of liberation” through election.³⁰⁷ In sharing the divine identity, Christ thus focuses our attention on the universal, redeeming presence of God in the particular man Jesus Christ.

One of the most striking features of the Incarnation is the “scandal of particularity”— why God should choose to engage with the world through particular times, places, and people, specifically, in the particular person of Christ crucified. That God became incarnate in Christ and was crucified has certainly been a “stumbling block” (1 Cor. 1:23) that haunts

³⁰⁵ Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 31.

³⁰⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Engagement with God* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 26.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 27. Phil. 2:6-8.

our conception of the ways God chooses to interact with his creation.³⁰⁸ As we noted in chapter three, this is ultimately a concern for the way the particular relates to the universal, the one to the many. The Incarnation, on this subject, delivers a fuller picture of place than we have been able to give thus far, providing the channel through which to understand both the particular and universal aspects of place and placemaking.

The Old Testament reveals God's tendency to move from the particular to the universal: the call of Abraham (to all families on earth), the election of Israel (to all nations), and the establishment of Zion (to the ends of the earth).³⁰⁹ God's interaction with the world follows this movement from one to many. But God's actions ultimately have to narrow before they can widen. Bauckham argues, "God's purposes could not in fact move directly from those he singled out in the Old Testament times to the universal goal of his purposes. They had to be focused definitively on one more particular act of singling out an individual: Jesus the Jew from Nazareth."³¹⁰ The Incarnation, then, is the supreme act through which God focuses his acts on one particular person and place for the sake of all of his creation. The key Christological question, then, is the "universal significance of the particular man Jesus."³¹¹ Bauckham draws this point out further by suggesting that Christ's universal significance is found in his particular relationship with people during his life on earth. "Jesus in his earthly life displayed a potential identification with all humanity, but he showed it in the way in

³⁰⁸ This focus on particularity has seen a revival in historical studies of Jesus—where and how Jesus lived, the events of his life, and so on, are often put in focus to establish the significance of the incarnational narrative. But placing too much emphasis on the historical Jesus, John Macquarrie suggests is an abstraction from what we see presented in the gospels. The gospel writers, rather than writing a history of Jesus' life, are reflecting theologically on his life and its ultimate meaning. Jesus' human experiences are held up as the marker of his true engagement with the created world as well as a sign of his divine identity and actual power to atone for the sins of humanity. While the particular human life of Christ is integral to our Christology, it must be tempered by an appropriate focus on a theology of the more universal significance of Jesus' life. John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, Revised ed. (London: SCM Press, 1977), 279. For an example of this kind of historical approach to the incarnation, see C. Stephen Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith: The Incarnational Narrative as History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). More generally, see those authors that pursue the "third-quest" approach, which focuses on the history of Jesus' life and ministry. N.T. Wright lists the major contributions to this approach in N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 84.

³⁰⁹ Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), ch. 2.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 48. See also Thomas F Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 51.

³¹¹ Richard Bauckham, "Christology Today," *Scriptura* 27(1988): 21.

which a particular historical individual can: by concretely identifying in love with those people he actually encountered.”³¹² The extension of God’s grace and love to his creation had to come through particular relationships in order for it to be made universal among all of his creatures. This, of course, relates to our own extension of God’s love to others through relationships in place. Through “placed” hospitality, we can imaginatively understand others in their own place and identify the universal significance of our own actions in the story of God’s Kingdom.

Christ, as the “concrete universal”³¹³ reveals how the God of Israel, who chooses people for specific purposes and who dwells with his people in fittingly made places on earth in the Old Testament, extends this invitation to all humanity to participate in the divine life through Christ. In Christ, God’s presence is apprehended in terms of his relation to *people in place*, and humans are given a primary role in reconciling and redeeming creation to God *through the work of Christ in them*. The distance between God and the world that resulted from human sin in the garden is bridged precisely in the distance that Christ takes on between himself and the Father on the cross, and ultimately overcome in the resurrection of Christ on the third day.³¹⁴ The Resurrection, then, inaugurates this calling of humans into fuller participation with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the life of the world.³¹⁵

This points again to the significance of “calling” as a category related to a Christian theology of placemaking, understood in wider terms under the doctrine of election. God’s choosing of specific people and places, though, is not to be understood as a sign of his exclusivity or favor, but rather, a calling *for* something that necessitates both human response

³¹² Ibid., 22.

³¹³ von Balthasar, *The Word Made Flesh*, 170; Larry Chapp, "Revelation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs Von Balthasar*, ed. Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 20.

³¹⁴ Mark A. McIntosh, "Christology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs Von Balthasar* ed. SJ Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004), 35. Citing the *Theo-Drama* 4, 361-2)

³¹⁵ For the suggestion that we must not only dwell on the incarnation, but must understand transformation through the lens of the resurrection, see also Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise*, 214.

and responsibility with gifts given.³¹⁶ It is a call to “ever purposeful service,”³¹⁷ an idea that will recall the command for stewardship and the gifting of place in the first chapters of Genesis. Von Balthasar notes:

For the grace of God is fundamentally a call; it is being enlisted in God’s service; it is being commissioned with a special task; and through all this there is bestowed upon us a unique personal identity in the eyes of God.³¹⁸

What this ultimately means for von Balthasar is that we are called and commissioned to participate in God’s own activity in the world.³¹⁹ Through God’s self-emptying love, he has allowed us a free place in his creative work and universal mission through Christ. This has obvious implications for our theology of placemaking. This participation in Christ will be comprised of various “placemaking activities” which God uses to reveal himself to the world and transform it by his grace. And these placemaking actions, as we will see later, are best construed in the context of the “here and now” rather than being abstracted or generalized for the application to some higher eschatological or universal purpose.

To illustrate this point further, I will briefly return to the work of David Brown. We will remember that Brown suggests that because God is totally generous, then he will establish creation in such a way that he “can be encountered, and encountered often,” through variously different forms, including the arts and place.³²⁰ But though Brown assures his readers that God is encountered as both transcendent and immanent, and that the sacramentality of the created world is a result of God’s own direct revelation of himself, it remains difficult to account adequately—and with any sort of nuance—for the idea of election in Brown’s theological account of place. This is not to say that Brown totally fails to

³¹⁶ Rowley, *The Biblical Doctrine of Election*, 120; Newbigin, *The Open Secret: Sketches for a Missionary Theology*, 19.

³¹⁷ Rowley, *The Biblical Doctrine of Election*, 174.

³¹⁸ von Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, 28-29.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

³²⁰ Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 9.

see the importance of the particular, as we see specifically in his discussions of symbolic geography and pilgrimage and in his earlier writing on the Incarnation.³²¹

Brown nudges the significance of the Incarnation to the periphery in his more recent project, though, and therefore stops short of what might be a fuller view of God's generous and loving action in his creation. He argues, "The incarnation of course occurred in a specific time and place, but since for it to occur at all was essential, perhaps less can be made of this fact than theologians sometimes suppose."³²² It seems, however, that this is the very element noticeably absent from Brown's argument in *God and Enchantment of Place*. He misses the main event—the central place through which we encounter God on earth. To argue for a theology where God is so easily encountered through the material, the Incarnation in place may actually serve better to highlight the point than a general approach. If we identify Christ as the fulfillment of Israel's particular election, as the ultimate place of divine-human encounter, and as the once-and-for-all realization of God's creative and redemptive plan for the wider world, then we can better account for the various ways in which we encounter God precisely through particular places, people, and created objects. Revelation might better be understood as a question of "Who" rather than "what."³²³ Given in the person of Christ is the offer to humanity to participate in a variety of ways in the universal work of the Trinity.

While in one sense, Brown is right to suggest that various media can serve as vehicles of divine revelation and grace, his theological justification for this could benefit from reference to the "divine Who" behind them.³²⁴ A natural religion or theological rationale for encountering God through places, as Brown presents, suffers when it lacks the ultimate grounding of God's most particular encounter with humans through the man Jesus Christ.

³²¹ Ibid., ch. 4. See also Brown, *The Divine Trinity*.

³²² Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 156-57. He goes to say, though, that "what is interesting is that the historical Jesus clearly did have a vision that took land and city seriously."

³²³ Chapp, "Revelation," 22. In this sense, he shares his theology with Karl Barth, who puts the revelation of God ultimately in the person of Christ. See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 13 vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956-75).

³²⁴ Chapp, "Revelation," 23.

Brown is on to something when he suggests that the material world (and therefore specific objects, events, and places within it) can reveal the spiritual, and we will see shortly how Christ initiates this in the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist for the church and how the physical community can reveal the presence of God. But before we can talk significantly about *places* as the center of divine activity, we must focus on *the place* of divine creative and redemptive activity in the one, particular person of Christ. Focusing on *the Person* will allow us to deal adequately with the New Testament shift to *the people* of God, a theme cited often enough to suggest the spiritualization and dismissal of place.³²⁵ However, we will see that places and the communities within them remain in central focus, while the way in which they are conceived, their symbolism, and the mission associated with them are refocused and revised.

Christ in Creation and Redemption

We have seen that the man Jesus Christ is *the* locus of God's divine presence and identity, along with the central place through which God fulfills his elective purposes for Israel and the whole world. This allows us to talk about Him in two main ways, though these remain related: first, more generally, as the locus of God's creative and redemptive activity for *all* of creation, and second, specifically as the new Temple—the particular place of divine redemptive presence on earth.

“If Christ is central to Redemption,” Turner argues, “he cannot be excluded from Creation.”³²⁶ This connection between the “cosmic Christ” who was “in the beginning” (Jn. 1:1) and his atoning work on the cross finds its key passage in Col. 1:15-20.³²⁷ Paul's connection to creation here and elsewhere in the epistles represents his widening of focus

³²⁵ For its dismissal, see Davies, *The Gospel and the Land*, 15. Alternatively, Samuel Terrien notes how the church and community is now the place of divine presence. The temple becomes the community. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence*, 452.

³²⁶ Turner, *Jesus the Christ*, 21.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 21. See also Rom. 8:18-23; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 4:9.

from the Old Testament account of place rather than his dismissal of it, and it is here that we can identify one of the central themes of a Christian theology of place. Bartholomew notes that in Paul's corpus, the "shift in focus is not from the land to nowhere, but from the land to the whole of creation, to all nations, and it is precisely this creation-wide shift that gives particular places importance."³²⁸ Paul's theology of place, if we can ascribe one to him, relies on the foundation of Christ in Creation.³²⁹ Christ as Creator renews the focus on all of creation, including of course, but not limited to, Israel's land and people.³³⁰ By focusing in on Christ as the Creator and Redeemer simultaneously in his letter to the Colossians (*all of Creation can be saved through Christ*), Paul is able to speak to Israel's messianic and eschatological hopes while also recognizing the new scope of Christian mission to the entire world.³³¹

Here, in Christ's redemptive work, we see the outworking of God's universal aims and significance taking place through particular, and exceedingly local, avenues. This has important implications for a theology of placemaking. If Christ is the place of both creation and redemption, then any view of place that comes out of a "christocentric" theology must necessarily maintain those two central elements.³³² In fact, Bartholomew maintains that the biblical witness formulates a theology of place in terms of this "creation-redemption model."³³³ To say that place is understood through a creation-redemption model is to acknowledge God's beginning, present, and future redemptive plans for *all* of creation.³³⁴ It simultaneously takes account of God's creation of the world as good, acknowledging his continual presence and action within it, and looks forward to the New Creation as it finds

³²⁸ Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell*, 127.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 140.

³³⁰ See Wright's discussion of this in N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), especially pp. 412ff. Even Israel's resurrection beliefs before the time of Christ reflect this in some way, citing the eschatological renewal of the whole creation and the physical resurrection. See pp. 329-34.

³³¹ Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell*, 127. See also Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*.

³³² Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell*, 243.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 31, 241ff.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 246. See also Trevor Hart and Richard J. Bauckham, "The Shape of Time," in *The Future as God's Gift: Explorations in Christian Eschatology*, ed. David Fergusson and Marcel Sarot (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000).

expression in Christ's work in the Kingdom of God on earth. In this creation-redemption model of placemaking, then, we can identify the practical ways that God "enlists us as the agents of his activity in the world," inviting us to participate in the lives of each other and of God Himself through particular actions that carry universal significance.³³⁵ Alluding to the eschatological implications of human action in place, Bartholomew suggests in a light-hearted tone: "Jesus is coming, get on with placemaking!"³³⁶ Not only do our particular actions reveal something about our own human economy, but as our actions in place center on creaturely participation in both creation and redemption, they can be conceived in terms of their wider eschatological significance as they work in relationship with and response to God.³³⁷

Creation and Redemption in "Temple" Terms: Christ and Community

While we might continue to refer more generally to this creation-redemption model of place, Christ's creational, redemptive, and eschatological associations can be concretely located in the notion of Jesus as the fulfillment of the Temple and the locus of divine presence on earth. In the New Testament's depiction of Christ as Temple, we can see how the particularization of God's redemptive work in Israel and his eschatological plan for the renewal of creation culminates in the image of Christ the Temple, and further, how this applies to our theological concept of place. Bauckham notes that the Temple is portrayed metaphorically in two ways in the New Testament: ecclesiological, in regard to the people of God, and christologically, in regard to the singular person of Christ.³³⁸ We will center our attention on the latter before turning to the people of God as the new Temple and its particular significance for a theology of placemaking.

³³⁵ Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell*, 246.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

³³⁷ von Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, 29.

³³⁸ Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, 77-8. See especially John's gospel, where Christ is presented as the Temple.

There is much to say about the image and particular site of the Temple, however three aspects of Temple scholarship will preoccupy us here as they relate to the Incarnation and place: First, Christ is understood as the fulfillment and embodiment of the Temple in redemptive terms. Jesus as Temple redeems all of Creation, and thus marks a sort of divine stamp of approval on the renewal and care of creation. Second, Jesus as Temple is seen as the locus of divine presence. In Christ, we can further understand God's use of places to reveal his presence and meet his people. Third, Christ's role as temple-builder (Jn. 2:19) and his emphasis on temple-building practices will look forward to the New Creation and will suggest something about the link between divine and human placemaking activities in "temple practices"³³⁹ while calling implicit attention to the inherently "artistic" element of placemaking.

First, Jesus is not simply the metaphorical fulfillment of Temple hopes, but embodies the Temple himself.³⁴⁰ What this means is that Jesus now serves as the actual, physical site of redemption by providing a once and for all action that reconciles creation back to God. By embodying the Temple, Christ could show how his identity was the same identity of God—while God dwelt in the Jerusalem Temple, providing access for the redemption of Israel's people, the divine presence is now immediately in Christ, and it is through Him that people will now achieve their salvation. The "permanent structures" in the Old Testament provide a way through which to understand Christ, and the Jerusalem Temple remains the main place through which Jesus is identified.³⁴¹ But Jesus should not be seen as a replacement of the Jerusalem Temple, but rather as its *fulfillment*. "While in a sense geography is transcended in this image," here, as elsewhere, God's plan for his people is achieved "by way of

³³⁹ Nicholas Perrin, *Jesus the Temple* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 79.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁴¹ Thomas F Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1983), 27-8.

particularity.”³⁴² The particularity of the place of the Temple and its role in creation’s redemption is drawn into “the temporal and geographical particularity of a genuinely human person.”³⁴³ In Jesus, we see the “concreteness of God’s activity” come into striking focus.³⁴⁴ This activity of God is driven home further in Christ’s designation as the “cornerstone” (Mt. 21:42; Mk. 12:10; Lk. 20:17; Acts 4:11). The cornerstone of the temple, as we saw in chapter three, was associated with the place of most of God’s major acts in creation and redemption, including the forming of Adam from dust, the flood of Noah, the sacrifice of Isaac, and the expected place of the Messiah’s return, among others. In the same way, both creational and redemptive realities are tied up in this one place of God’s action, now identified with Jesus himself as both Creator and Redeemer.³⁴⁵

Second, Christ as Temple draws out the theme of God’s dwelling in places in quite literal terms. The Old Testament writers were never fully able to resolve the tensions between God’s immanence on earth and his transcendence in heaven, or to put it in more biblical terminology, God’s absence from and presence within the Temple and creation. They tended to focus on various arenas of God’s presence, and these differed between discussions of the *moveable* tabernacle and the *stationary* Temple. But now Christ’s identification with the Temple brings those two notions of place together. “In Jesus the problematic presence of God to Israel, the distance of his nearness and the nearness of his distance, which so deeply troubled the souls of psalmists and prophets alike, was brought to its resolution.”³⁴⁶ Jesus the man, sharing in the divine identity of God, allowed for both the earthly tabernacling presence of God in the creaturely while keeping his distance as Creator. The glory of the Creator is seen

³⁴² Bauckham, *Bible and Mission.*, 79.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 79.

³⁴⁴ Lilburne, *A Sense of Place*, 68.

³⁴⁵ Perrin, *Jesus the Temple*, 33.

³⁴⁶ Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 39.

in the Word made flesh and creaturely.³⁴⁷ But God's glory, one day, we are told in the book of Revelation, will fill the entire earth. The New Jerusalem comes down from heaven and "God's dwelling place is now among the people..."³⁴⁸ The various manifestations of divine presence will be united in the new heaven and new earth, the Temple and God's associated presence now filling the entire earth.³⁴⁹ The divine presence is everywhere in the New Creation, and Christ is the marker of this new reality to come.

While Christ is the fulfillment of the Temple and the locus of divine presence, it is only in the New Creation that we will see God's presence dwelling *in the entire earth* in the same way as he dwells in the Temple and tabernacle. It is true that the Psalms present the earth as declaring God's handiwork, but the language of the whole world as God's Temple only reaches its fulfillment in eschatological terms. We continue to be reliant, then, on God's active encounter with people through places until then. The divine presence as witnessed in Christ is one step closer to this eschatological vision, though, and we will see that Christ's designation of the community of believers as Temple affords them a special role in participating in the Kingdom of God's final realization.

Third, the image of the Temple is also conceived in ecclesiastical terms, identified with the people of God in community. What is more, both Jesus and community are represented not only in terms of the Temple itself, but also as "temple-builders,"³⁵⁰ a designation certainly reminiscent of the placemaking or "building" activities identified in chapter three. In his Incarnation, Jesus assumes the identity of Yahweh's high priest, also alluded to in his designation as the New Adam (1 Cor. 15:45) and thus takes on a role of "eschatological

³⁴⁷ See John 1:14.

³⁴⁸ Rev. 21:1-3. For his discussion on people, place, and presence in Revelation, see also Bauckham, *Revelation*, 132-43. The vocabulary for "dwelling" used in this passage is also used in John 1:14.

³⁴⁹ For progression from Temple to world, see Levenson, "The Temple and the World." Also, see Perrin, *Jesus the Temple*, 65.

³⁵⁰ Perrin, *Jesus the Temple*, ch. 2.

temple-builder.”³⁵¹ But, “In the aftermath of this apocalyptic reality,” Nicholas Perrin writes, both believers and apostles were “bound together in their common role of temple-builders and priests, even if those roles worked out practically in different ways.”³⁵² The church, thus, “takes the place” of Christ in the sense that they now embody this temple-building role on earth, which finds a correspondent in Christ’s own work in heaven. In one sense, Christ goes to “prepare a place” for us in heaven (Jn. 14:3), but he also leaves the church with the command to prepare places which look forward to the New Creation.³⁵³

This relationship between earthly placemaking and a heavenly “longing for home” is also suggested in the church’s command to “go to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8)—to expand God’s presence in all the world. While the calling is universal, this spreading of God’s presence will take place in *all the particular places* of the earth. One will recall that the Garden and Temple are both conceived as center and microcosm of divine presence, while simultaneously suggesting the spreading of God’s presence throughout the entire world. Perrin makes this link between temple practices and the new church community, suggesting, “*all the practices which Jesus was to enjoin upon his followers are to be seen essentially as temple practices.*”³⁵⁴ As the new place of God’s presence on earth, the people of God will participate in building His temple again, though this time, it will include all sorts of placemaking practices and will encompass all the earth in its eschatological realization. While the particular person of Christ leaves us, the community, established and strengthened by particular relationships, will take on this role with the help of the Holy Spirit, looking forward to Christ’s final eschatological goals in the local placemaking practices of the here and now.

³⁵¹ Ibid., 119.

³⁵² Ibid., 69.

³⁵³ In fact, Terrien notes the connection between appearances of Christ post-resurrection as “channel[s] of an exhortation, a command, or a commission.” The divine presence here is linked with the command and calling to *do* something. Christ’s presence among us sees its fruit in our acts of making which tell of the Kingdom of God on earth. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence*, 428; 35.

³⁵⁴ Perrin, *Jesus the Temple*, 79.

The community's role as both Temple and "temple-builder" will also suggest the significance of the church's activity in terms of redemption. Christ's work as both fully human and fully divine makes possible the participation of creatures in both creation and redemption. While Christ is the final place of redemption, his followers, as the new place of his presence, are enjoined with him in all sorts of redeeming and transformative actions on earth. Vernon White suggests in a similar way, "Although crucial conditions for the possibility of reconciliation have been uniquely constituted by God in Christ, this does not for one moment release us from the responsibility of co-operating in 'actualizing' it here and now."³⁵⁵ The actualization of Christ's work will occur in all the activities which his followers are called to in scripture: loving our neighbors; being hospitable, kind, merciful, and forgiving; working towards justice; and so on. What is more, these activities are communal and placed, enacted and understood in relation to other creatures, both human and non-human.

Finally, the church's role as "temple-builder" will suggest the "artistic" element of redemptive placemaking activities through Christ. In chapter three, I identified the artist in the tabernacle as a key image for understanding humans' role in making fitting places on earth for God's presence. Understood in even wider terms, the church's engagement with "culture" or "culture-making" might reveal God's presence in community and transform creation into something that reflects His Kingdom here on earth.³⁵⁶ The action of human "making" which factors so prominently into Old Testament engagement with place is no less significant in the New. William P. Brown makes a striking observation in this regard, noting that the Spirit of God (*ruah*) that enabled creation (Gen. 1:2), is the same spirit that inspired the artistic skill of the workers for the building of the tabernacle (Ex 28:3; 31:1; 35:1), as well

³⁵⁵ Vernon White, *Atonement and Incarnation: An Essay in Universalism and Particularity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 115.

³⁵⁶ Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downer's Grove: IVP Books, 2008).

as the spirit that is responsible for creating the new community at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13).³⁵⁷ While it is common to identify the artistic creativity of humans in the Genesis and tabernacle, Brown's drawing of the theme into the Pentecost account suggests that the "artistic" activity of humans through the Spirit will continue to be reflected in the communal and creative working of the church.

I identify the broadly placed activities of the church as "artistic" in the sense that they body forth the glorious love of God in the world through "signs," which are "man's natural activity."³⁵⁸ David Jones argues that "*all* men and their practices" partake in sign-making.³⁵⁹ I will press this to argue that the church *especially* should be understood in these "artistic" terms as it is called to show forth the work of Christ through human community and practice. Jones places all artistic activity under that of "sign-making" and designates artistic practice as "sacramental" in the sense that it embodies and re-presents something more.³⁶⁰ And while the sacramentality of art is certainly only one way to define and understand the practice of artistry, the notion of sign-making is helpful here as it connects the placed, physical, and symbolic actions of the church with the work of Christ through them. In this sense, we can talk about the church participating "artistically" in the redemptive work of Christ as people enact various sorts of placemaking and "temple-building" activities in community.

Placemaking in Community: The Sacraments as Placed Actions

We might understand the concept of "sign-making" better, though, by looking at the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist. While Jones highlights all sorts of activities as "sacramental," perhaps Christ's own signs can further elucidate the value of placed human

³⁵⁷ William P. Brown, *The Ethos of the Cosmos: The Genesis of Moral Imagination in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 403.

³⁵⁸ David Jones, "Art and Sacrament," in *Artist and Epoch: Selected Writings by David Jones*, ed. Harman Grisewood (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), 149.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 166.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 161.

action in response to God, which we might apply more broadly to the concept of artistic placemaking. Despite the theological uncertainty about the precise way God works through the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist, I will suggest that they, among others things they do, highlight the important link between particular place, human making, and divine presence.

The two central sacraments in the life of the church will communicate this link most clearly, though these reflections can be applied to other acts of sign-making and artistry more widely. Both baptism and Eucharist have a role in “placing” us in Christian community, as they are symbolic and physical signs of membership in the community of Christ. Torrance suggests that baptism is a matter of belonging in the community while the Eucharist is a matter of participation within it.³⁶¹ Baptism symbolizes our entrance into right relationship with God through Christ and becomes our “initiation into the Christian community.”³⁶² As it brings us into the community, baptism is a way of making our relationship to God concrete and enabling participation in the atonement achieved by God through Christ.³⁶³ Before baptism, we are *outside* the community of Christ and after baptism as we are *inside*. The boundaries of Christian community are permeable, and believers enter the community through a physical sign just as Christ entered the “place of Jordan.” Baptism, thus, is the actual “*locus* of transformed relationships.”³⁶⁴ Before we enter into the divine presence and community in a new way, we must first get in the water. Through both physical and mental ascent, the sign of baptism draws believers into the “catholicity of space”³⁶⁵ that is Christ and his community.³⁶⁶

³⁶¹ Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 101. See also Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 432.

³⁶² Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, 458.

³⁶³ Colin Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 188.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 188. My emphasis.

³⁶⁵ Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, 64.

³⁶⁶ It is interesting to think about baptism as a physical sign of belonging in the Christian community in light of what we learned in chapter one about the importance for love for a sense of belonging in place. In a theological sense, love is the

The Eucharist, as a continual and repeated sign of participation in Christ and community, is of perhaps even deeper theological significance in regard to place, human making, and divine presence. Here, we see the relationship between divine and human making, the power of Christ's presence in material objects and practices, and the transformative possibilities related to our own enactment of and participation in the Eucharistic liturgy. In this basic act, Christ associates himself with the material substance of the bread and wine, and we actively partake in his body and blood. In Christ's institution of the act, all sites of action come together in the one Person—Christ acts as both God and human, representing the place of both divine and human actors as the sign is continually and historically enacted.³⁶⁷ In our own reenactment of the Last Supper, we find that there is action on both sides as well. God acts dynamically to reveal his presence in the Eucharist, and humans call forth and respond to this presence with thanksgiving in community.

While we do *respond* to God and make meaning through the sacraments, Christ *in our place* is still the initiator of that grace and meaning.³⁶⁸ Christ enables our action in the Eucharist by inviting us into participation with him in the first place. Our meeting of God in the Eucharistic community is a result of the action and love of Christ. This dependence on Christ does not diminish the human role in Eucharistic practices, though. In fact, our participation in redemption is further enabled by our dependence on Christ. We may “transform the world through the celebration of the Eucharist,” by participating in the action of Christ, offering thanks to the Father through the Holy Spirit.³⁶⁹ Christ's actions might,

ultimate reason for belonging in the Body of Christ—love of Christ for us and our love for Him as we enter into Christian community through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us and the physical sign of baptism as we become an “insider” in that community.

³⁶⁷ And, as Trevor Hart helpfully points out, if perhaps we wish to designate further, it includes the work of God as God, God as human, and our work as humans. For a helpful look at the relationship between human and divine action in the sacraments, see Hart, “Calvin and Barth on the Lord's Supper.”

³⁶⁸ Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 90, 99.

³⁶⁹ Nicholas Healy and David L Schindler, “For the Life of the World: Hans Urs Von Balthasar on the Church as Eucharist,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs Von Balthasar* ed. Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 55.

then, be understood as enabling all potentially transformative human activity in the world. Even the transformative work of the non-Christian becomes a distant echo and participation in divine actions.³⁷⁰

What, then, is the role of “place” in the transformative work of humans through Christ? Again we might look to the placedness of the Eucharist itself. William Cavanaugh’s study of the Eucharist as “one privileged site for the Christian spatio-temporal imagination” is helpful in developing some of these themes in relation to space and place.³⁷¹ Cavanaugh suggests not only that the relationship between the particular and the universal is best mediated by the Christian community’s practice of the Eucharist, but also that the “Eucharist as an earthly practice of peace and reconciliation” is the means by which we participate *locally* in Christ’s universal redeeming purposes.³⁷² The particularity of each aspect of the Lord’s Supper—the bread and wine as the actual, physical place of Christ’s presence, the particular community’s location, and the distinctive features of each congregation’s improvisational and earthly enactment of the liturgy—are key elements of thinking both “locally” and “globally” about the presence of Christ. Cavanaugh argues that this particular-universal relationship is only fully understood in the placed practice of the Eucharist:

...the Eucharist produces a catholicity which does not simply prescind from the local, but contains the universal *Catholica* within each local embodiment of the body of Christ. The body of Christ is only performed in local Eucharistic community, and yet in the body of Christ spatial and temporal divisions are collapsed. In the complex space of the body of Christ, attachment to the local is not a fascist nostalgia for *gemeinschaft* in the face of globalization. Consumption of the Eucharist consumes one into the narrative of the pilgrim City of God, whose reach extends beyond the global to embrace all times and places.³⁷³

³⁷⁰ Paul’s admonition to “be transformed,” though, is most completely and finally understood in Christ. Cf. Rom. 12:2.

³⁷¹ William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism* (London: T&T Clark, 2002), 4.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 51.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, 98-99.

If we take Cavanaugh's suggestion seriously, we will see that other Christian placemaking practices, while concerned for the wider world, must materialize out of local practices that are earthed in the places to which they are called. Cavanaugh is largely influenced by von Balthasar here, who suggests that the Church's "eucharistic mission," then, is to engage the whole cosmos in the "trinitarian exchanges of love" brought to life through participation in space, time and motion.³⁷⁴ Through acts of creative, and indeed "artistic," placemaking, the people of God may reveal God's love and presence to the world, while actually participating in that very love which Christ has made available to us. But these practices will always be based in a solidly "local" imagination, out of which God's love is made manifest to the world in decidedly concrete ways.

Placemaking in Community: Local Communities and Congregations in Place

In addition to Eucharistic activity, The Church's participation with Christ will be exhibited on a daily basis in people's actions in their own local congregations and communities. While the sacraments provide a framework for our understanding of the Church's participation with Christ, the way that communities act on a daily basis and make their own places in the world reflects the way that placemaking practices can be enacted more generally. As the temple of the Holy Spirit and the local presence of Christ on earth, the community plays a particular and central role in bringing about God's redemptive plans for creation.

The new Spirit-led community reveals the active presence of God on earth, and through the community's actions, God is made known to the ends of the earth. This is not to suggest that the church is the only place where human and divine actions coincide, though. Brown's point must be taken here—that God can be found in various arenas of human

³⁷⁴ Healy and Schindler, "For the Life of the World: Hans Urs Von Balthasar on the Church as Eucharist," 62.

engagement with the world, including those areas that are not explicitly “Christian.” This will become more apparent as we discuss placemaking practices in terms of the arts in chapter five. The action of human making more generally can be understood as an activity that ties us to God, though, and so those who engage in that activity might be understood as in some way participating in what it means to be a human made in the image of God. Through acts of imagination, ordering, planning, building, and so on, all humans may participate in the hopeful renewal of our creation. The relevant point to make here is that God’s presence can be found in arenas of local human placemaking, and that it is this very *locality* that speaks to the abiding presence of God in *all* the world.

Indeed, as Cavanaugh insinuates in his study of the Eucharist community, in order for the community to emit a “sanctifying presence” at all, they must be fully grounded in a locale. Lesslie Newbigin acknowledges this primary role of the church in a physical locale when he writes:

I do not think that the geographical parish can ever become irrelevant or marginal. There is a sense in which the primary sense of neighbourhood must remain primary, because it is here that men and women relate to each other simply as human beings and not in respect of their functions in society.³⁷⁵

What Newbigin realizes even in his missional context is that the *place* of people remains a relevant factor in how they relate with each other in community and with God.³⁷⁶ The building of local congregations and churches—that is, the making of places where communities dwell—is still central to the new community that Christ calls us into. In fact, the missional context of the church may perhaps *best* speak to the importance of particular places in the Kingdom of God. Just as God’s acts had to narrow on the person of Christ before his redeeming and reconciling action could be made known to the entire world, in the same way,

³⁷⁵ Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell*, 293., quoting Lesslie Newbigin, *Sign of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 64.

³⁷⁶ Gorringer’s assessment of Newbigin should be noted here, as he criticizes Newbigin for favoring the word and community over church structures. Gorringer, *Theology of the Built Environment*, 29.

we might see each church, congregation, or community as a microcosm—a picture of God’s self-limiting action in place, which reveals his presence to all of creation.

Displacement and Christian Calling

The broad picture of place that I have communicated thus far may seem contrary to the image of place often cited from scripture. This is due, at least in part, because both Old and New Testaments depict God as calling people *away from* places to fulfill his divine purposes. Abraham was called to leave his home, and Luke 19:46-52 instructs, “Leave the dead to bury the dead.” The call to be *displaced* will thus need to be reckoned with a biblical theology of place. Christians are, in fact, called to be sojourners in this world, working towards the final homecoming/eschaton.³⁷⁷ While this eschaton is best understood to have a clear relationship to the current world,³⁷⁸ we are still often called to be “wayfaring dwellers,” digging in to the places that we care called to, but always ready to go elsewhere for the sake of the Kingdom of God.³⁷⁹ In one sense, Christians can go anywhere and feel “at home.” In fact, the traditional liturgy encourages this feeling, as the people engage in the same liturgical acts of scripture reading, confession, and the Lord’s Supper, no matter where they are in the world. Bouma-Prediger and Walsh emphasize this feeling at home as “a posture, a way of being in the world. It is a journeying homemaking characterized by all the things revealed by that phenomenology: permanence, dwelling, memory, rest, hospitality, inhabitation, orientation, and belonging.”³⁸⁰ But this biblical view of “homemaking,” as these authors call it, is not a dismissal of physical places, even though it is more than the physical. The possibility of emplacement or being at home *anywhere*, without any stated attachments to

³⁷⁷ Lawrence, *The Word in Place: Reading the New Testament in Contemporary Contexts*; Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, *Beyond Homelessness*, 296.

³⁷⁸ See Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*; N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008); Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart, *Hope against Hope: Christian Eschatology at the Turn of the Millennium* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999).

³⁷⁹ Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, *Beyond Homelessness*, 295.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 297.

particular physical places, can be overly-simplified and suggest something that scripture may not have actually intended in regard to place. Just because Christ can be found in all of creation and in his people does not mean that we should just pick up and go *anywhere*, or that we should never be fully placed *somewhere*. What scripture does say is that God can call people to go to any number of places and have any number of relationships in those places. God will be present with us in those places, though this presence may be experienced in all sorts of ways, including, among others, the experience of his absence.³⁸¹ Certainly, God will call some people away from their homes, as scripture attests. But he will also call some to stay put, and this is equally as suggestive of God's calling to proclaim His kingdom on earth.³⁸²

If we understand a theology of place as that of a *calling* to be emplaced, we can better account for various types of action in place, including missionary activity or those who have left home and feel called back to it. The love of God can work through us in many ways, but what is *always* the case is that this work takes place in loving Christian communities, which always exist in particular places.³⁸³ While we may ultimately be “sojourners” until heaven and earth reach their final purpose, we are responsible for the places in which we sojourn until our final homecoming: “The Christian gospel, in other words, is a grand story of redemptive homecoming that is *at the same time grateful homemaking*.”³⁸⁴ As Bouma-Prediger and Walsh suggest here and throughout their work, placemaking will be both a central activity to the type of work that Christians are commanded to do on earth and will have redemptive and eschatological implications in the final fulfillment of the Kingdom of God.³⁸⁵ The “making new” of creation will begin in our own localized placemaking activities embodied in the love

³⁸¹ Hart, "Complicating Presence."

³⁸² Often, when Christ performed miracles, he commands people to return to their homes. See for example, the story of Christ's exorcism of Legion in Luke 8:22-39.

³⁸³ One might present the isolated monk or desert fathers as a counter-example, but these cases might still be understood within a larger communal framework—the community affords them the opportunity and often the resources to pursue a life of solitary contemplation.

³⁸⁴ Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, *Beyond Homelessness*, 320. My emphasis.

³⁸⁵ At the foundation of community building is love, what Bouma-Prediger and Walsh cite as the necessary component of “any possibility of being at home in creation.” And love, as we will explore further in chapter eight with the help of Wendell Berry, is always grounded in a place and time. See *Ibid.*, 278.

of God in community, whether these communities are the ones we have grown up in or ones to which we have been called around the world.

Summary and Conclusions

I have identified several relevant points of the doctrine of the Incarnation, along with various points from Jesus's life and ministry, which suggest the importance of place for both the divine-human relationship and human community. We cannot understand the New Testament focus on community as a total shift, but rather as a continuation of the same story that has been told from Creation. We first identified the way that place and space are important to God, and indeed, tied up in his own creative activity. But looking at the ontological and philosophical relationship between God and space was not enough; we needed to identify the practical ways that Christ engaged in both physical and symbolic places like the temple and called us to participate in the divine life, which he embodied. I suggested with Bauckham that we focus on the divine-human relationship by recognizing Jesus as manifesting the divine identity of the God of Israel. With this understanding, we were able to explore the ways that Christ embodied God's particular and universal aims for Israel and the whole world, along with the manner in which Christ's redemptive action on the cross was tied to his creative action with the Father in Heaven. Christ was understood as both Creator and Redeemer, an important suggestion for identification with him in terms of human placemaking practices. Christ's actions in place, from both the "side of man" and the "side of God," should be seen a paradigmatic model, which we are to follow.

This focus on Christ as the place of creation and redemption suggests several possibilities and implications for the human aspect of placemaking. While human work must never be confused with the once-and-for-all work of Christ, we can understand human work to share in Christ's work in at least some ways. In fact, it is *precisely* the unique way in which we share in Christ's work in creation and redemption that we can provide a full account of

our role as placemakers. By suggesting that Christ can do work in and through us, we can outline the central ways in which human placemaking is theologically important, as well as identifying what type of activities and mindsets are central and necessary to a Christian understanding of placemaking.

First, we see that Christ allows us to have union and participation with God. While we enter into life with God in our baptism, we continue to participate in God's work through various "placemaking" actions and practices like the Eucharist and communal endeavors. This participation, furthermore, has a potentially redemptive role. We may transform places through our actions there and look forward in an eschatological way to the New Creation. This redemptive role can also be understood in a missional context. The mission of the church is to spread God's Word and presence (which is associated with community) throughout the entire world. This mission is both particular and universal, embodied in particular, local places while representing the universal scope of God's desire for his creation.

Secondly, our participation with God in Christ and our mission in his Kingdom work is seen as a matter of calling. We are called to participate in various places through "making" activities. While we are the recipients of God's generously given gifts, we are also called to do something with these gifts, to add value to them, and transform places through Christ in us.³⁸⁶

Along these lines, we identified our role as "temple-builders" and concluded that because Christ "enters creation anew to be identified with a new community in the flesh," our fleshly and human activities in community remain of central significance.³⁸⁷ This new community as God's Temple entails building or making, just as it did when the people were

³⁸⁶ This includes a calling to remember, to be hospitable, to do good work, and to build community. Bouma-Prediger and Walsh cite, in a similar way, three characteristics of Christian sojourners: memory, community, and hospitality. *Ibid.*, 297.

³⁸⁷ Brown, *The Ethos of the Cosmos: The Genesis of Moral Imagination in the Bible*, 397. St. John of Damascus argues similarly for the use of images in worship. Because Christ came as the image of God made flesh, we can image him in art and contemplate his spiritual, divine presence in humanly form. See St. John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images: Three Apologies against Those Who Attack the Divine Images*, trans. David Anderson (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980).

commanded to build the actual tabernacle and temple in Ancient Israel. While placemaking may not always involve wood or stone structures, it does include various sign-making activities as are typically associated with human artistry. While the sacraments of the church serve as universal “signs” of involvement in the Christian life, the people of God are also called to all sorts of other sign-making activities grounded in place.

A proper focus on place helps us understand the ways in which our actions can be transformative. Resurrection and transformation occur not by God “lifting us to ‘another world’” or displacing us from the world we live in.³⁸⁸ We are very much “placed” in this world, and through a properly placed human artistry and sign-making, we may even add value to the life of the world.³⁸⁹ It is, then, precisely our placement within the world—in the everyday, physical locations in which we live our lives—that forms the venue of redemptive transformation through Christ. Our participation in creation and redemption occurs in our practices as they are enacted in the here and now. These local actions can be understood as parables of the Kingdom or a microcosm of divine presence in place as they anticipate and envisage God’s presence with us in the New Creation.³⁹⁰ Our local acts of sign-making, whether in or out-side the church can speak loudly to the intrinsic goodness of God’s creation and call forth his intensified presence in the Holy Spirit in place. How the Spirit works to bring about final transformation is not the main issue here; rather, our calling to practice faithful placemaking in the places to which we are called is the key element of this incarnational theology of place,

In the next chapter, we will see how placemaking might be construed more directly in terms of placed human artistry. We will retain this incarnational-Trinitarian focus as we

³⁸⁸ Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 207.

³⁸⁹ Rowan Williams, "Poetic and Religious Imagination," *Theology* 80(1977): 179.

³⁹⁰ Karl Barth refers to the importance of “secular parables” in Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, SS 69, sec. 2. Gorringer uses this notion of art as “secular parable” in T.J. Gorringer, *Earthly Visions: Theology and the Challenges of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

suggest that through practices that are particular, physical, and communal in character, humans as artists participate in and transform the world in union with Christ.

§ 1 SUMMARY: A CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF PLACE

It will be helpful, before moving on, to review and outline the wider shape of the theology of place suggested above. I have approached the topic biblically and theologically from three main angles: a creational theology as witnessed in the Genesis account, a theology of divine presence as seen in the tabernacle and temple narratives, and an incarnational theology grounded in Christ's redemptive work in the community of creation. While various issues were explored in each of these chapters, we saw that a theology of place is thoroughly bound up in reflection on Christ's work in both creation and redemption, along with our participation in that work.

Place, we see, is a player in the story of God's relationship to us and work within us. We noted the "God-people-place relationship" in scripture suggesting, with John Inge, that "places form the seat of relations" between God and people.³⁹¹ But reflection on place is not merely important for its instrumental value in the divine-human relationship. I urged the need to acknowledge the "givenness" of place, suggesting that the goodness of creation, as we saw God perceive and declare in Genesis 1, should form the backdrop of our understanding of place. Place is a gift by God for humans. But we are also responsible in that giftedness, commanded to respond to the gift of place and do something with it. I suggested that this action might be construed as "placemaking" and further outlined the ways in which placemaking is a shared human practice and experience, called forth of us by God.

In chapter two, I also suggested that placemaking was part and parcel of the *imago dei* (connected with the dominion mandate and the call to procreate) as well as the injunction to "till and keep" the garden. Placemaking here was explored in terms of responsible stewardship; it is one of the main ways that humans take care of and add value to the world

³⁹¹ Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*.

we are given. Placemaking as a calling by God for humans was further elucidated in chapter three, but this time, we explored the specific actions of the artist working in conjunction with divine command to build and adorn the Jewish tabernacle. We learned that not only is human making a general calling by God for us, but also that particular human making can actually contribute to constructing a fitting place for God's presence to dwell with us. Here, we saw the link between divine and human placemaking, and suggested that human placemaking and action can actually participate in and invite God's placemaking presence here on earth. We noted, however, the importance of not obligating God in this, along with the fact that divine presence and encounter is always the result of *divine* action towards creatures. There, was, however, a *relationship* and *meeting* between creature and Creator, implying an action on *both* sides of the equation.

In chapter four, I highlighted the ways in which place should ultimately be grounded in a christocentric vision of creation and suggested that the "incarnational" dimension of place was the best way to construct a theology of place and placemaking in light of both Old and New Testament witness. We noted also, the fact that the "incarnational" is always "Trinitarian," the work of Christ always being grounded in and related back to its Trinitarian relations. The importance of formulating a theology of place *through Christ*, though, was underscored, especially as it suggested the importance of particularity and physicality for humans, the integral link between creation and redemption, and the way it calls forth our participation and sharing in Christ's work in communities in place. Again, we saw that place is a calling by God for us to experience and expand God's Kingdom here on earth. Place, in this view, has a missional context that focuses on the importance of making particular, local places here on earth rather than yearning for abstract notions of heaven separated from the earthly. Placemaking should thus be eschatological in its aims, but only as it seeks to

transform and redeem local places here on earth and anticipates wider possibilities for the New Creation.

As we move on to some more “practical” concerns for placemaking, we will keep these theological concerns in mind. The next section seeks to explore one way—albeit one very central and paradigmatic way—that humans engage in placemaking practice: the arts.

§2: THEOLOGY IN PRACTICE: PLACEMAKING AND THE ARTS

While section one navigated the broad contours of a biblical theology of place and placemaking, section two will highlight how that theology of place might be put into practice through the arts. In section two, I will explore some of the ways in which placemaking might actually be rehearsed by looking at the arts in place, while identifying how artistic practice, particularly, points to our role as participants in creation and its redemption through Christ. Specifically, art's role in particularizing the world, drawing attention to the physical aspects of it, and participating in forms of community, suggests that human artistry is one very central and paradigmatic way that humans participate in both creation and redemption. In chapter five, I will conceptually link theological approaches to the arts with the theology of place established in section one, while considering the ways in which human artistry should be understood as a paradigm for human placemaking. Chapters six through eight will then look at particular artists' engagements with the world through place, thus concluding the study with a concrete focus on the arts in place. In all the chapters that follow, I will suggest that *the theological significance of art might actually be found in its relationship to place* and that *our theological understanding of placemaking might be bolstered by conceptualizing it through the image of human artistry in place*. I will employ the themes that have remained formative throughout, especially the creational and incarnational justification for human action in place and its relationship to divine aims, action, and presence.

CHAPTER 5

**PLACEMAKING AND THE ARTS:
TOWARDS AN ARTISTIC THEOLOGY OF PLACE AND
A PLACE-BASED THEOLOGY OF THE ARTS**

This chapter and those that follow will form a sort of practical application for the incarnational placemaking practice described at the end of chapter four. I suggested that Christ's incarnation opened up a way for humans to experience God more fully in the world and that we are called to participate in Christ's work in place by cultivating creation and anticipating redemption through localized placemaking. I will suggest here that human artistry is a paradigmatic instance of this type of Christian placemaking—that both in practice and symbol the arts provide a lens for understanding other sorts of placemaking actions as they participate in both creation and redemption.

This will require a theological engagement with art that focuses on the role of place and our calling to placemaking as outlined above. First, I will highlight the main characteristics of the arts that intersect with this concept of place. In their particularity, their physicality, and their relationship to community, art shares a basic relationship to place. All placemaking activities focus on these three elements, and so by exploring these themes in art, we might also learn something about the wider practice of placemaking while elaborating on the “artistic” theology of place to which I have alluded thus far. Artistry, therefore, is not just an arbitrary example to illustrate placemaking practice. The sorts of things that humans do in making art can be understood as a pattern for other forms of placemaking. In their particular, physical, and communal aspects, along with the ways in which they “make new,” the arts reflect a wider claim about human participation in creation and redemption through placemaking.

Following this comparative account between art and place, I will address some of the parallels between popular theological models for the arts and the theology of place elucidated in chapters two through four. In particular, I will concentrate on those models that construe artistry as a creational calling, likened to stewardship, as well as those that approach the arts from an incarnational-Trinitarian perspective and which focus on “adding value” to the world through artistry. In both models, I will note how these approaches endorse the importance of human participation in both creation and redemption through the arts. Not only can the arts affirm the world God has given us, but they can also anticipate future redemptive possibilities for creation. Of course, participation in creation is not *necessarily* redemptive, and the fact of human sinfulness remains relevant to the notion of human participation. However, despite this, we must see a basic continuity between Christ’s work in creation and his work in redemption, and suggest that his calling to us to participate in creation includes the possibility of our participation in redemption. To this latter theme, I will introduce a “place-based theology of the arts” in order to argue for a redemptive understanding of localized placemaking through the arts. As a final concern, I will address a question lingering throughout—What is the role of non-Christian art in terms of participation in creation and redemption? Can the placemaking practices of non-Christians also be understood as redemptive?

There are, of course, various other placemaking practices that are important, and indeed scripturally grounded, that lack any apparent connection with “art.” Before we go further, then, it will be helpful to remind the reader of the definition of “art” or “artistry” as I will use the terms here. In both practice and influence, all actions of “making” can be understood as “placemaking practices”—painting and poetry, cooking, gardening and farming, engineering, modes of scientific inquiry, and so on. I suggested earlier that human making is part of what it means to be made in the image of God, called forth to cultivate the

earth and have dominion over it. “The arts,” then, can be placed under this broader heading of “human making.”

Everything we do is not necessarily “art,” though. When we refer to the arts, we typically mean that area of human making devoted to purposeful, intentional, and creative engagement with one’s place in the world. We need not move in the direction of John Carey and dissolve *all* that is art (and thus make *everything* art),³⁹² but I will broaden the modern definition of artistry to include both art and craft, embracing especially those things that the modern art world has largely dismissed—“folk” arts or homemaking for example. In keeping with this sense of purposeful creative endeavor, then, I will continue to adopt the view of Wendell Berry, who, as I noted in chapter one, defines art as, “all the ways by which humans make the things they need.”³⁹³ While other suitable definitions might be offered, here I will prefer this wider definition of art and its related spheres of activity as understood within an ethic of responsibility, highlighting the ways in which our artistic actions in place are part of our call to practice responsible placemaking in creation.³⁹⁴ Artistry is one of the most basic ways that we engage in the world of places—it is in fact, a central and distinctive placemaking activity. Artistry should not be put on a pedestal separate from our everyday lives, as the “institution of High Art” has taught us to do.³⁹⁵ Rather, an implicit goal in this chapter will be to bring art back in to the realm of everyday experience and placemaking practice, simultaneously highlighting the “special” character of art for our relationship to place while grounding it in the particular, physical, and communal world in which we live.

³⁹² John Carey, *What Good Are the Arts?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

³⁹³ Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom, & Community*, 108; Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 2. Wolterstorff prefers the more succinct, “objects and instruments of action.”

³⁹⁴ What activities are included in the canon of “Art” varies from age to age. Wolterstorff outlines the evolution of the canon of high art in *Art in Action*. See also Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought 2*, 163-227.

³⁹⁵ Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, part 2.

The Arts and Place(making)

The arts have always been held in close relationship with place or nature. Plato understood art as a form of *mimesis*, or imitation of nature; the arts served to highlight and reproduce things in the natural world and human life.³⁹⁶ Since Plato, there have been various other interpretations of what the arts are for and what they do, many of them corresponding in some way to the communal understanding of place outlined in section one. Art can be described as revelation, ultimate reality, expression, or communication, to name a few possible interpretations. Despite differences in definition, though, scholars will often use spatial language or metaphors of place when describing the roles and characteristics of the arts. Heidegger argues, “Poetry is what really lets us dwell....Poetic creation, which lets us dwell, *is a kind of building*.”³⁹⁷ Many others reveal Heidegger’s central claim that art is involved in actually making places. Wallace Stegner asserts that, “no place is a place until it has a poet.”³⁹⁸ Michel de Certeau corroborates this view when he suggests, “Stories thus carry out a labor that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places.”³⁹⁹ Not only does artistry make a place for us, but art can be understood as a kind of place. This latter point is picked up in the work of Yi-Fu Tuan, who suggests that art is a type of virtual place.⁴⁰⁰

Theologians similarly use this spatial language. John Dixon avers that art is a “constructive” activity—that, “Everything man does manifests either *his place within the related order* or his attempts to lay hold of that reality and understand it.”⁴⁰¹ In other words, the arts enable us to see and respond to the gift of creation and discover in it the nature of our relationship to it. Colin Gunton suggests redemptive possibilities for the arts in terms of place,

³⁹⁶ Plato, *The Republic and Other Works*, trans. B. Jowett (New York: Anchor Books, 1973), Book X. This of course was why Plato denigrated the arts in the way he did, being concerned with the higher world of Forms and spirit, of which the arts were a cheap imitation.

³⁹⁷ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 215.

³⁹⁸ Stegner, *Where the Bluebird Sings*, 205.

³⁹⁹ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 118.

⁴⁰⁰ Tuan, *Place, Art and Self*. See my discussion in chapter 1.

⁴⁰¹ John W. Dixon, *Nature and Grace in Art* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 96-7. My emphasis.

arguing that art takes the form of “a re-creation, of a re-ordering of *that which is out of place...*”⁴⁰² While these theologians use the term “place” in more metaphorical ways, Craig Bartholomew states the relationship between art and place more directly, suggesting in a comparable way to Stegner and de Certeau above, that the arts have “a unique capacity to evoke the multidimensional nature of place.”⁴⁰³ While these scholars make important claims and the arts are often alluded to in their studies of place, theologians have largely neglected this important relationship when they develop either a theology of place or a theology of art. In light of this gap, I will seek to identify some of the main ways that the arts are related to place and the theological parallels that apply therein. After establishing the basic connection between art and place, I will later draw a clear parallel between theological evaluations of the arts and the theology of place as outlined above.

The Particularity of Art in Place

Unpacking the particularity of art includes two related assertions. First, art, like place, is always a particular work, act, or object. A painting is *this* painting; a musical piece is always *this* version or performance (and so influenced by the place in which it is made/performed). Second, the arts help us perceive and attend to the particularities of the world in which we live. We are simultaneously describing the particularity of artistry and its relationship to place in terms of *what art is* and *what art does* in temporally located places and throughout history.

The first meaning—what art is—relates to the particularity of the work itself in relation to a place. A particular work of art, on the one hand, can reflect and make a place what it is, contributing to place identity and providing the main artifacts through which people associate with and acquire a sense of place. For instance, the town of Portland, Oregon prides itself for

⁴⁰² Colin Gunton, "Creation and Re-Creation: An Exploration of Some Themes in Aesthetics and Theology," *Modern Theology* 2, no. 1 (1985). My emphasis.

⁴⁰³ Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell*, 314.

its particular sense of place—the town has a unique character, and a large part of this sense of place is attributed to the local art scene and other creative placemaking practices. Similarly, many cathedrals in the United Kingdom, such as Durham or Ely, have added modern artworks to their sanctuaries and grounds to communicate an expressly spiritual sense of place. These artworks, no doubt, play a major role in telling the community what type of places these churches are, along with identifying and forming the spiritual atmosphere of the worshipping congregations. There are countless examples that one may cite in addition to this. The artist as placemaker can contribute very real “structures” to the place, which actually contribute to particular place identity.⁴⁰⁴ Oftentimes, if an artwork is famous enough, we will recognize the place based on the artwork residing there, as in Anish Kapoor’s *Cloud Gate* at Millennium Park, Chicago. Without the sculpture, one might be unable to identify the plaza from other urban landscapes.

On the other hand, as they are simultaneously influenced by the place in which they reside, artworks might be said to “belong” to a particular place and time in both purpose and meaning. This meaning is fluid, so that most artworks can also acquire new and different meanings as they transit through time and across places. They can transcend places in appropriate and sometimes universal ways while remaining thoroughly grounded within them. In this way, artistic actions and objects are both synchronic and diachronic, wrapped up in the particularity of one place and time, while being connected through time to other places and storied events.⁴⁰⁵ Picasso’s adaptation of primitive masks in his cubist paintings is one relevant example of this, and in this sense, we might understand the artifact (both the

⁴⁰⁴ Dixon, *Nature and Grace in Art*.

⁴⁰⁵ The notable exception to this is ephemeral art, where the artifact is temporary. The work of Christo and Jean-Claude or Andy Goldworthy’s land installations are a good example of this kind of art. The photograph of the work is often all we have left and the main mode through which to experience the piece.

African mask and Picasso's adaptation of it) as Yi-Fu Tuan suggests—as a place itself that acquires meaning over time and in relation to variously different “uses.”⁴⁰⁶

The second meaning—what art does—relates the similarity between artistry and reflexive modes of placemaking. One job of the artist, in this view, is to help her audience realize the significance of the particular place they live in and perhaps grant it further meaning. Flannery O'Connor saw this as a central part of her job as an artist. “As a novelist,” she says, “the major part of my task is to make everything, even an ultimate concern, as solid, as concrete, as specific as possible.”⁴⁰⁷ O'Connor hints at the reciprocal relationship between the particular and the universal in her writing about fiction, and she suggests that art unifies our sense of this relationship. If we want to understand ultimate concerns, she claims, we must see them through the real, particular circumstances we experience here in the world.⁴⁰⁸ Place, she notes, is foremost in those circumstances and central to our understanding of the relationship between particularity and universality. “The Catholic novel that fails,” she argues, “is a novel in which there is *no sense of place*, and in which feeling is, by that much, diminished. Its action occurs in an *abstracted setting* that could be *anywhere and nowhere*.”⁴⁰⁹ Ultimate concerns, or “ultimate reality,” to use a similar phrase by Paul Tillich, cannot be abstracted elements “beyond” the work of this world.⁴¹⁰ This is where O'Connor perhaps gets it better than Tillich. While Tillich finds ultimate reality *best* in abstraction (particularly, abstract expressionism), O'Connor recognizes the importance of attending to the particular and letting that inform one's vision of transcendent, ultimate, or universal realities. This is not

⁴⁰⁶ Tuan, *Place, Art and Self*, 3.

⁴⁰⁷ Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), 155.

⁴⁰⁸ Karl Rahner also notes this relationship in his “Theology and the Arts,” but focuses on the transcendent nature of man that is reflected through particular histories. “Both art and theology are rooted in man's transcendent nature. But it is important to see why and how this human transcendence is always represented in art in a quite definite, particular and historical way. True art embodies a very definite, particular and historical instance of human transcendence.” Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen, *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 222.

⁴⁰⁹ O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners*, 199. My emphasis.

⁴¹⁰ See Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, ed. Robert C. Kimball (London: Oxford University Press, 1969). See also his short piece on “Art as Ultimate Reality” in Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, ed. *Art, Creativity, and the Sacred: An Anthology in Religion and Art* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 219-35.

to suggest that abstraction in art is somehow inferior to “realistic” art, though. O’Connor herself would acknowledge the “outlandish” and often “unrealistic” quality of her own work, while simultaneously noting its attention to truth and particularity of a specific place. The point is that abstraction, both in art and in theology, is still very much grounded in the actual world. Picasso’s primitive and abstract nudes told no less of the particular world in which he lived. Beethoven’s *Moonlight Sonata* conveys a particular mood that we can associate with his real life and experience. These artists’ works can still be understood in terms of what Richard Viladesau calls, “texts of” their particular time, place, culture, and religion.⁴¹¹ The artwork serves as the locus of embodying particular values, philosophies, and religious ideas from a particular culture in place, whether or not they explicitly do so in the subject matter of their work. As we encounter these “texts,” they can reveal new ways of identifying and understanding the particularity of places in the world, opening us up to possibilities for transformed action and responsible placemaking.

The Physicality of Art and Place

The particularity of the arts is closely related to their embeddedness within the physical world. This is first of all an observation about the physicality of the work of art itself. Even music, the most “unearthly” or “transcendent” of the arts, is physical in nature and can connect us further to the physical world.⁴¹² Sounds ring in our eardrums; our hands touch carved wood or molded bronze. The emotion incited by these things is deeply connected to interaction and engagement with the physical. In the same way that our sense of belonging in community is tied to physical places, so also our reaction to the artwork (contemplation, emotion, etc.) is tied to the physical artifact, even if that artifact is as fleeting as a song. Many modern art theories express a different perspective, pushing the audience beyond the physical

⁴¹¹ Richard Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts: Encountering God through Music, Art and Rhetoric* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 124.

⁴¹² See Victor Zuckerkandl, *Sound and Symbol: Music and the External World* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956).

artifact as quickly as possible in order to get to the more important point—emotion, transcendence, or ultimate reality.⁴¹³ These perspectives, however, if taken to the extreme, find it difficult to account adequately for the need for the artwork at all. If physicality is merely something to abrogate or get quickly beyond, then the practice and care of the artist with her materials seems superfluous at best.

But we do not have to justify the physical nature of things by stating that they always take us beyond to some form of ultimate reality.⁴¹⁴ The physical world is not some shadow of a better world. Scripture tells us quite the opposite—that Creation is “good” without any further qualification. While the arts may indeed transcend the physical world, they should certainly not be reduced to anything less than their physical structure.⁴¹⁵ We must concentrate, then, on art firstly as a “thing,” important precisely for its fleshiness. Man is first, “*homo faber*, maker of *things*, of tools.”⁴¹⁶ Only with this in mind can we develop a “theology of wider sensibilities” as John Dillenberger has rightly suggested.

The centrality of the physical dimension of both art and place should not, therefore, be divorced from mental or spiritual realities.⁴¹⁷ We saw earlier how place is understood as both physical and symbolical—both a tangible and concrete piece of earth and an experience or set of relationships. In the same way, physical awareness is linked with mental awareness in the arts; we understand things and process them mentally through our bodily engagement with the external world. The material “thing” accompanies contemplative self-reflection and is necessary to mental development. This linking between the physical and spiritual in art is conceived by Frank Burch Brown in terms of “world-making,” the view that art embodies

⁴¹³ One relevant example of this approach is R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958).

⁴¹⁴ Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise*, 205.

⁴¹⁵ Aidan. Nichols, *The Art of God Incarnate: Theology and Image in Christian Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1980), 90.

⁴¹⁶ John Dillenberger, *A Theology of Artistic Sensibilities: The Visual Arts and the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 231.

⁴¹⁷ Begbie does not wish to either and acknowledges the connection. His main point is that we cannot ignore, as many modern art theories have, the physical quality of artistic production.

and makes a world through which we can understand various possibilities, whether or not they actually take place in the real world. He writes, “Precisely because we are embodied, thinking, passionate beings who want meaning and meaningfulness, truth and emotional satisfaction, we cannot be engaged wholly except through forms that imaginatively encompass and orient us within something like a world.”⁴¹⁸ When art “makes a world,” it links both physical and mental awareness, so that even if a place or world is wholly imagined, it bears some resemblance or response to the current world with which an artist works. Projected worlds, as Wolterstorff also notes, are “always *anchored to* entities existing in the actual world.”⁴¹⁹ The imaginative is understood precisely in terms of its relationship to the real.

World-making is a helpful image for conceptually linking art and place in terms of physicality and the additional meaning beyond it. Amos Wilder suggests that art, specifically story, contributes to our attunement with the world. The making of a world through narrative and story is “deeply rooted” in our desire to be placed, in our “quest for orientation.”⁴²⁰ Thus, stories not only answer the questions of *what* and *how*, but also *where*; they orient us in the world. But it is not only the literary arts that have a role in world-making:

We may well remind ourselves that other arts serve the general task of orientation in other ways. The plastic and graphic arts, for example, are first of all spacial. Where narrative has sought to bring extension in time under control these arts have furthered the task of world-making by bringing extension to space under control. By marking, shaping, and building they articulate the non-temporal place of our being, with special reference to sight and touch.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁸ Frank Burch Brown, *Religious Aesthetics: A Theological Study of Making and Meaning* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 109. For a fuller elaboration of the role of the physical in processing mental information, see Mark Johnson, *Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1987). A similar view is expressed in more popular form by Matthew B. Crawford, who advocates the role of manual labor in understanding and experiencing the world. See Matthew B Crawford, *Shop Class as Soul Craft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009).

⁴¹⁹ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Works and Worlds of Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 356.

⁴²⁰ Amos N Wilder, "Story and Story-World," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* XXXVII, no. 1 (January 1983): 360.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, 360.

If the arts serve to orient us, as Wilder suggests, it is because they bear some relation to the real, physical world of lived experience.⁴²² The primacy of physical place is what we must return to again and again in both general theories of placemaking and in theories of the arts. In order to attain meaning “beyond” we must necessarily be situated “within.”

If the imagination and artwork is anchored to the real, then we must also expect the artist herself to be grounded in the world in the same way. In a modern culture of placelessness and mobility, the importance of orientation is often dismissed or forgotten, though. “The modern artist in general,” Rowan Williams suggests, “does not know where she is; and if you do not know where you are, you cannot easily ‘lift up signs’...If you cannot place a perception, a specific thing, in the context of its resonances and formal echoes, you cannot place it at all.”⁴²³ If art is conceived as an object of human action, then the place of action and the artist’s own sense of place must also be valued and cultivated. The artist’s sense of place, though, must ultimately be understood from within the third point of overlap—the relationship of art and place to community.

A Communal Understanding of Art and Place

Both place and artistry are best conceived in communal terms—their own identity is tied up in traditions, practices, events, and stories, even as they also affect and alter those things. As communal actions and events, both artistry and placemaking should thus be understood in “dialogical” terms, as affecting and being affected by one another in a conversational way.⁴²⁴ There is a reciprocal relationship between art and place in communal terms as well: the influence of the community in place on the artist and artwork, and the influence of art on a place and community.

⁴²² Ibid., 361.

⁴²³ Rowan Williams, *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love* (London: Continuum, 2005), 77.

⁴²⁴ Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise*, 220.

The influence of place on the arts suggests a contextual understanding of the arts. Art always takes place in a context, in a society, or in some set of human relations. Art does not take place in a vacuum. It takes place *in a place!* Clifford Geertz suggests that as a complex arrangement of cultural signs and symbols, art depends on a community to give those signs meaning.⁴²⁵ The artwork, in this way, *must* be read in light of its place in a society or context. Though the meaning of its symbols may change over time, the community is the executor of meaning. But this does not mean that the artist is “merely a mouthpiece for that [social] practice.”⁴²⁶ While the artist always works from something given (community practices, standards, traditions, styles, and so on), she is also re-making the tradition, adding something new or of value to it.

This communicates the second aspect of the relationship between art and community: the fact that the artist and artwork also exercise some influence on the place and community. Geertz includes this reciprocity in his contextual theory of art, suggesting, “Works of art are elaborate mechanisms for defining social relationships, sustaining social rules, and strengthening social values,” all key elements in the structuring of a society.⁴²⁷ Artworks, in these terms, affect the sense of place or community by engaging with social structures in profoundly new and sincere ways. Oftentimes, art may open up new possibilities for re-defined social structures that are more ethical or religious in their goals.

Art’s role in *re-making* a place or community might be elucidated better in terms of what Wolterstorff calls world-projection, similar to “world-making” introduced above. While world-projection is only one of the many actions that art performs, it serves a primary and

⁴²⁵ Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretative Anthropology* (London: Fontana, 1993), 118. Meanings can also change over time. For instance, we ascribe different meaning to funerary masks than did primitive cultures.

⁴²⁶ Nicholas Wolterstorff, “The Work of Making a Work of Music,” in *What Is Music? An Introduction to the Philosophy of Music*, ed. Philip Alperson (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1987), 112.

⁴²⁷ Geertz, *Local Knowledge*, 99.

pervasive role in the way that we encounter places in new or different ways.⁴²⁸ Art cultivates “man’s powers for envisagement”—it allows us a way to envisage the world in ways other than the way it actually exists.⁴²⁹ Art can confirm, concretize, illuminate, alter, evoke emotion, model tendencies in, or give hope and consolation in relation to the community or world around us.⁴³⁰ Iris Murdoch envisages a similar role for imaginative and creative world-projection. By making “pictures of himself,” she describes, man as artist reflects on his relationship to place and all that it entails (with implications in the social, moral, ethical, economical, and spiritual spheres), “and then comes to resemble that picture.”⁴³¹ Our “pictures,” therefore, will reflect our sense of community responsibility, placedness, and moral standing in the world, while simultaneously allowing us a means by which to affect it. In this role of “picturing,” the arts serve as the best paradigm for wider placemaking practice. They can confirm, concretize, illuminate, alter, and evoke all those aspects of place elucidated in chapter one—memory, identity, belonging, and community, among others.

This relates to the transformative function of the arts in community, as they provide the place of envisagement and the lens through which men and women may construct new pictures and places. The artist’s own sense of place is paramount when considering this transformative sense. In fact, Calvin Seerveld suggests in specifically Christian terms that “truly God-praising artistry *can only flourish* when the artist is deeply embedded both in an artistic community and in the wider societal communion of sinning saints.”⁴³² Rather than starting from nothing, the artist with a sense of place deeply rooted in community will know

⁴²⁸ Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 122.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, 144-149.

⁴³¹ Iris Murdoch, “Metaphysics and Ethics,” in *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*, ed. Maria Antonaccio and William Schwiker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 252.

⁴³² Calvin Seerveld, *Rainbows for a Fallen World: Aesthetic Life and Artistic Task* (Toronto: Toronto Tuppence Press, 1980), 26. My emphasis.

better where she stands and what is needed in her art than the artist who works in isolation.⁴³³ Steve Holmes goes one step further to suggest that boundeness to community and tradition (and I will add “place”) is an essential part of what it means to be a creature more generally, emphasizing the “goodness of historical locatedness.”⁴³⁴ Our historical location in community and tradition is not a constraint to be escaped from, but a part of the very creatureliness that God offers to us. A responsible artistry will recognize this communal connection and seek such further conversation with community in place. Holmes suggests that our theology as a whole benefits from this acknowledgement of communal connection to a tradition, and in the same way, artistry profits from engagement with traditional and communal sources located in place.

The purpose in making these connections between place and artistry is to suggest that the arts may serve, in both their necessary groundedness in place and the types of things they do in the world, as a paradigm for understanding placemaking more generally, as well as a relevant tool for human action in place. Artistry has a central and distinctive relationship to place, which will be important for several reasons. Drawing such correlations reveals, firstly, the inherently “artistic” nature of all discussions of place and placemaking practice. Places are always “made” as we have already argued, out of materials that are given to us. Even when the “Arts” as we typically understand them are not employed, placemaking is always a “taking and offering back”—a creative and intentional “making of all the things we need.”⁴³⁵

⁴³³ But one may still wish to pose as a counterexample the private and individualistic aspects of art. A painter or sculptor may spend hours in the studio alone, the poet communing only in her own mind to find the perfect phrase or word. But this serves as no defeater of a communal understanding of the arts. While the artist may pursue and even enjoy art in private, her art is still “fundamentally communal and interpersonal.” Brown, *Religious Aesthetics*, 87. And while the artist, of course, may choose to what extent to be involved in a community or society, her worldview can never be fully detached from that context.

Though the artist’s creativity is bound by these responsibilities to self, others, and ultimately to God, this is not to say that the artist is not “free.” While modernity has often construed freedom as “isolation,” a better way to understand artistic freedom and originality might be to suggest that true originality comes from one’s connection to others, both past and present. In this sense, “originality” is a return to one’s origins. “The Responsibility of the Poet,” in Berry, *What Are People For?*, 92. See also T. S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1932).

⁴³⁴ Stephen R. Holmes, *Listening to the Past: The Place of Tradition in Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002), 5.

⁴³⁵ Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom, & Community*, 108.

Secondly, as a microcosm of placemaking actions more generally, we can concretely locate in the arts theological patterns which reveal the ways in which we participate in both creation and redemption. As O'Connor rightly noted, our knowledge of universal realities is illuminated through engagement with the *particular*. The arts will thus serve as a particular archetype as we continue our discussion of the creative and redemptive possibilities for human placemaking practices. A drawing together of a theology of the arts and our theology of place is where we will next turn, then.

Theological Models for the Arts as a Placemaking Activity

Beyond the basic relationships between art and place just expounded, theological engagement with the arts will elucidate the ways in which artistic-making and placemaking parallel in their function, practice, and wider theological justification. While my linking of art and place has been motivated by theological concerns, in this next section, I will seek to further explicate the concept of artistry as a paradigm for placemaking by utilizing particularly theological interpretations of the arts in comparison with the theology of placemaking suggested thus far. These models of understanding artistry from a theological perspective will strongly suggest the relevance of the previous three themes in art and place: particularity, physicality, and community. But here, by looking to explicitly theological evaluations of the arts, we can not only build on our theological anthropology of people as placemakers, but also highlight the incarnational element of artistic placemaking, which connotes our obligations to engage in artistic making in place as a result of God's presence with us in the Person of Christ and His calling to us in Christian community. This comparison will not only further draw a theology of place and a theology of art together, but it will also address a new way of looking at a theology of the arts through the lens of place. This "place-based theology of the arts" utilizes the concept of place to expound on currently

existing theological models for the arts, especially those that draw a clear connection between artistry and creation, incarnation, and redemption.

The Arts and Creation: Gift, Calling, and Responsible Stewardship

Theologies of the arts often start “In the beginning.” The doctrine of Creation provides the most logical starting point for a theology of the arts, especially as the artist is often understood as “creator.” “This idea of art as creation,” Dorothy Sayers writes, is the one important idea that Christianity has lent a philosophy of the arts.⁴³⁶ For Sayers, the Creation narrative suggests something about humans’ ability to create anew, not *ex nihilo*, exactly as God does, but by bringing about something *new* from the given that was not there before. This is, for Sayers, what it means to be made in the divine image.⁴³⁷ Sayers is right to draw a correlation here, and the analogy is quite useful if one does not take it too far. We will recall, though, from chapter two, that the *imago dei* is linked with the notion of calling rather than a direct analogy with God, and it is this calling that provides perhaps the better lens through which to explore the nature of human artistry as it is grounded in the doctrine of Creation. Sayers’s language of “newness,” however, will be important for our wider understanding of artistry and its role in creation and redemption.

The creation account presents man as “called”—we are commanded explicitly to have dominion, to procreate, and to till and keep the garden. We saw in chapter two how these actions should be taken to have wider meaning outside the Genesis context, and I argued that all humans are called to responsibly take care of and add value to the gift of creation in which they are embedded. Humans are elected to be stewards over the community of creation, cultivating it through relational acts of love. Their embeddedness, vocation, and telos, then, might be the better starting point for a theology of the arts. These tasks, which all humans are

⁴³⁶ Dorothy Sayers, *Letters to a Diminished Church: Passionate Arguments for the Relevance of Christian Doctrine* (New York: W Publishing Group, 2004), 159.

⁴³⁷ Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker*, 21-31.

enjoined to perform, will correspond directly to the tasks of the artist.⁴³⁸ The artist, Wolterstorff argues, “when he brings forth order for human benefit or divine honor, shares in man’s vocation to master and subdue the earth.”⁴³⁹ How we understand the “election” of the artist—the “special” role society bestows on him—must then be likened to the election of all other people as I have already defined it. It should be conceived as an “election for” something—a calling to work responsibly with the gifts of creation.⁴⁴⁰ While God may inspire and gift certain people with “ability, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft,” these gifts are always for some wider purpose and should be carried out in the wider community for the purpose of making creation more “fitting” for divine dwelling.⁴⁴¹

A “creational” account of human artistry thus introduces art as a response to God’s gifts in creation and as a calling to participate in the making of creation anew. Understanding art as both “response” and “participation” allows us, as Wendell Berry writes, “to see the Creation anew,” and “to welcome one’s part in it anew.”⁴⁴² We respond to the command laid upon us by God and seek to remain faithful to it by living and working in places in specific ways. Artistic making is one way that we remain faithful to the mission to which we have been enjoined with Christ from Creation.

⁴³⁸ Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 68-9.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁴⁴⁰ If we wish to suggest the relationship between the art and the calling to participate in creation and redemption, it will be helpful to keep this notion of election at its heart. This way, we will not make the arts into a sign of God’s generous presence on earth, but rather, we can understand the arts and other activities of human making as *participating in and inviting* God’s indwelling presence and action on earth through his particular purposes. While God is indeed “truly generous” and we should expect him to be encountered in various ways, God’s election *includes* his generosity rather than obviates it. This is because God’s election of people and places is always a result of grace, but his gift of particular things on earth always calls for responsible service and action from recipients. God’s election and gift does not exclude, but rather, calls out and particularizes. See Rowley, *The Biblical Doctrine of Election*, along with my previous discussion.

⁴⁴¹ Ex. 31:3.

⁴⁴² Berry, *What Are People For?*, 9. David Bailey Harned, on the other hand, distinguishes between these two ways of viewing the arts, but it seems more evident that the Bible suggests multiple and *related* ways of construing human artistry as a calling by God and that “response” and “participation” lie on the same continuum that relates to our vocation as placemakers. David Bailey Harned, *Theology and the Arts* (Philedelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966). Roger Hazelton also distinguishes between various ways of viewing the arts, citing art as disclosure, embodiment, vocation, and celebration. See Roger Hazelton, *A Theological Approach to Art* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967).

Responsibility to God's commands and calling is therefore a key element in a theology of placed human artistry as it is in placemaking more generally. Calvin Seerveld sums this up appropriately when he writes, "Art is one way for men and women *to respond to the Lord's command* to cultivate the earth, to praise his Name. Art is neither more nor less than that."⁴⁴³ While aesthetic enjoyment is one aspect of this role, it is not the only purpose of the arts. Seerveld calls attention to the way the concept of stewardship extends beyond the account of the Garden of Eden and is tied to God's later commands "to beget shalom,"⁴⁴⁴ and to "serve the imaginative needs of one's neighbors."⁴⁴⁵ In Berry, Wolterstorff, and Seerveld, the notion of responsibility applies to God, people, and the rest of creation.⁴⁴⁶ Berry writes, "everybody is an artist—either good or bad, responsible or irresponsible."⁴⁴⁷ The arts are "ways of giving honor to the works of God."⁴⁴⁸ Wolterstorff makes the similar claim that "all human responsibilities are ultimately responsibilities to God."⁴⁴⁹ But within this framework, Wolterstorff break down our responsibility to three separate areas—we have responsibility to the natural world, which falls under the dominion mandate; we have responsibility to love our neighbors; and we have responsibility to God for acknowledging Him.

⁴⁴³ Seerveld, *Rainbows for a Fallen World*, 25. My emphasis.

⁴⁴⁴ Calvin Seerveld, "How Should Christians Be Stewards of Art?: A Response to Nathan Jacobs," *Journal of Markets and Morality* 12, no. 2 (2009): 378. See also Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 79, on shalom.

⁴⁴⁵ Seerveld, "How Should Christians Be Stewards of Art?," 379.

⁴⁴⁶ This notion also finds a distinct echo in the writing of Wendell Berry, especially his observations in the essay, "The Gift of Good Land." Here, Berry looks to the giving of the Promised Land in Deuteronomy to formulate a theology of place. In this narrative, we learn that place is a gift, "not a free or a deserved gift, but a gift given upon certain rigorous conditions." Berry outlines the three requirements for keeping the land that he takes from Deuteronomy: 1) fidelity to God, which he associates with memory, 2) neighborliness or hospitality, and 3) practicing good husbandry. All of these things he then brings together under the wider category of charity, or love. While we will see the implications of Berry's theology of place for his own artistry further in chapter 8, the main point to be made here is this: that the concept of stewardship includes not only humans' work in the garden, but also the ways in which people must *continue* to responsibly use and make something of God's good gifts in the world through hospitable and responsible acts in place. Wendell Berry, *The Gift of Good Land* (Washington D.C.: Counterpoint, 2009), 267ff.

Janet Goodrich connects these observations about the Israelite's actions in the land to the triadic structure of creation Berry used in the essay "Discipline and Hope." The Israelites' fidelity and humbleness of spirit stands for the relationship between people and God. The condition of neighborliness stands for the relationship between man and wife (or more broadly applied, people and community), and the condition of practicing good husbandry relates to the relationship between farmer and field, or people and place. Janet Goodrich, *The Unforseen Self in the Works of Wendell Berry* (St. Louis: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 99.

⁴⁴⁷ Berry, *Art of the Commonplace*, 358.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 317.

⁴⁴⁹ Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 78.

While Berry, Seerveld, and Wolterstorff are right to begin with a Creational account of human artistry, a Christian doctrine of Creation always stems from a Christological perspective. Because Christ is both Creator and Redeemer, providing the ultimate particularization of God's presence with us, our focus must always return to the supreme instance of that particularization: the doctrine of the Incarnation. An incarnational focus will lend further warrant to the notion that we are invited and obligated to share in God's own creativity and presence by responsibly using our own in Creation. An incarnational theology of the arts will pick up many of these and previous themes by situating the notion of artistic stewardship in decidedly Christological terms, which will further suggest the potentially "redemptive" value of the arts as a placemaking practice.

Incarnation and the Arts: Art's Redemptive Function in Particular Places

St. John of Damascus used the Incarnation as a justification for the use of icons in the 8th century, and since then the Incarnation has been perhaps the central doctrine employed in developing a theological rationale for the arts.⁴⁵⁰ In more recent interdisciplinary dialogue between theology and the arts, the doctrine has been utilized extensively, recalling the centrality of the Person of Christ, along with his work, to the life of the church. Taking an incarnational-Trinitarian approach to artistry, as we did with place, will suggest the ways in which Christ's incarnation may clarify certain theological claims about human artistic making. As it seeks to establish the Incarnation as the central theological grounding for human artistic action in place, this theology of the arts may communicate the significance of art as a central tool to discover, indwell, and enhance the world around us, revealing also a fundamental claim about the nature of human artistry as obedience to God in response to his creational calling.

⁴⁵⁰ See Damascus, *On the Divine Images: Three Apologies against Those Who Attack the Divine Images*.

Placemaking, I have already suggested, is adding something to place itself, to one's own knowledge of it, or to the community life within it—it is making a “place” out of a “space.” But placemaking is also understood as a response or submission to what is already there—a re-making or unfolding of the place already given. Jacques Maritain links these two aspects—givenness and making—in relation to the art event. Art, he says, is “the fruit of a spiritual marriage which joins the activity of the artist to the passivity of a given matter.”⁴⁵¹ For Maritain, the artist's working with the world is a reflection of the communion between the artist's own inner life with the inner life of the objects of the world.⁴⁵² Artistry is a primary vehicle for human participation in the givenness of Creation, while simultaneously functioning as a tool for opening up more out of it. Art is never merely imitative but seeks to draw out *more* from the objects and places with which it interacts.⁴⁵³ Rowan Williams expounds on Maritain here:

The ‘what’ of what is known is not something that simply belongs to the given shape we begin with in our perception; it extends possibilities, or even, to use a question-begging word, *invites* response that will continue and re-form its life, its specific energy. All this is implied in Maritain's words... ‘things are not only what they are.’ Re-presentation assumes that there is excess in what presents itself for knowing, and that neither this initial cluster of perceptions nor any one set of responses will finally succeed in containing what is known.⁴⁵⁴

The world brims over with additional meaning and presences that we do not know. Human artistry, as a proper act of obedience, as Williams describes it later, seeks to discover the gratuitous traces of God's presence there, unfolding in artistic form, and echoing in artistic placemaking, the “character of God's love as shown in making and becoming incarnate.”⁴⁵⁵ The Incarnation becomes the paradigm through which artistry is understood—God's grace and love that is poured forth in the Incarnation reveals something about the importance of the physical world and God's presence within it, as we saw similarly in relation to place in

⁴⁵¹ Quoted in Thiessen, *Theological Aesthetics*, 327.

⁴⁵² Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, 23.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 165.

chapters three and four. Christ's making a place on earth affirms the goodness of His creation, while also providing the means of its further redemption. How we hold these two ideas together—the existing goodness and the spiritual possibility of creation—is drawn out even further by Trevor Hart by looking to the Person of Christ Himself. Hart helpfully applies the language of the hypostatic union, driving home the point that the physical and the spiritual dimensions of artistry and place are intertwined in unity. An incarnational theology of art, then, embraces the physical qualities of art while always seeking more out of them. The artwork transcends the physical, no doubt, but without ever withdrawing from it.

An incarnational theology of art, therefore, is a “making significant” that embraces and draws on the possibilities of the physical creation that God has already given to us, while seeking to extend them in a Spirit-led way.⁴⁵⁶ And just as the Incarnation simultaneously affirms and transforms creation, our artistry, as it finds meaning in the Person and work of Christ, participates in this simultaneous affirmation and transformation.⁴⁵⁷ This aspect of artistry is what Hart calls “added-value,” or something which “characteristically renders back something more or other than is given to it in nature as raw material.”⁴⁵⁸ Humans are not simply rearranging the material of creation but they are adding value to it in creative and new ways. While this theological move must begin with a proper view of Creation, a *purely* creational account of artistry cannot take us far enough in this regard; we need Christ who

⁴⁵⁶ For the concept of “making special” see Ellen Dissanayake, *What Is Art For?* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988). See Rowan Williams, “Poetic and Religious Imagination,” *Theology* 80(1977).

⁴⁵⁷ Placemaking and artistry, of course, are not solely matters of Christological concern, but ones of Trinitarian scope. Viewed in light of the work of the Father and Holy Spirit, we can more fully understand Christ's work in redemption of creation over time, and see how we participate in that action through the work of the Holy Spirit in us. William Dyrness is critical of claims that focus too much on the Christological dimension alone, suggesting that, “The center of the story, however important, should not be taken for the whole.” While this is true, our place of entrance into the life of the Trinity is the work of Christ, and this particular fact should not be left unnoted. Scholars who seek a more general aim by de-emphasizing the importance of the Incarnation seem to be moving too hastily and removing a central element of the way we understand creation and redemption working together. In light of this, I acknowledge the inherent relatedness of incarnational and Trinitarian approaches to the arts, suggesting not the persons of the Trinity be taken in turns, but that as the particular man through whom we are reconciled to the Father and gifted the Spirit, Christ should remain a central way that we interpret and understand our life in the world of places and our artistic actions that help make us at home within them. Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 93.

⁴⁵⁸ Hart, “Through the Arts: Hearing, Seeing and Touching the Truth,” 5.

allows us into his own place as the God-man to reveal this potentially additive effect of our artistic practice. Christ, sharing in all human likeness, compels us to think about our own human response to God and suggests that we might also share and participate in a similar, embodied way in God's redemptive activity in this world. This is not just a general claim, but has specific implications for our artistic practices. Hart avers:

Responsible creativity of an artistic sort is thus not only warranted, but may be viewed as *an unconditional obligation* laid upon us and called forth by God's gracious speaking to humankind in the life, death, and resurrection of the Son. Indeed, we may go further and suggest that it is not only a proper response to, but also *an active sharing in* (albeit in a distinct and entirely subordinate mode) God's own creative activity within the cosmos.⁴⁵⁹

Through the incarnation and work of Christ, our own placemaking actions can meet those of God in a way not dissimilar to the artists in the tabernacle, but in an intensified and more concrete way. Artistry embodies our obedient response to God's divine command and action of placemaking, and may thus continue to be understood as a central way of making fitting dwelling places for God with us in community.

If art has some relational tie to the work and presence of Christ in this world, then the question of redemption and its meaning will necessarily arise. Christ's work in Creation is also his work in Redemption. To suggest that the arts "do something" in this world that has lasting significance for the divine-human relationship and wider creational transformation is, of course, a rather contentious claim, and some theologians are more open to the prospect than others. Timothy Gorringer warns against viewing art as redemptive *in itself*, deeming the concept a "child of romanticism."⁴⁶⁰ Rather than elevating art to a form of religion, art cannot *by itself* give us access to the divine, perform a prophetic role, or directly affect the primary concerns that face society today which are in need of redemption: war, famine, disease, environmental concerns, and displacement of people, among others. But while

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., 18. My emphasis.

⁴⁶⁰ Gorringer, *Earthy Visions*, 19.

Gorringe at first seems overly critical, he does not entirely dismiss the redemptive role of art. Rather, his strongly stated view functions to rid art of the implication that it possesses some inherent power of its own. In fact, in his theology of the built environment, he presses the redemptive understanding of placemaking further to suggest the role of human making in reconciliation and the pursuit of justice. But even there, he notes, it is only the result of God's grace towards us that true transformation through placemaking occurs.⁴⁶¹

The role of divine action and grace is important to note, and the tendency to temper the redemptive aspects of art is found in others' work as well. While John Dixon speaks of the "arts of redemption,"⁴⁶² and Patrick Sherry suggests that the arts might serve a redemptive function,⁴⁶³ both of these authors are reticent to take the theme too far. Sherry suggests that the arts might not actually *be* redemptive but they can "*express*" redemption in a variety of ways.⁴⁶⁴ His emphasis seems to be on the arts primarily in a heuristic role rather than as participating in redemption itself through the actual making process. Dixon connects art and redemption more closely, but still shifts his focus to less definite claims regarding the redemptive function of the arts. He says:

Man cannot make a redemptive art, but he can make an art that communicates what he experiences of redemption as a man and what he knows of it as an artist. Only God is the Redeemer, and the artist who sets himself the task of creating an art of redemption only manifests further the art of the fall, the setting up of false gods as idols. Yet the artist works in a world where redemption is the key act in the ordering of life....His work must embody the structure of events *out of which the work of redemption could proceed* and within which it still acts.⁴⁶⁵

Dixon and Sherry both speak to the difficulty of suggesting redemptive possibilities for the arts, acknowledging importantly, that it is ultimately God who redeems all of creation.

⁴⁶¹ See Gorringe, *Theology of the Built Environment*. See also my discussion of divine action in chapter three.

⁴⁶² Dixon, *Nature and Grace in Art*. He differentiates the "arts of redemption" from the "arts of creation," "the arts of man in the image of God," and "the arts of the fall" (72).

⁴⁶³ Patrick Sherry, *Images of Redemption: Art, Literature and Salvation* (London: T&T Clark, 2003).

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 161. He prefers the term "express" here to "show."

⁴⁶⁵ Dixon, *Nature and Grace in Art*, 78. My emphasis. I am unsure how an artist might *embody* works out of which redemption might occur without first *reflecting* on creating an art of redemption.

Jeremy Begbie also provides a thoughtful account of art as participating in redemption despite a similar reticence to liken human work too closely to the divine. He says:

To speak of the redemptive possibilities of art is of course hazardous, lest we detract from the supremacy of the redemption wrought in Christ, and lest we suggest that Christ's redemption is no more than an aesthetic re-ordering of material reality (when it is clearly much more than that.) Nevertheless, God's redemption in Christ clearly has an aesthetic dimension to it, and there would seem no good reason to deny that *we can share* in this dimension of divine activity through artistic endeavor.⁴⁶⁶

While we must note that redemption is certainly not limited to the aesthetic sphere (it involves what Begbie has not mentioned: namely, the moral, political, practical, and so on), artistry's contribution to a theology of redemption is rightly noted.⁴⁶⁷ But the fact that we can "share" in divine activity through artistic practice can be pressed further still.

The incarnational element of artistry—its embodying particular, physical, and communal realities in the structures of human making—bears even more fruit. Christ invites us to share with him in his creative and redemptive work precisely in the way he has shared himself to us—through the particular, physical, and communal Person of Christ Incarnate. Christ's incarnation as an embodied human in place is paramount to his redemptive work in Creation. Redemption, in this sense, has a decidedly "fleshly" and personal element. It is a matter of total vision, transforming creation in *every* respect.⁴⁶⁸ Christ as God come in the flesh speaks directly to the possibility of redemption through and of the physical in local arenas. Hart argues similarly: "That God has graciously placed himself in our midst for touching, hearing and seeing means that this same 'physical' and historical manifestation must always be the place where we put ourselves in our repeated efforts to know him again and ever more fully."⁴⁶⁹ We might experience Christ through colors, shapes, sounds, and actions as they

⁴⁶⁶ Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise*, 212-13. My emphasis.

⁴⁶⁷ The "artistic" and the "aesthetic" of course are two different things. Brown, *Religious Aesthetics*. Begbie's argument has profound implications for a theology of the arts, though, in addition to a theological aesthetic.

⁴⁶⁸ George Pattison, *Art, Modernity and Faith* (London: SCM Press, 1998), ch. 8.

⁴⁶⁹ Hart, "Through the Arts: Hearing, Seeing and Touching the Truth," 24.

communicate the significance of our being embodied creatures. But there is more. Not only do we *experience* Christ through the physical, but his Incarnation involves transformation of the physical so that we are simultaneously *transformed in* Christ and become *transformative through* Christ as we mirror his work in potentially redemptive ways. Just as Christ's body is transformed in the resurrection, so our bodies and bodily work are transformed and transforming in a post-Resurrection world.⁴⁷⁰

This is where Hart's notion of art as "value-added" is particularly helpful for understanding our participatory work in creation and redemption. It illuminates the dual purpose of human artistry: that art is *added* value—it is not invention, but something in addition to, a re-making and re-composition of that which is given; and that art is *value* added—it is doing something special with creation, enhancing it in some way. The latter expression carries the specific theological implication that as artists, we are participating in, or at the very least *anticipating*, the redemption and transformation of the world through Christ.⁴⁷¹ The "transfigurative dimension of art (the way in which art hands back more than nature initially grants it)" is closely tied to its potential sharing in redemption.⁴⁷² We can actually add something to, or make something of, the world through our own free, creaturely action. By adding value to place through artistic and imaginative placemaking, we can look forward to and participate in the redemption and renewal of creation by God—his own final act of adding value to the world in the New Creation.

But we are left with some questions regarding the nature of "added-value," including what sort of value it is and the nature of its bestowal. By appealing to the category of place,

⁴⁷⁰ Begbie reminds readers of the inadequacy of theories of art which focus solely on the incarnation without reference to the transformative role of the resurrection. Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise*, 214.

⁴⁷¹ See also Bauckham and Hart, *Hope against Hope*. Here, they discuss anticipatory vs. progressivist notions of redemption and eschatology. We anticipate the renewal of creation, but this is not a matter of doing x,y, and z in order to get there. Our participation will not involve performing a series of tasks to get to the end, but rather, our actions will reveal anticipations of possible futures in Christ, pictures of the way things should or could be.

⁴⁷² Hart, "Through the Arts: Hearing, Seeing and Touching the Truth," 21.

we might answer these questions and extend Hart's claim further. The theology of place that I have outlined in section one suggests that our creative and redemptive participation in Christ's work is a matter of localized placemaking, of faithfully responding to and inviting the presence of God into the places we are in and to which we are called. If we respond to this calling in responsible, appropriate, and obedient ways, our work can be nothing but transformative, even if the impact seems too small to notice.⁴⁷³ It is precisely this "little" and local work that matters. A localized placemaking that values the physical landscape, that responds to the community's needs, and that notices the particularities of lived experience there—all of these things are what we mean by "redemptive placemaking" or "adding value." These local acts are good in themselves; no tallying is needed to postulate their redemptive significance. Each act serves as a potential parable of the Kingdom—a microcosm of the reality of New Creation and God's full presence in all the earth in the eschaton. Artists as placemakers can participate in these ultimately redemptive aims in the ways that they choose to engage with and transform the immediate places around them.

While "redemptive work" is often tied to eschatological impact, this is not the main focus here. The "value-added" of artistry is a more localized and immediate matter, even while it *may* have wider eschatological implications. While the eschatological dimensions of human artistry are important, they are not the main focus when we examine placemaking as expressed in scripture. Rather, Christ calls us to reveal God's Kingdom in our current places, the final results of which are left up to God. The artists in the tabernacle were called to make a fitting dwelling place for God with them *there* in the wilderness. Later, the Eucharistic community takes *this* bread and *this* wine, celebrating God's presence in *this* place. The wider

⁴⁷³ Wolterstorff suggests "fittingness" as a feature of artistry and its task—what George Pattison summarizes as "getting the right fit between the matter and that which is represented in it." Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 96ff. Pattison, *Art, Modernity and Faith*, 135. While Wolterstorff is mostly referring to responsibility with the material itself, we might apply the notion to artistry as placemaking more generally to suggest that the artist is, in some way, making a place fitting for that which indwells it, both humans and God.

implications of divine dwelling on earth are not the immediate focus, but rather the particular divine-human meeting that occurs in their community in the tabernacle or the Eucharistic table. Our calling, similarly, is to live faithfully in *this place*, and so make it more fitting for God's presence with us there.

In terms of a theological model for the arts, I will call this a “place-based theology of the arts.” This will convey the sense that artists' work is relevant first to the life of a place and its inhabitants. It is one tool that the members of a community have for making places and identifying with them. As this artistry adds value to the life of a given community and rejects the often-arrogant focus on “global impact,” it might be understood as participating in Christ's redemptive work. This does not de-value the global or the importance of Christ's universal mission, but seeks to contextualize it and perhaps even make it more manageable. By viewing artistry, which is necessarily particular and placed in a community (even if it is immediately removed from it) as a form of localized placemaking, we can understand the local transformative and redemptive impact of our actions and objects, while leaving open the potential for wider transformation in the present and future. While this is certainly only one way of making sense of it, a place-based theology of the arts reveals one of the primary ways that humans can participate in creation and redemption by creatively making a place on earth.

Excursus on Non-Christian Artistry and Participatory Placemaking

The redemptive and eschatological implications of human artistry in place will raise some necessary questions: Can artistry born of unbelief also have a redemptive role? More generally, how do we situate non-Christian artistry in terms of a theory of art as a calling to responsible and localized placemaking?

The question, I believe, may be best answered by noting something about the art of believers. Art produced by God's people does not always participate in His plan in a positive way; in fact, our sinfulness and selfishness can move further away from God's final goals for the creation. Take for example, again, the golden calf incident in Exodus. Though the Israelites were God's chosen people, they created out of idolatry and pride, and so failed to obtain divine approval or call forth divine presence. Evaluating the redemptive value of all art, Christian and non-Christian alike, seems, then, to be more a matter of its particular intentions and contributions to the creation, along with its relationship to a more final picture of justice and reconciliation.⁴⁷⁴ If an artist's work produces, or even *hints* at, a picture of place as it should be, then that work is no less "redemptive" than his Christian counterpart. As the artist engages in responsible placemaking, they can participate in the creative and redemptive work of Christ in the world. Brown's work on theology and culture is once again helpful here, as he paints a picture of God present in a variety of places in the world, Christian and non-Christian alike. This is where God's action must remain central to our theology, though. If art, whether of non-Christian or Christian origins, is to be considered redemptive in any way, it must be God's inspiration and action in the world that makes it finally capable of achieving that end. Human work might be said to *participate or share in* redemption, not achieve it in isolation. Our participation presupposes the relationship between human and divine action, so that God's presence in the world is not an act of simple conjuring, but a relationship and meeting between Creator and creature through inspired and creative acts of localized placemaking.

⁴⁷⁴ See for instance Gorringer, *Theology of the Built Environment*; Gorringer, *The Common Good*.

Placemaking and the Arts: Some Theological Conclusions

The link drawn here between art and placemaking seems to be the natural course when we consider the primary role of place in human experience and examine the most common and distinctive ways that humans tend to engage with place. I have made the serious claim that placemaking is a central human practice with theological implications for our participation in the creative and redemptive work of Christ. Furthermore, art is a primary means of engaging with and making places. It serves, alongside other religious or theological meanings it may have, as a tool for placemaking in Christian practice. Its particularity, its physicality, and its relationship to community allow us to identify artistry as a paradigm for placemaking practice, setting it up as an analogy and image for the types of things involved in other sorts of placemaking practices. In making these claims, then, this chapter has contributed both to a theology of place and to the wider theological engagement with art. By looking through the lens of the arts, I have bolstered our notion of placemaking as responsibly working with physical materials, drawing out their particularity in places of community. Additionally, by linking art and place as practices and concepts, while drawing together the theological significance of each, I was able to integrate the concept of place into a theology of the arts in order to reinforce the claim that the arts, as a form of placemaking, participate in both creation and redemption.

While place and placemaking is an uncommon starting point for constructing a theology of the arts, it is one that speaks clearly to our religious understanding of the created world and our theological assumptions about how to live in it. A place-based theology of the arts seems to be one of the most basic ways in which we might account for the role and impact of human artistry, and which might provide a foundation on which to talk about the arts in other ways, such as ultimate reality (Tillich), or a locus theologicus (literally the “place” of theology), a means of communication (which always happens in a context), or a source of

transformation and redemption. These examples and other theological engagements with the arts could benefit from a real, sustained attention to place. George Pattison begins to express this when he suggests:

Instead of the grand anticipation of a ‘theological aesthetics’ (or of theology as aesthetics), theology (I suggest) would do better to linger, to spend time, to risk wasting time, with the world, with artists’ (and scientists’) efforts—fumbling and inadequate as they no doubt often are—to open up that world in material, verbal, and noetic transformation as the space-time of human dwelling.⁴⁷⁵

Pattison’s appeal to the significance of human dwelling will recall Heidegger’s influence on the philosophy of both place and art. And while Heidegger was no doubt abstracting his philosophy of art beyond what is immediately useful, his basic assertion that, “Poetry builds up the very nature of dwelling,” is particularly germane here.⁴⁷⁶

What is interesting is that theologians are *already* getting at this emphasis on place in implicit ways in their theological engagements with the arts. Our exploration of a theology of place brought forth many of the main elements involved in a theology of art as a tool for placemaking, and these theological engagements were both creational and incarnational. The gifted and made qualities of place directly apply here to art as both inspired and gifted, and as a product of real creative work by the artist. We work with the creation that is already there and given to us, but through our own personal and communal creative endeavors, we can make something new that was not there before, and which adds value or enhances the place we are in. I related that “value” or “enhancement” to the fact of Christ’s incarnation, where he allowed us a participatory role in creation and its redemption. I argued that this potentially redemptive quality of the arts, though, was best conceived in terms of *a faithful response to our creational calling in particular places*. While our actions may have wider eschatological value, we respond to Christ’s presence *in the here and now*. Too much of an eschatological emphasis lends

⁴⁷⁵ George Pattison, “Is the Time Right for a Theological Aesthetics?,” in *Theological Aesthetics after Von Balthasar*, ed. O. V. Bychkov and James Fodor (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 114.

⁴⁷⁶ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 227.

a troubling focus on human action to bring about the New Creation, but concentrating on our actions in the present places to which we are called suggests the significance of human participation in divine plans without impinging on more ultimate divine power or sovereignty. Our actions can still be understood as microcosmic in the sense that they contribute to or detract from the New Creation, but our focus should remain on a more localized placemaking and the calling to responsible and inspired action in our current age.

As the people of God, we fulfill our callings in all sorts of different ways through the work and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The mission of the Spirit will always seek to transform and to go into the dark places of creation and bring forth light. Christ did this in the particular places he encountered, which served to show the wider implications of His presence for the entire world. Undoubtedly, art is one way that we similarly make places fitting for the presence of God with us in community. When we make art with these assumptions in mind, we are no doubt making places fitting for the Spirit of God with us. We are transforming places for good or ill in the ways we choose to make things there and, thus, participate in constructing a place for the redemptive presence of God in creation.

A theology of place and placemaking can also receive real benefit from this theological engagement with the arts. Our theology of placemaking is better founded when we acknowledge that the arts are one of the most basic ways in which cultures over time have interacted with, understood, and transformed their places. I suggested earlier that all placemaking has at least some “artistic” component. “Not that every place that is made is art; *but to make art (which is also to think about it) is to make place.*”⁴⁷⁷ If we have learned anything so far, it is that neither artistry nor places are univocal. Rather, the human action of placemaking includes all sorts of physical and symbolical engagements with the world. As the world

⁴⁷⁷ Tacita Dean and Jeremy Millar, *Art Works: Place* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 26. Emphasis mine.

becomes ever more global and transitory, we must find practical means through which to best engage with places anew, and the arts, in the multifarious actions that they perform, may be able to contribute distinctively to a theologically oriented placemaking practice.

In order to draw these themes together further still, it will be helpful to look at several examples of artists who reflect or engage in this action of placemaking in their artwork. Artists need not appeal to every theological or place-based concern we have delineated here. But through different genres of art, including visual image, domestic craft, and written word, we will see that the arts are involved in placemaking in various ways and that whether or not the artist is working from a specifically theological or religious point of view, their work in place speaks to one of the most basic blessings God gave us as humans—the call to cultivate the earth, to make a fitting dwelling place for God with us, and to participate in our particular places to bring all of creation into further communion with Christ.

CHAPTER 6

PARTICULARITY AND PRESENCE IN THE LANDSCAPE: MAPPING THE EXPERIENCE OF PLACE IN THE WORK OF MARLENE CREATES

One might easily point to the genre of land art or environmental art in order to provide an example for the arts' relationship to placemaking. Certainly, art that deals with place, land, or the environment exclusively has become more commonplace since the 19th century, and in our current ecological state, environmental art has become more popular still, dealing not only with the land itself, but also with what it means for humans to responsibly live in it.⁴⁷⁸ One might choose from a range of artists, then, both Christian and non-Christian alike, to illustrate the ways in which the arts might contribute to the action of placemaking. My current example will suggest the value of engaging artistically with place without any explicit theological persuasion or commentary. By investigating an artist with only implicit religious or theological concerns in her work, we can elaborate on the final question of the last chapter: the redemptive significance of artistry born outside the confines of the church or Christian belief. Specifically, we will see that an artist need not make religiously themed art or even be a Christian in order to speak to the foundation of human experience or participate in the adding of value to places in the world. Artistry, when it adds value to given materials in a particular and local place, participates in the extraordinary range of ways that God's Creation moves to its final end. The work of artists who engage particularly with the land and natural world can teach us something about our everyday actions and attitudes to place, while pointing to the potential impact we have on those places in positive or negative ways.

Marlene Creates is a Canadian artist who deals mostly in the medium of photography and land art installations. Over the course of her career, she has explored several themes

⁴⁷⁸ Landscape used to be the background for other, often historical scenes, but was rarely pursued for its own benefit until around the 17th century. Landscape painting as a popular genre reached its height in the 19th c., especially as seen in the works of British landscape artists such as Gainsborough, Constable, and Turner.

related to place, including the particularity of place, the relationship between nature and culture, memory, narrative, and land use, among others. While her methods have no doubt changed over time, we might understand all her work to be engaged in the type of placemaking practice explored earlier. The images and installations Creates produces communicate and contribute to the particularity of places, and all her work carries a community-oriented focus, suggesting that a place becomes a place once “someone has been there.”⁴⁷⁹ By exploring both human absence and presence in the landscape, Creates suggests what it means to be “in place” in the modern world. Specifically, Creates’s work is a good example of the way in which art might be used to map our relationship to place, while providing one of the means through which to engage in the action of placemaking. If we follow Creates’s work throughout her career, we will see that she attends to place in several different ways. Not only does she explore her own relationship to local places and landscapes through more personal works such as *Places of Presence: Newfoundland kin and ancestral land, Newfoundland 1989-1991*, but she also invites viewers to question their own sense of place. In this way, Creates is engaged both in the action of placemaking for herself and providing concrete images which viewers can utilize in their own placemaking practices.

While Creates does not make art with any specifically religious aims, she does often work with religious sites—such as in her work with standing stones—and occasionally draws from the Christian tradition to describe and understand much of her work. For instance, she describes one of her most recent projects, *Larch, Spruce, Fir, Birch, Hand, Blast Hole Pond Road (2007–ongoing)*, as attending to the “thisness” or *haecceitas* of each tree on her Newfoundland property, a term used by the medieval theologian and philosopher Duns Scotus to describe the particularity of the created world.⁴⁸⁰ In this study of her work, I will explore the ways in

⁴⁷⁹ Susan Gibson Garvey, “Marlene Creates: Landworks 1979-1991,” (St. Johns, Newfoundland: Art Gallery, University of Newfoundland, 1993), 17.

⁴⁸⁰ See Duns Scotus on the notion of *haecceitas*. Philip Sheldrake provides a good summary of his views on the matter as they

which her methods communicate the rich complexities of place, while drawing out the theological elements implicit in her work to show how interaction with places through artistry can actually “add value” to place and even perform a possibly redemptive or transformative role in the environment.⁴⁸¹

Particularity and Presence in the Landscape

While Creates has dealt almost exclusively with issues related to place over the course of her thirty-three year-long art career, her work remains devoid of banality. Her careful attention to the particularities of places and human experiences in the natural world continually give viewers something to reflect on. Her earliest series, *Paper, Stones and Water (1979-85)*, records human ordering and action in a place with an eye to the essentially ephemeral nature of that action in the natural landscape. In this series of 59 photographs (53 color and 6 black and white), she records temporary landworks, over half of which include the placement of white paper in the landscape.⁴⁸² The works record a natural environment, revealing touches of human presence in either the placement of paper or the organization of objects in the field of vision. In the paper works she records the effect of placing paper on water or stones and photographing the result. These works indicate the momentary nature of her relationship to the place, revealing what Creates suggests is our “fragility and temporariness in the landscape.”⁴⁸³ But the photographs are even more complex than that. For at the same time, they suggest the extent to which our actions are permanently related to the landscape in the experiences themselves and how the place itself makes a permanent record on us. For instance, *Paper and Water Lilies, Newfoundland 1982* reveals the imprint of the

relate to place in Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*.

⁴⁸¹ Readers should recall that I suggested the potential for humans to share in redemption *in relationship with* divine action. When humans work with the givenness of a place, adding value to it, and contribute to its potential transformation in positive ways, we might be said to *share in* the creative and redemptive activity of God in the world through Christ. Even when an artist is not “Christian” they can positively contribute to creation in this way, a claim that I will extend specifically to Marlene Creates at the close of this chapter.

⁴⁸² Garvey, “Marlene Creates: Landworks 1979-1991.”

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, 7.

water lilies in the paper as it is immediately placed on the surface of the water (See figure 1). The paper immediately changes and draws up a record of the place within it. The water lilies leave their impression on the paper and the result is caught in the photograph. The work is immediate and attached to the particular moment—therefore fleeting and ephemeral. After Creates photographs it, the moment is gone. But the image itself also reveals the extent to which we are affected by nature even when nature goes back to its customary state. The place leaves its imprint on us as viewers, as it does in the photographed paper.

The works in this same series that record where Creates has moved stones or other natural, found objects also communicate this complex relationship. While the stones may be ordered according to Creates's desires, the tide will come and wash them away later. In a couple of cases, (*The High Tide as it acts upon an X, England 1980* and *Pebbles placed in trapped pools moved by the High Tide, Ireland 1981*) Creates returned to photograph the result, which she describes as nature's own ordering of its place. Often the stones or sticks she has placed there are in a different yet more naturally ordered pattern.⁴⁸⁴ These photographs also speak to both the change and constancy of nature, as well as the nature of our impact within it. While the artist's actions were often washed away in an instant, we are left with the photographic image that communicates something of our lasting presence within the landscape.

This dichotomy of permanence and ephemerality, and presence and absence, speaks to the artist's broader views on place. Place is never a singular entity. We can neither break it down to one description nor identify a general attitude toward place. J.E. Malpas, as we saw in chapter one, communicates this multiplicity of place that Creates seems to share. Our experience of a place is always complex—a combination of subjectivity and objectivity,

⁴⁸⁴ See *Stones, England 1980*. Figure 2.

spatiality and temporality, self and other or self and nature.⁴⁸⁵ Creates's images and installations leave us questioning the nature of our own relationship to place while simultaneously shedding light on it.

Creates continued this theme of human and natural ordering of the landscape in *Cairn: Shore Stone and Mountain Stone, St. John's, Newfoundland 1982*, an installation of beach rocks and quarried stone (See figure 3). She moved each of the stones to the new place and arranged the rocks in an orderly pattern. The stones themselves also speak to both human and natural ordering as the stones gathered from the beach are naturally weathered and smoothed while the quarried rocks are jagged and reflect their human removal from the landscape. Like the *Paper, Stones and Water* series, the stones also speak to the ephemerality of human action in the landscape and the constant changes in nature. The stones are beginning to sink back into the ground and eventually, will certainly disappear from sight (See figure 4). She says of the piece, "This is a sculpture of duration, not permanence."⁴⁸⁶

Creates concentrates more exclusively on the theme of presence and absence in the landscape in her series *Sleeping Places, Newfoundland 1982* and *A Hand to Standing Stones, Scotland 1983*. The former is "about a presence indicated by its absence," while the latter is about "an absence indicated by a presence."⁴⁸⁷ *Sleeping Places* is a beautifully done series of 25 black and white photographs, each recording an image of the artist's impression left on the ground after sleeping. Creates traveled around Newfoundland, sleeping outside each night and in the morning photographed the impression her body left on the ground. Each photograph is wonderfully unique, depicting crushed vegetation and grasses (See figure 5). These works, she says, express the idea that each site becomes a place after someone has been there. The absence of her body in the impressions communicates the fact that the particular place has

⁴⁸⁵ Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 163.

⁴⁸⁶ <http://www.marlenecreates.ca/works/1982cairn.html>. Accessed 28 January 2012.

⁴⁸⁷ Garvey, "Marlene Creates: Landworks 1979-1991," 17.

been made by her presence. The land itself remembers her bodily impression in the place as does her camera.

In *A Hand to Standing Stones*, she indicates her own presence at the place by placing her hand in each shot against the standing stone (See figure 6). We see the place absent of its original makers, but visited by Creates who communes with the history and tradition of the place.⁴⁸⁸ Rather than choosing larger standing stones such as Stonehenge in England, she opts to visit smaller places of human presence such as the Outer Hebridean Islands of Scotland, in order to focus on the local and particular ways that each society structured their rituals around places. At this point in her career, one commenter observes, “It is apparent that the human dimensions of place—the cultural in the natural, as it were—have begun to claim special attention.”⁴⁸⁹ The complex nature of places becomes more apparent in these works, and here, especially, we begin to be able to draw out some more theologically significant implications.

The communion between nature and culture, and presence and absence, that Creates observes in her works is important theologically, though the artist does not necessarily intend the images in this way. By giving place to human action *alongside* the actions of nature, she presents a more relational view of creation, what we called in chapter two the “community of creation.” Advocating neither human dominion nor an over-reliance on our “return to nature,” Creates suggests realistically:

To banish all evidence of ourselves is yet another contrivance in a place where the natural environment has been turned into a contrived phenomenon. This makes nature an object. But nature—including human nature—is more accurately a subject. Or, as I like to think, nature is a verb. And we are not, in fact, aliens.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., 18.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., 18.

⁴⁹⁰ Marlene Creates, “Nature is a verb to me,” in Susan Gibson Garvey, “Rephotographing the Land,” (Halifax, Nova Scotia: Dalhousie Art Gallery, Dalhousie University, 1992), 9.

Creates's works thus speak to the individuality and givenness of nature—specifically in its own ordering and re-ordering tendencies—and the place of our action within it. Nature is both active and acted upon—a verb in the sense that it emits influence and action over us, as well as allowing human collaboration in its processes and products. Nature is, as Creates suggests in her own reflective writing, never free of human action. Even in our absence, we manifest an extraordinary degree of presence in the landscape. Creates's depiction of the complexity of this relationship to nature provides a striking message to the relevance of our actions. It also images the types of relationship we see in scripture, specifically the mutual relationship between creatures and creation and humans' responsible participation in and re-making of God's gift of creation. In her work, Creates advocates a mutual relationship between nature and culture that speaks clearly to the fact that humans are called to participate with places and non-human creatures rather than dominate over them.

A Hand to Standing Stones brings out another important and related theological meaning along with Creates's similar recent project, *Larch, Spruce, Fir, Birch, Hand, Blast Hole Pond Road (2007–ongoing)*. In the latter, she also places her hand in the frame, but this time against trees standing on her own Newfoundland property (See figure 7). While both series of photographs speak to the relationship between people and place, they also communicate the importance of the particular, that each place she touches is important in its own particularity. Every stone is different, every tree unique. And this particularity is so important that it merits her human touch, a sort of assent by the artist of the importance of each tree and stone. Creates describes her most recent project as an exercise in attentiveness to the “thisness” or *haecceitas* of each tree, a term brought to her attention by Canadian poet Don McKay, but more commonly associated with the theology of Duns Scotus.⁴⁹¹ For Scotus, “everything without exception is

⁴⁹¹ She cites McKay for bringing this term to her attention in a personal interview by email with the author on 12 October 2010. The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins is also famously influenced by this notion in Scotus's work. See especially the poem “God's Grandeur” for an example of the importance of God's particular creation.

rooted in the cause of creation.”⁴⁹² All things, by their nature of being particular, participate in the unity of creation in Christ. Hence “this place,” “this person,” “this animal,” are all important in the community of creation. Creates, in referencing the “thisness” of the trees on her property, communicates the importance of particular landscapes and places, along with their particular relationship to her, as shown by the presence of her hand. Her views on the communion of people and places meet the notion of particularity in these two projects in a striking and powerful way. By giving attention to the particular, Creates shows us how to participate in the unity of creation through it. Only by attending to the local do we reach the wider concern.

Creates’s work, in this sense, is decidedly “incarnational,” to connect her work further with the notion of *haecceity* upon which she draws. The Incarnation of Christ—his sharing with us in the most particular of ways as a human being in a specific place in time—suggests the significance each element of this creation holds in relation to its Creator. God pronounces a divine and blessed “Yes!” on creation in his advent here, calling our attention to the fact that his presence is precisely revealed in the particular. But Christ came not just to approve, but also to transform creation. And this transformation is performed not in some broadly universal way, but through engagement with the places to which we are called. Furthermore, Christ’s invitation to us to be a people of God reveals the fact that clothing ourselves with Christ (Rom. 13:14) will mean actively responding to the obligation set upon us to transform the places that *we* encounter, just as Christ did. Creates not only calls attention to the particularity of each tree and stone on her property, but perhaps even *contributes* to it. Not only do the photographs suggest a different and scaled-down vision of the place, but it may also encourage different action within it as a result of renewed perception. In this way, Creates’s art and others like it might be considered a tool for changed action in the landscape

⁴⁹² Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, 24.

which results in a newly devoted attention to its particularities along with a careful theological or ethical focus in terms of placemaking practice.⁴⁹³ In terms of the place-based theology of the arts elucidated in chapter five, her work might be understood as contributing in potentially redemptive ways as it seeks to draw out the particularity of the local landscape and influence our attitudes toward it.

Place-Making and Place-Mapping: Communal Memory, Narrative, and Experience in Place

While all of Creates's work deals with the relationship between people and place in some way, and therefore might serve a theologically instructive role, perhaps the most enlightening aspect of Creates's work revolves around her depiction of human placemaking, particularly as it is expressed in her work with "memory maps." In this stage of her career (beginning in 1987), we see a move from recording fainter images of human presence on the landscape—a stone being thrown into the water or an ordered arrangements of stones—to focused portrayals of people's perceptions, actions, and effects on the places they live in. While Creates has always been interested in "the idea that [the land] becomes a 'place' because someone has been there," her work now turns to the telling of particular stories from particular places.⁴⁹⁴ Now her interest is decidedly concrete—she "has ceased to be this kind of privileged witness because she has sought more relevant witnesses, ones seldom consulted"—the people that live in places oft forgotten, yet important because of the very fact that they have made a place where they are.⁴⁹⁵ Two projects speak particularly to this commemorative cartographic theme, each elaborating on the concept of placemaking further in its nuances and attention to detail in her subjects' culture and landscape. While Creates has never

⁴⁹³ For instance, more ecological land management or forestry practices might be considered one important way that attention to particularity results in ethical placemaking practice.

⁴⁹⁴ Jacqueline Fry, "The Distance between Two Points Is Measured in Memories, Labrador 1988," (North Vancouver, British Columbia: Presentation House Gallery, 1990), 57.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

associated the term “placemaking” with her work, these projects in particular speak clearly to the ways in which humans make and re-make places in the world.⁴⁹⁶ Each series reveals some of the ways in which people experience particular place through living and acting within it.

Creates first used the concept of the “memory map” in *The Distance Between Two Points is Measured in Memories, Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario 1987*. The following year, this series continued with 18 assemblages based on memories of elders living in northern Labrador. Each assemblage includes a hand-drawn “memory map,” a transcription of an excerpt from a story told to Creates by the inhabitant of the place, a photograph of the person in their current home, a photograph of the place they described, and often an object or grouping of found, natural objects from the place.⁴⁹⁷ Each map was drawn by an inhabitant who reported his or her own memories of a specific place. As a result, each map looks different and depicts the terrain in the ways that the people remembered it through their own individual experiences. By encouraging inhabitants to remember the landscape in this way, Creates draws on the wider history of experiences there and is able to communicate something of the ways in which the place itself was shaped by particular actions and events. While often the major illustrative differences in the maps result from gender distinctions (men often reported where they hunted or fished, while women tended to focus on smaller, more domestic areas such as a home), the common thread through the whole project is that of “sadness at the loss of nature in their lives.”⁴⁹⁸ While the overall tone is nostalgic, it is not overly sentimental. Rather, it expresses the desire to be in a full community with nature again, a desire that, even if laced

⁴⁹⁶ I asked the artist in an interview about this concept and she replied, “I am certainly “place-making” for myself.” The attachment of the term to her work, then, seems in keeping with her overall intention. I wish to argue that in placemaking for herself, she allows others to participate and thus engage in placemaking in their own ways. Personal interview by email with the author. 12 October 2010.

⁴⁹⁷ Garvey, “Marlene Creates: Landworks 1979-1991,” 20-21. The original smaller series in Sault Ste. Marie was part of a larger group exhibition entitled *Sans Démarcation* (“Without Boundaries”) and consisted of four assemblages which included “a ‘memory map’ etched in slate, a photograph of the place to which the map referred, and small pile of objects collected from actual places: stones, slag, sand, and a bundle of sticks.”

⁴⁹⁸ Fry, “The Distance between Two Points Is Measured in Memories, Labrador 1988,” 15.

with nostalgic overtones, communicates a truth about the way in which we tend to live in places now.

Creates connects these past experiences of the inhabitants with her own by traveling to each of the sites depicted in the maps in order to photograph it. Her own journey, then, is as much a part of the work as the inhabitants' stories and maps.⁴⁹⁹ The journey not only helped her to understand how the place was made initially, but also allowed her to interact with it in a new way. Creates was able to see things that she might not have seen otherwise. The different experiences of the people recorded in the memory maps affected the way the place was understood by Creates when she returned to them.

This project certainly served to inspire Creates's next series dealing with memory maps, *Places of Presence: Newfoundland kin and ancestral land, Newfoundland 1989-1991*, which focuses on her own ancestors' presence in the land. In this series, Creates focuses on her relatives' depictions and descriptions of her ancestral land, and is thus much more personal in terms of her own placemaking practice. It consists of only three assemblages this time—places where her grandfather, grandmother, and great-grandmother were born (Figure 8). This is not the land where she grew up, and in fact, many of the places she had never even been to. But the project holds personal meaning to her. She says:

...I do this work, every part of it, with my heart pounding in my chest. When I listen to stories of my family's history in Newfoundland (which I've never heard before), I sense that these stories come from a past that affects me. When I walk around the land, when I choose the stones from the shore, when I look at my notes and photographs, I feel a poetic inheritance that cuts across me as a woman and an artist. These intersections are powerful, some are painful, and all are elusive, fragile, and improbable.⁵⁰⁰

Creates's work here is an example of what Edward Casey calls "mapping with/in," a kind of "absorptive" or "productive" mapping that reflects the embeddedness of the maker in the

⁴⁹⁹ Garvey, "Marlene Creates: Landworks 1979-1991," 21.

⁵⁰⁰ Marlene Creates, "Artist's Statement," in *Places of Presence: Newfoundland Kin and Ancestral Land, Newfoundland 1989-1991* (St. John's, Newfoundland: Killick Press, 1997), 5.

landscape. “Instead of imposing a map on the landscape, the artist-mapper exposes the landscape itself: shows it to be itself a map or maplike.”⁵⁰¹ As the people sketch the place as viewed through their human experiences, we gain a greater sense of how the landscape has affected their own narratives within the place. What Casey calls “absorptive mapping” is about the relationship of the body of the viewer to the landscape, and like Malpas earlier, Casey’s picture of place revolves around experience and action. Rather than simply reproducing images of the natural landscape, the artist-mappers reflect their own experience there and recount the actual production of the place, while simultaneously re-producing it anew through the retelling of an implaced human narrative.⁵⁰² Creates describes it as such:

I see these places as palimpsests, as impressed with those people and events as the surface of an old slate blackboard or a marked wooden table-top. When we describe the land — or, more frequently, remember events that occurred at particular points on it — the natural landscape becomes a centre of meaning, and its geographical features are constituted in relation to our experiences on it. The land is not an abstract physical location but a *place*, charged with personal significance, shaping the images we have of ourselves.⁵⁰³

This expression of the place in personal experience, its re-presentation, is what Casey further describes as “mapping out.”⁵⁰⁴ As people identify the relationship between themselves and nature through “mapping with/in,” they are able to enter a performative mode of placemaking for both themselves and other people by “mapping out.” Essentially, in identifying their own actions and experiences as being linked to the landscape, they are “getting the experience into a format that moves others in ways significantly similar to (if not identical with) the ways in which [they have] been moved by being with/in a particular landscape.”⁵⁰⁵ Creates’s work, thus, not only has the potential to encourage her relatives to experience the place in new ways, but she invites viewers to participate in that placemaking

⁵⁰¹ Edward S. Casey, *Earthmapping: Artists Reshaping Landscape* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 189.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, 189. See also Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

⁵⁰³ Creates, “Artist’s Statement,” 6.

⁵⁰⁴ Casey, *Earthmapping: Artists Reshaping Landscape*, xxi.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, xxii.

through various forms of identification with human experience, giving “expression to the complex workings of the geographical imagination.”⁵⁰⁶ What Creates does with the memory maps is put people into direct dialogue with the places that they remember and/or currently live in, thereby increasing their sense of the particularity of place and encouraging a development of the geographical imagination needed for the continued making of places.⁵⁰⁷

As Creates’s career progresses, she seems to become more interested in the concept of placemaking. But rather than drawing attention to the interconnection between people and their personal histories and experiences of places, as in previous works, in *Language and Land Use, Alberta 1993* and *Language and Land Use, Newfoundland 1994*, she is more interested in “the dissonance between image and text—the lack of constancy, that is, between appearance, hidden histories, and invisible stories.”⁵⁰⁸ Her attention turns to land use, focused primarily on the signs people put up to prescribe behavior or delineate places. The titles of Creates’s assemblages in these series, each of which includes a photograph of the sign in the landscape, a handwritten story of the place by the artist, and a found object from the site, are based on the text in the signs rather than the place names, indicating her interest in the identity of the places based on *current* action and use.⁵⁰⁹ This work involves her interest in the ways that people make and use places both personally and communally; she “balances between the private realm and the public sphere, enjoying and employing the contradictions that seep through the cracks.”⁵¹⁰ While in her work on “memory maps,” invisible dimensions of landscape are exposed through the individual’s mapping of histories and experiences, in series

⁵⁰⁶ Joan M. Schwartz, "Constituting Places of Presence: Landscape, Identity and the Geographical Imagination," in *Places of Presence: Newfoundland Kin and Ancestral Land, Newfoundland 1989-1991* (St. John's, Newfoundland: Killick Press, 1997), 9.

⁵⁰⁷ She has frequently used memory maps in a teaching setting as well, particularly with school children. Email correspondence with artist, 21 October 2010.

⁵⁰⁸ Marlene Creates and Joanne Marion, "Interview," in *Language and Land Use, Alberta 1993*, ed. Art Gallery & Archives Medicine Hat Museum (Alberta: Medicine Hat Museum, Art Gallery & Archives, 2000).

⁵⁰⁹ Ingrid Jenkner, "Why Spoil the Look?," in *Marlene Creates: Language and Land Use, Newfoundland, 1994* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: MSVU Art Gallery, Mount Saint Vincent University, 1998).

⁵¹⁰ Lucy R. Lippard, "Coming and Going," in *Marlene Creates: Signs of Our Time* (Catalogue of an exhibition held at St. Mary's University Art Gallery, Halifax, N.S. June 18-Jul. 31, 2005 and then traveling to The Rooms Corporation of Newfoundland and Labrador, St. John's, Nfld. and the Tom Thomson Memorial Art Gallery, Owen Sound, Ont., 2005), 9-10.

like these, we see public signs depicting a generalized use and often obscured attitude toward the land. “Her images of signs in place call our attention to the attention-callers, which often seem to operate at cross-purposes with the surrounding landscape, which is left undescribed except by inference.”⁵¹¹ Signs that read things like “OUT OF BOUNDS” (1993) and “PEELING BARK KILLS TREES” (1994), reveal the ways in which land is intended to be used, but insinuates other potential uses than those immediately depicted (See figure 9). Not only does the sign draw attention to the “attention-caller” but also to the subject of the sign, the person for whom it was intended. One might assume that peeling bark is often done and therefore the sign was posted to advise otherwise. Either way, Creates’s photograph of the sign signals the various ways that people “make the place” and the competing attitudes that signal land use. Often, the signs represent a disconnect between the stated land use and the history of the place. For instance, in “OUR COASTLINE IS NATURAL & SCENIC,” (1994), Creates’s photograph of the beach reveals an oil tank encroaching on the “natural” territory, and her written text with the image describes how the beach was actually manmade. Our coastline is neither natural nor scenic here, as the sign suggests (See figure 10).

Public signs factored prominently into Creates’s work for a decade (1993-2003), indicating her persistent interest in the ways that people actually engage with places as both insiders and outsiders. Lucy Lippard remarks, “Although maps are no longer an overt element in Creates’s art, she continues to investigate how we find our way through the landscape.”⁵¹² Creates has produced thirteen major series since the *Language and Land Use* series where signs factor prominently into the art.⁵¹³ In these works, Creates continues to deal

⁵¹¹ Ibid., 8.

⁵¹² Ibid., 17.

⁵¹³ These series include: *Around the Water’s Edge, St. John’s Harbour, Newfoundland 1995; Entering and Leaving St. John’s, Newfoundland 1995; Limites municipales, Québec 1997; Intersections: Places, General Regulations, and Memories, Mount Saint Vincent, Halifax 1998; Questions about the Place, Nova Scotia 1998; Points of Interest, Saskatchewan 1999; Dwelling and Transience, Greater Victoria 2000; Walking and No Walking, Alberta 2000; HIDDEN HISTORIES AND INVISIBLE STORIES, the City of Hamilton and the Royal Botanical Gardens, 2000; Looking at the City of Hamilton from Ten Paces Outside the Municipal Boundaries, Hamilton Pre-Amalgamation 2000;*

with the ways that different people act within the natural and manmade landscape. For instance, in *Dwelling and Transience, Greater Victoria 2000*, she photographs signs around the city that express a sense of coming and going in place. Often the signs are for tourists and other visitors, directing people about appropriate parking (“HORSE DRAWN VEHICLES ONLY” (Figure 11) or “TOURIST PARKING ONLY” (Figure 12). Others communicate the nature of the city’s transient population (“U.S.A. IMMIGRATION & CANADA CUSTOMS.”) Rather than asking residents or visitors about the nature of their sense of belonging, she lets the public signs and those in charge of erecting the signs speak for the residents, a tactic that communicates something both real and hidden about the nature of the place and its current use. In each of the photographs the sign is central in the composition and focus. The natural landscape recedes into the background while one’s attention is immediately drawn to the sign’s direction. The sign’s communication about land use then informs what we understand about the surrounding landscape. “NO PERSON MAY SLEEP OVERNIGHT IN ANY VEHICLE IN THE PARK” affects the way we view the green vista behind it (See figure 13). Creates’s work here implies a complex relationship between dwelling and transience, between the local and the global. While the signs most often speak directly to the transient population, they exist in a city of both long-term residents and temporary travelers. The signs, therefore, communicate more than they directly say.

The Theological Significance of Creates’s Place-Based Artistry

Though Creates would not be classified as a religious or “Christian” artist, her work in reflecting on the particularity of physical places and the ways that communal land use changes over time suggests several theological possibilities for a place-based artistry. First, the way she deals with particularity reveals a central theological interest. Creates’s work causes us

Looking at the City of Ottawa from Ten Paces Outside the Municipal Boundaries, Ottawa Pre-Amalgamation 2000; Fire and Water, Bruce Peninsula, Ontario 2003; Cues for Sightseers, Yukon 2003.

to consider the particularity of each aspect of place, noting the sometimes paradoxical relationship of human engagement with it. Giving attention to particularity in the way she does, her work not only shows us something about a specific place but also contributes to its particularity—she “adds value” to the place while drawing out its true nature. In the last chapter, I explored how a theology of art as “added-value” was related specifically to the particularity of the work or action in place, what I called localized placemaking. By giving consideration to particular places, stones, or trees, Creates grants them a sense of purpose and meaning, calling attention to the potential value in all of God’s Creation as it reveals various modes of presence in the landscape.

Second, this adding of value points to the incarnational element of places—the fact that there is value in the physical even while there is something “more” to it. The multidimensionality of place that Creates reveals in her works no doubt includes the spiritual or sacred. But this is not something the art takes us to *beyond* the places represented, but something that lives *within* them. The physicality of place is important in its own right as it conveys the value of the landscape for us in historical, present, and future dimensions, while hinting at some grander presence within it which we call forth, at least for Creates, by virtue of our being intentional about our own presence there. Many of her earlier works convey presences in the landscape, and while most of these are allusions to the human community that resided there before us, the spiritual dimension of that presence is not lost on viewers or the artist herself. By drawing our attention to “places of presence,” Creates suggests that there is more than meets the eye in this world we live in. We have a responsibility to participate in attentive ways with that presence, simultaneously taking note of what is already there and calling forth a presence that is not yet. While she often leaves her viewers to make that leap for themselves, she invites them into a space christened for them, one that already calls attention to the particularity of the given world and encourages viewers to find more in it.

Third, Creates insinuates the possibility of transforming places through communal placemaking actions. By reflecting on past and present use of the land, as Creates does in her later photographic series, we can imagine how places can and will be used in the future. Our sense of the history of places as well as our “geographical imagination” inspires and allows us to envisage future placemaking. We might take this one step further, though, to suggest that we are also invited to imagine potentially redemptive possibilities for our placemaking. This redemptive role, as I argued in chapter five, is best conceived in relation to localized placemaking practices rather than focusing solely on future eschatological dimensions. Adding value to and participating in the redemption of places requires truly “seeing” them, imagining them in all their uniqueness *in the here and now*, and yet perceiving how they relate to the wider “community of creation” in future terms. Creates allows us to imagine the potentially redemptive impact we might have by acquainting us with instances where particular human use of the landscape has been enacted and affected.

Although Creates does not explicitly call attention to all of these theological elements of place use and transformation, this does not mean that her work cannot be understood and applied in such terms. To speak of “non-Christian” art participating in the redemption and transformation of places is possible and, indeed, important in terms of understanding the myriad of ways that God acts and reveals his presence in the world. We may say that Creates’s work is an art of redemption in that it promotes viewers to reflect on their own responsibility towards places and actions within them. It reminds us of our own calling to make places on earth that are fitting for both human and divine presence there. And it promotes an incarnational vision of the world that sees value in the materiality of each particular member, moving us closer to a vision of the New Creation, not as we focus on “global” or universal impact, but as we seek to make Creation anew first in the particular places we are in.

To exempt all “non-Christian” art from the possibility of good work will certainly limit the extent to which good work is done. We must remember that, ultimately, redemption is an act by God alone. We do not hold any particular power in this regard, even as Christians. But participating through various forms of human making in Christ’s redemption of creation is something that we are all called to as human beings. Attending to the particular, physical world implicates us, whether we seek or fully understand the explicitly theological dimension of this or not. An artist who does good, responsible work to make a place on earth will no doubt have lasting impact. Creates, writing of the potential impact art might make, suggests, “My feeling is that small actions do matter. If we can effect some kind of change by our art, it would be worthwhile to be able to encourage the appreciation of small, discreet art practices.”⁵¹⁴ An art of place such as hers has a lasting impact on the ways in which we conceptualize our relationship to places in the world. By calling attention to land use and particularity in the way she does, to our presence and absence in the landscape, and to the multiplicity of ways that place affects us as humans, Creates calls us to question the nature of our own relationship to place. Her art helps us contemplate the role we have in placemaking and adding value to the created world, and if I can take liberties with her work and apply a potentially redemptive understanding of her art in place, then we might not only understand Creates’s work in a whole new way, but we might develop a new interest in the genre of land art more generally as a means of helping us responsibly engage in making places on earth that have lasting transformative and religious significance.

⁵¹⁴ Marlene Creates, “Nature is a verb to me,” in Garvey, “Rephotographing the Land,” 10.

CHAPTER 7

CRAFTING A PLACE IN GEE'S BEND, ALABAMA: HOW QUILTING CULTIVATES A SENSE OF PLACE AND COMMUNITY

While most of Marlene Creates's work was intended primarily for a gallery from its inception, other modes of human artistry begin with a much humbler purpose. This is the case for the women of Gee's Bend, Alabama, whose artistry centers on the practice of quilting. Quilting is often regarded as a "craft" practice, a domestic skill primarily for utilitarian purposes. But while this may be the predominant view of the modern world, for the women of Gee's Bend and others who engage in this activity of making, the practice is tied up in much more. Particularly, I will draw attention to the importance of Gee's Bend quilts as physical objects that embody and cultivate a sense of place and community. This is best identified in their applied physical function, their relationship to the physical place of Gee's Bend, and their social and communal context. Ultimately, I will suggest that the quilters of Gee's Bend are engaged in the action of placemaking—that these craft practices serve to ground them in place while inviting others into the particular communal life of Gee's Bend. As a placemaking practice, quilting takes what is given to it and offers back more, often recycling old cloth to make something new. In this way, and in the broader cultural effect of women's craft, quilting can be understood as transformative and redemptive for local communities and wider consumer culture. Using Gee's Bend quilts as a case study, I will argue that craft practices can be understood from a theological perspective as being a purposeful tool for cultivating place and community, participating in the making and transforming of communities in our modern often-placeless society.

Introduction to the Quilts of Gee's Bend

The small, mostly African-American community of Gee's Bend, Alabama was originally the plantation of the wealthy, white Pettway family in the mid-1800s. After the end of the American Civil War, it became home to the ex-slaves of that plantation, still enslaved

in many other ways to white landowners and businessmen, but this time with the freedom to try and make a living in their own place. About half of the current residents of Gee's Bend still bear the name Pettway, a small sign of this not-so-distant past.⁵¹⁵ The community has often been described as an "island."⁵¹⁶ It sits in an oxbow of the Alabama River, has only one road upon which to enter and leave, and covers a land area of only thirty to thirty-five square miles (Figure 14).⁵¹⁷ The physical, isolated location has determined the cultural and aesthetic tradition that has been preserved in the Bend for over a hundred years.

These quilts would have all been lost to history if, in the mid-1990s, William Arnett, a folk art collector and researcher from Atlanta, Georgia, had not discovered the imaginative quilt designs of the women of Gee's Bend. Arnett had seen a photograph of Annie Mae Young posing with two large quilts draped over a woodpile and was so impressed by the modern quality of the design aesthetic in the quilt that he traveled all the way to Gee's Bend to track it down (Figure 15). What he found was much more than a beautiful quilt. He found a whole community of women who had been producing beautiful quilts since their families were slaves on that same land. The small, isolated hamlet turned out to be a wellspring for a rich aesthetic tradition founded on the values of community, place, memory, and tradition. Arnett bought a large number of the quilts and eventually turned them into a museum show that traveled to high art museums all over the country, including the Museum of Modern Art in Houston and the Whitney Museum in New York City. The women traveled along with the show and have received much acclaim as a result of their quilt showing. Since then, several books, articles, and even a series of U.S. postage stamps (Figure 16) have been printed on the

⁵¹⁵John Beardsley, et. al., *The Quilts of Gee's Bend*, 1st ed. (Atlanta: Tinwood Books, 2002), 207.

⁵¹⁶Ibid. Typically this has been stressed in all literature on Gee's Bend. What is interesting is that in an interview I conducted with Mary Ann Pettway, the manager of the Gee's Bend Quilt Collective in January 2011, she lamented the fact that they were called isolated. Surely, by definition of the word alone, the place is indeed set apart from wider society. However, her view on this serves to show the fact that while this community may seem an anomaly to some, the place is merely home to the residents there. They feel connected to each other and the creation around them. They are not isolated from what matters.

⁵¹⁷Gee's Bend is about 5 miles across by 7 miles long as stated in Michael Kimmelman, "Art Review: Jazzy Geometry, Cool Quilters," *The New York Times* 2002.

Gee's Bend quilts, and the women have made a place for themselves in the world outside Gee's Bend.

The popularity of Gee's Bend quilts was largely the result of their modern design aesthetic. These quilts were more than just bedcovers; the museum exhibitions emphasized the fact that these quilts were "Art" and the women "Artists."⁵¹⁸ In fact, the quilts were "reinvented in the name of art" so much so that often it is difficult to believe they were first created as humble coverlets, for warmth, comfort, and utility.⁵¹⁹ While the social context was highlighted in the museum shows and guides, the intensely modern designs were what gave the quilts enough clout to make it in the modern art world. The quilters of Gee's Bend have repeatedly been compared with pillars of modern art such as Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, Frank Stella, Henri Matisse, Jasper Johns, Joseph Albers, Paul Klee, and Sean Scully (See figure 17 for visual comparison).⁵²⁰ Michael Kimmelman in his New York Times review of the show wrote that these quilts are "some of the most miraculous works of modern art America has produced. Imagine Matisse and Klee (if you think I'm wildly exaggerating, see the show) arising not from a rarefied Europe, but from the caramel soil of the rural South."⁵²¹ The abstract design, geometry, color choice, and minimalist aesthetic of the quilts are all highlighted in this regard. Richard Kalina elaborates:

The Gee's Bend quilts are exemplars of [a] broadened approach to abstraction. Their elusive complexity—their scale, their reference to the body, to physical work, to social structures and to the land—greatly enriches our perception of them. *But there is something else....* I believe that they are entitled, every bit as much as a Frank Stella or Kenneth Noland painting of that period, *to lay claim to an unfettered optical reading as well, in other words, to participate fully in the esthetics of modernism.*⁵²²

⁵¹⁸ Sally Anne Duncan, "Reinventing Gee's Bend Quilts in the Name of Art," in *Sacred and Profane: Voice and Vision in Southern Self-Taught Art*, ed. Carol Crown and Charles Russell (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007); R. Kalina, "Gee's Bend Modern," *Art in America* 91, no. 10 (2003); Kimmelman, "Art Review: Jazzy Geometry, Cool Quilters."

⁵¹⁹ Duncan, "Reinventing Gee's Bend Quilts ".

⁵²⁰ Paul Arnett, et.al., ed. *Gee's Bend: The Architecture of the Quilt* (Atlanta: Tinwood Books, 2006), 76.

⁵²¹ Kimmelman, "Art Review: Jazzy Geometry, Cool Quilters."

⁵²² Kalina, "Gee's Bend Modern.", 106-107. My emphasis.

Kalina recognizes their complexity in terms of social and physical readings, but ultimately, the quilts' significance lies for him in the modern visual quality of the colors, designs, and abstract expression. In order for their placement in high art museums to be justified, they were reconceived in terms of their aesthetic function and relationship to other high art forms rather than their original function as coverlets.⁵²³

While their resemblance to modern art is certainly one way to understand the quilts, and an important recognition to make at that, I will argue that taking a rather different approach to the quilts and quilting practices of the women of Gee's Bend will produce more substantive fruit, both in terms of understanding what these women were actually up to in their quilting practices and elucidating the theological value of the arts/crafts and their relationship to place.⁵²⁴ It is the quilts as functional, physical objects—the result of embodied interaction with materials—that is most important to a proper understanding of them. Their actual, everyday place in the social context of Gee's Bend, Alabama reveals the truest meaning to what these women were doing in their craft practices. We will see, though, that the aesthetic design and choices that are so lauded are intensely bound up in this physical context.

⁵²³ This is not the first or most explicit time this has happened in regard to quilts being presented as "Art." In the 1971 art exhibition "Abstract Design in American Quilts" at the Whitney Museum in New York, quilts were looked at through the "modern eye" and abstracted as far as possible from their original context in order to see the painterly designs present in them. Quilt collectors Jonathan Holstein and Gloria van der Hoof had envisioned a show that emphasized the artistic quality of the textiles as opposed to their quality as craft or the personal meaning and social context that might have accompanied the quilts. The quilts were hung like paintings against white walls with attention given to the "flatness" of the quilt design rather than its original function as a bedcover. The artistic intent of the quilters was stressed, including their intentionality in design. And finally, originality, one of the key components of modern art, was stressed in relation to the quilt designs. Peterson notes the similarity in the 1971 quilt exhibition and the 2003 Gee's Bend exhibition at the Whitney Museum. The way the quilts are displayed is almost identical—hung on white walls and abstracted from immediate context in order "to facilitate the modern eye." There are differences, though, in the discourse used for the Gee's Bend show. There is a great amount of emphasis placed on the social history and tradition of Gee's Bend quilters. Photos and videos of the people and landscape of Gee's Bend accompany the exhibition. Biographies, interviews, and stories of the quilters are included in the exhibition catalog. The quilters themselves even tour with the quilts, often breaking out into gospel songs in the middle of the museum space. Karin Elizabeth Peterson, "Discourse and Display: The Modern Eye, Entrepreneurship, and the Cultural Transformation of the Patchwork Quilt," *Sociological Perspectives* 46, no. 4 (2003): 471ff.

⁵²⁴ The museum exhibits did highlight the relationship of these quilts to place, especially in the second exhibit, "The Architecture of the Quilt." However, by emphasizing the modern aesthetic of the quilts before their physical function and practice results in merely sentimentalizing the social context and relationship to the physical geography rather than highlighting its central relationship to both the designs and use of the quilts over time.

This “everyday” reading is certainly related to the fact that quilting is more often associated with “craft” than with “art.” In his history of craft practices, Edward Lucie-Smith defines craft according to the *Shorter OED*: “A calling requiring special skill and knowledge’ esp. a manual art, a handicraft.”⁵²⁵ Two things are especially relevant here: first, the fact that craft is understood as a “calling” is significant in terms of what we have already identified as a theological reading of human artistry in place. Second, craft is most often associated with handwork, a manual engagement with physical objects. Crafting practices are material and physical, tied up in our own existence as embodied creatures in place. We will spend some time on the latter, physical component of craft practices before concluding with a reflection on the ways in which craft might be understood as a calling in the theological sense.

Craft practices are one very significant way that people engage with the physical world. Stitching together two pieces of cloth, lifting heavy fabric, feeling the sometimes-harsh regularity of stitching movements in one’s neck and shoulders, all speak to the relatedness of the craft practice to bodily engagement. At their core, crafts have been associated with the making of “useful” physical objects, i.e. objects whose purpose does not rest solely with contemplation.⁵²⁶ Howard Risatti also defines craft according to “practical physical function,” indicating the importance of the physical quality of the object at hand.⁵²⁷ Before aesthetics or communication, crafts, he argues, are made for applied use in a way that the “arts” are not. But in his attempt to distinguish between art and craft activities as such, Risatti deprives art of much of its power and places craft in an awkward relationship to it. For

⁵²⁵ Lucie-Smith, *The Story of Craft*, 11.

⁵²⁶ Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*. Wolterstorff relates the ways in which art theory has changed over time, resulting in the modern notion of the arts as objects of contemplation, separated from any other use or function. See also Becker on usefulness of crafts as a category to define them. Howard Becker, “Arts and Crafts,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 83, no. 4 (1978).

⁵²⁷ Howard Risatti, *A Theory of Craft: Function and Aesthetic Expression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 17. He differentiates between function and use here, the function being what the object was made for and the use a subsequent inclusion of the object in a specific action that may or may not be what the object was originally intended for.

example, he suggests that while craft is “part nature, part culture,” art is “all culture.”⁵²⁸ He goes on:

...craft objects are related to fine art in that both have a social existence as aesthetic objects. Yet craft objects are different from works of fine art because of their rootedness in nature. It is this rootedness that makes them special because it means they are both nature and culture. In this sense, and it is an important sense, they occupy a unique position in the world of man-made objects because they bridge the gulf between the world of nature and that of culture. They straddle the line between the two, partaking of both.⁵²⁹

We have already addressed the ways that art manifests precisely the opposite understanding, that all arenas of human making are a marriage of nature and culture in the broadly conceived form of placemaking. Ultimately, Risatti, in his attempt to free craft from the constraints of modern high art theory, confuses the issue further even as he makes some helpful points regarding the importance of the rootedness of craft practices in the natural world. While Risatti gives in to a modern notion of the arts as he seeks to separate craft objects from it, Richard Sennett suggests a broader understanding in terms of craft.

“Materially,” Sennett argues, “humans are skilled makers of a place for themselves in the world.”⁵³⁰ While Risatti’s focus is on objects, Sennett focuses on practices, indicating a key conception of man as “maker” (*homo faber*). All humans are makers, argues Sennett, and should thus be concerned with the value of good craftsmanship and creativity. Craftsmanship, as a manual engagement with physical materials and responsible use of resources, suggests humans’ relationship to the world as placemakers. Craftsmanship, as a basic human activity, can “give people an anchor in material reality.”⁵³¹ This is both a physical and a metaphorical claim, referring to one’s relationship and attitude towards the physical world and one’s conception of one’s place within it.

⁵²⁸ Ibid., 224.

⁵²⁹ Ibid., 231. In fact, John Ruskin writes of the relationship between art and nature, arguing in opposition to Risatti that art is a mixture of nature and culture. See John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, Dover ed., 3 vols. (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2005).

⁵³⁰ Sennett, *The Craftsman*, 13.

⁵³¹ Ibid., 11.

While Sennett makes many important claims, he does not bring the issue into theological focus. Nicholas Wolterstorff, though, approaches artistry from the position of its relationship to a “Christian aesthetic,” and highlights that the arts, which were associated with the crafts in previous eras, are first and foremost, “objects and instruments of action.”⁵³² While one function of the arts may be contemplation, there are a variety of other uses and functions that relate a sense of art’s relationship to the created world. Wolterstorff suggests that modern art theory is a diluted philosophy of human making, focusing only on one issue among many, and seeks to bring craft and art practices back together again by arguing for the calling of all humans to make something of God’s gift of creation. I explored his creational theology in chapter five, and here I will argue the Gee’s Bend quilts should be perceived in light of his wider theological model. Of course their art-like qualities are important, but the division between art and craft is a false one as many critics have set it up. The quilts of Gee’s Bend need not lose their value as objects grounded functionally in place in order to be understood as a valuable artistic object. Theories that suggest a *purely* contemplative understanding of art objects and practices will find more difficult footing in a Christian worldview. This is because they lose the decidedly creational and incarnational element of human artistry; they forget that art exists as part of the good creation God has given us and to which Christ saw fit to come and make his home. They move too quickly beyond the physical work of art without stopping to dwell fully within it.

Perhaps this is the main problem with evaluations of the Gee’s Bend quilts—the art objects are too often abstracted from the physical, placed art practices. What these women did physically to make them and how their practices affect their community reveal the quilts’ central role in the placemaking practice of the women of Gee’s Bend. The fact that the women make material objects to communicate a sense of place, spirituality, community,

⁵³² Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 2.

memory, and so on, suggests their decidedly incarnational bent. It is through the physical world that deeper meaning and desire is expressed. Theirs is a reality informed by the incarnation as it expresses love for the material and a desire to transfigure it into something new, drawing out the implicit meaning in a piece of cloth which communicates on multiple levels—including the beautiful *and* the useful. The women express this incarnational persuasion in various ways: through their engagement with and response to materials, through their inspiration from the landscape and built environment, and by cultivating physical and metaphorical interpretations of the quilts in the community which reflect the particular “place” of Gee’s Bend.

Responsiveness to Materials

The Gee’s Bend quilts are often distinguished by their use of materials and improvisational design aesthetic. Because the women had no access to fabric stores, they most often used recycled materials—old work clothes, flour sacks, and other found materials. This made for both a creative use of materials and design, as they would piece together unconventional and often mismatched fabrics, using even the smallest scraps to add to the size of the quilt. While most of the quilts adhere to a common pattern, most commonly the “Housetop” or “Bricklayer,” they often detour from this design to produce “variations” on the common quilt pattern. For, instance, Martha Jane Pettway’s quilt of green, beige, and red corduroy with a floral border (Figure 18) is a variation on the typical “Housetop” design, exemplified more directly in Loretta Pettway’s work-clothes “Housetop” quilt from 1963 (Figure 19).⁵³³

These variations are the result of the women’s tendency to improvise, a characteristic common to African-American art. Their quilting practices have been likened to African-

⁵³³ Beardsley, *The Quilts of Gee's Bend*, 111.

American cultural music, particularly jazz and gospel music, which has the tendency of a “call and response” with artists, with other people, and with their materials.⁵³⁴ Theirs is “an aesthetic of the here and now,” the result of instantaneous decisions about the direction the design should take.⁵³⁵ Mensie Lee Pettway explains this changing sense of pattern: “Ought no two quilts ever be the same. You might use exactly the same material, but you would do it different.”⁵³⁶ The women respond not only to the materials, but also to other quilters with which they are working to determine the ways in which the design should be altered. What results is a creative collaboration with the materials themselves and with the other quilters that respond to the design. Many initially improvised designs have become staples of the Gee’s Bend design aesthetic over time. What this means for the Gee’s Bend quilts is that they maintain a cohesive style, while each quilt is an exercise in particularity, a homage to the specific materials and circumstances that govern the making of that particular quilt in that time and place.

Inspiration and Response to the Physical Geography and Built Environment

The inspiration and influence of the place, its materials and structures, and its demands for use of the objects makes these quilts nothing less than an “embodied” art of place. The practice of quilting, by its nature, is an art of embodiment. The demands of quilting large pieces can be physically exhausting and the hard work that goes into each quilt is reflective of the importance such quilts have for the community, both physically and aesthetically. The quilts were first and foremost objects of action, intended for a specific function. During the cold winters in the Bend, and without heating in their homes, they depended on having multiple quilts in the winter to keep warm. Often, quilts would be piled seven and eight high on beds and they would line the walls and floors with quilts to keep out

⁵³⁴ Ibid., 109.

⁵³⁵ Ibid., 14.

⁵³⁶ Ibid., 18 (sidebar).

drafts in the clapboard houses. Even after the Federal Government and the Farm Security Administration came in to build “Roosevelt houses” in the late 1930s, quilts would adorn the houses for both warmth and as aesthetic reminders of family traditions.⁵³⁷ In the summers and other seasons, the quilts would be put to use as well. Notably, the older, worn quilts would be burned during the summer months to keep mosquitoes away.⁵³⁸

While the applied physical function of the quilts communicates a connection to the physical world, their aesthetic designs also suggest the women’s relationship to the physical and built environment. While the quilts draw on a wider African-American design aesthetic, they also have their own “locally intensified sense of design” in the Bend.⁵³⁹ The layout of the land, the weather patterns, the colors of the natural environment, and the buildings and other monuments of Gee’s Bend influence the design of the quilts. When family aesthetic is not the first intent or inspiration, commonalities in visual experience, weather, and landscapes make for a shared common style in quilting.⁵⁴⁰ Often, quilt designs will “map” the landscape, “echo[ing] the layout of fields, garden plots, and houses of the neighborhood.”⁵⁴¹ Two quilts by Amelia Bennett and Sue Willie Seltzer do just this (Figure 20). They map the place in abstract design using community-driven designs such as the “Housetop,” “Bricklayer,” and “Lazy Gal.”⁵⁴² Roads, buildings, and outcroppings can be seen in the various sections of fabric and stitching patterns. By mapping the landscape in this way, the women reacquaint themselves with the physical place and reinterpret it through imaginative and artistic devices.⁵⁴³ Their geographical imagination inspires and is inspired by the physical landscape of Gee’s Bend.

⁵³⁷ Arnett, ed. *Architecture of the Quilt*, 23; Beardsley, *The Quilts of Gee's Bend*, 27.

⁵³⁸ Arnett, ed. *Architecture of the Quilt*, 23.

⁵³⁹ Beardsley, *The Quilts of Gee's Bend*, 78.

⁵⁴⁰ Arnett, ed. *Architecture of the Quilt*, 126.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*, 46.

⁵⁴³ See Casey, *Earthmapping: Artists Reshaping Landscape*, along with my discussion of artistic mapping in chapter six.

While Bennett and Seltzer's quilts may be more explicit in their mapping of the landscape, most women see a relationship between their quilt patterns and the world around them in a self-reflective way. The "Housetop" pattern becomes a way of looking at the world, informing everything the quilter sees.⁵⁴⁴ The design is connected with the physical and emotional issues of home. Not only do they make their homes physically inviting (cozy, warm, hospitable), but they also act out other desires for the type of home they imagine and hope for. "I always did like a 'Bricklayer.' It made me think about what I wanted. Always did want a brick house," says Loretta Pettway.⁵⁴⁵ The execution of a quilt in "Bricklayer" pattern serves to satisfy that desire for place in abstract form.

Pettway's reflection on the Bricklayer design suggests the connection between the quilts and built environment of Gee's Bend, as well. While the natural landscape is key in how the people see themselves as a culture, the built environment bears the most direct relation to the quilts of Gee's Bend, most obviously because the quilts are made to be used inside homes as bedcovers.⁵⁴⁶ The quilts, then, bear a close relationship with architecture. Not only are they spoken of in architectural terms, likened to building a house, but they also draw inspiration from characteristics of the built environment around them:

For these women, the quilt was the literal completion of physical architecture, insofar as the quilt enlivened and transformed the otherwise drab setting of the tenant home. In a greater metaphoric sense, quilts invested architectural space with the history, memories, and desires of the community and the individual maker. A quilt was unique—comparable only to religion and song—in its ability to link its makers to the wider ramifications of their lives.⁵⁴⁷

The built environment serves as inspiration for design, as a metaphor for the way the quilt making process unfolds, and as the place where the work is put to most immediate use. The

⁵⁴⁴ Arnett, ed. *Architecture of the Quilt*, 37.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁵⁴⁶ Teri Klassen notes the prominence of outdoor photographs that accompany the quilt show, suggesting that there is still a certain abstraction in the fact that quilting is a domestic craft, taking place *inside* the home. This serves to push the further separation of the quilts from the world of "craft" and situates them in the world of "art." Teri Klassen, "Review of Gee's Bend: The Architecture of the Quilt," *Museum Anthropology Review* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2008).

⁵⁴⁷ Arnett, ed. *Architecture of the Quilt*, 31.

“Architecture of the Quilt” exhibition shows up-close photographs of barns, houses, and other buildings in order to show the relationship of abstract design in the quilts to the “put-together aesthetic” exemplified throughout the Bend. Indeed, the photos bear a strong resemblance to the blocks of patterns in the Gee’s Bend quilts. Quilter Mary Lee Bendolph confirms this, explaining, “Most of my ideas come from looking at things. I can walk outside and look around in the yard and see ideas all around the front and back of my house.”⁵⁴⁸ Bernard Herman refers to the quilters as “quilt builders” in this regard, likening them to building a house in the level of craftsmanship and design insight needed to put it together.⁵⁴⁹ Nancy Pettway also recalls this building metaphor in her description of her process: “Like you want to put your rooms together in your house...you put all your pieces together on your quilt.”⁵⁵⁰ It is interesting, then, that the museum exhibition focused only on the external, “more masculine” realms of the built environment, since the women were actually “building” their places from the inside out. The quilts served first in the home and only secondarily to the outside world.⁵⁵¹ While the women gained inspiration from the outside world, their “building process” began in the domestic, more feminine spaces of the rooms of the house. Of course, the two are connected and more effort to relate the women’s geographical imagination, inspired by the outside world, to the actual places in which the quilting practices were enacted would have been helpful. The first exhibition catalog hints at this when it tells of the newspaper-lined walls of their old clapboard houses, an indoor indicator of the influence of abstract design reflected in the quilts.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 7.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., 208.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., 208.

⁵⁵¹ Though they are known for having “art shows” in the summer when the women hang their quilts out to air. People walk around the community looking at quilts and getting inspiration from other women. Ibid., 215-216.

“All really inhabited space,” Gaston Bachelard suggests, “bears the essence of the notion of home.”⁵⁵² And because these quilts are not just made, they are “inhabited,” they reflect the complexity of the women’s sense of home as domestic space and its relationship to the outside world.⁵⁵³ The women create “quilt spaces” that bear a direct relation to their sense of self, place, and physical relatedness in a community. In this sense, again, the quilts have a distinctly incarnational element, being the immediate place of inhabitation for women in the home and community, as well as the avenue through which the women transcend their immediate circumstances, allowing them to imagine things differently. Dreams, fears, and above all, hopes, are all bound up in the quilt spaces they produce. They can reflect spiritual and communal values simply by stitching cloth together. Their notion of home, in Gee’s Bend and in the wider spiritual sense, is expressed through the materiality of the quilt objects and practices that structure their everyday lives. The women can find an immediate place of comfort in the cloth, which also serves to thread together their own lives in place with those that come before and after—their own material connection to the wider community of saints.

A Communal Quilting Practice: Spirituality, Memory, and Tradition in Place

In their spirituality, aesthetic, and focus on memory and tradition, the process of making the quilts and the objects themselves can be understood as both intensely private and public affairs. Arnett suggests that “a quilt is a mix of ‘other quilts’ and ‘the world,’ an ongoing synthesis of personal experience, the immediate environment, a sense of heritage, and the quiltmaker’s other artworks.”⁵⁵⁴ Their relationship to the community helps us understand the deeper meaning beyond these quilts, as they illuminate the aesthetic choices of the quilters and reveal the social function of quilting as a familial and spiritual undertaking.

⁵⁵² Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 5.

⁵⁵³ Arnett, ed. *Architecture of the Quilt*, 207.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

The practice of making the quilts serves as “a tool of socialization,” and functions as a “ritual of life.”⁵⁵⁵ The process of quilting is indeed deeply involved in their making a place for themselves in the community of Gee’s Bend. “If you make quilts, you belong,” says one of the quilters.⁵⁵⁶ In order to “belong” in the Gee’s Bend community, there are two main things that women must confront: quilting and religion.⁵⁵⁷ These are closely tied together and both are described as a “coming of age” activity for young girls of about twelve years old.⁵⁵⁸ Historically, to enter the church, one must have had a “vision” of some kind, a sort of Pentecostal experience of God’s presence and vision of his direction in life. While these visions served as initiators into the spiritual community, the girls were expected to experience a sort of aesthetic vision as well. While less controlled than the church atmosphere, it was presumed that the girls would participate in this quilting practice in order to prepare themselves for their future lives as wives and mothers.⁵⁵⁹

While quilting was a personal coming of age activity, the quilting process also had a tangible spiritual impact in the wider church community. While individuals pieced the quilt-tops, several women would come together to actually quilt it. When they did this, they would often “moan” or sing gospel songs and hymns to reflect on their relationship with God, “bearing witness for each other as their needles pierce cloth.”⁵⁶⁰ When the women came together to quilt and sing they reached a common ground. Their spiritual song energized and inspired the quilting process, and they became both spatially and spiritually connected in the “praise space” they made in that moment.⁵⁶¹ The presence of God was understood to accompany the presence of the quilters’ art in community. This affected the way church life

⁵⁵⁵ Beardsley, *The Quilts of Gee's Bend*, 39.

⁵⁵⁶ Arnett, ed. *Architecture of the Quilt*, 25.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 211.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 211.

⁵⁵⁹ As time went on, young girls abandoned this quilting practice, deeming it as unnecessary in light of modern amenities and store-bought quilts. Since the recent resurgence in interest in these quilts, though, many young girls are returning to their roots and taking up quilting again.

⁵⁶⁰ Arnett, ed. *Architecture of the Quilt*, 214.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 217.

functioned in the Bend, bringing several groups together where issues of religion had divided them.⁵⁶² With only around 500-700 residents at a given time, many of the churches split as a result of religious disagreement and division among residents. However, regardless of theological choices, when women would come together to quilt, those divisions disappeared and they realized that they were all in effect striving for the same goal.

Just as their spirituality was both private and communal, their aesthetic was drawn from both personal and communal inspiration. While the quilters' designs are often "bent," first by community tradition and second by individual quiltmaker's style, they cannot be removed from the communal tradition of improvisation, aesthetic tendencies, communal craft practices, and spiritual and family emphases that make the quilt what it becomes.⁵⁶³ The aesthetic tradition can refer to distinct family styles or, more broadly, to African art styles in their form, use, and symbolism.⁵⁶⁴ While a certain style may be picked up in a generation from grandmother to granddaughter, the wider aesthetic being referred to by all of the quilters is that of the "African diaspora," exemplified in vertical strips, bright colors, large designs, asymmetry, improvisation, multiple patterning, and symbolic forms (Figure 21).⁵⁶⁵ The "minimalist" designs that art critics so often laud as being the quilters' entrance to the world of modern art,⁵⁶⁶ is really the tradition from which many modern artists drew during the Minimalist abstract movement of the 1950s and 60s. The difference is that while modern artists such as Frank Stella were using this tradition from the outside, harkening back to a more "primitive" era, the quilters of Gee's Bend were drawing on a tradition closely passed down from within their own community. Furthermore, while the Minimalists, ironically, "approached the condition of craft" in their work which theoretically referred to itself or its

⁵⁶² Ibid., 54.

⁵⁶³ Ibid., 113.

⁵⁶⁴ Maude Southwell Wahlman, *Signs and Symbols: African Images in African American Quilts* (Atlanta: Tinwood Books, 2001).

⁵⁶⁵ A. C. Chave, "Dis/Cover/Ing the Quilts of Gee's Bend, Alabama," *Journal of Modern Craft* 1, no. 2 (2008): 234. Wahlman, *Signs and Symbols*, 7.

⁵⁶⁶ Kimmelman, "Art Review: Jazzy Geometry, Cool Quilters."

own physical form,⁵⁶⁷ the quilters of Gee's were *actually making crafts* that exhibited physical and symbolic qualities, referencing this more primitive, "minimalist" tradition out of actual kinship rather than wistfulness. The denotation of Gee's Bend as an "Alabama Africa" is true in at least this regard, where they preserved a craft tradition that traversed both time and place to become what it is now.⁵⁶⁸

The quilts as objects of embodiment have always been an important structure in the wider African-American tradition. They are physical embodiments of spiritual and emotional issues. The work-clothes quilts, especially, are understood to embody the spiritual struggle of the African-American people of the rural South. By recycling used or discarded cloth that functioned in the context of hard work, the women are able to reflect their aspirations for a renewed life. They represent a "spiritual striving," and are reflective of turning adversity into spiritual triumph.⁵⁶⁹ In this sense, the quilts have been likened to an extension of the African spiritual or sorrow song. In the sorrow song, there is a conflation of sacred and secular time in relating the story of their personal slavery to the slavery of the Israelites in the Old Testament,⁵⁷⁰ and the quilts suggest a similar "make-do moral imperative," which materializes their ability to accept what is given to them and hand it back transformed.⁵⁷¹ Though they always have an eye to the past, to what has been given to them already, they transform scraps of cloth into something beautiful and purposeful that reflects their sense of God's presence with them and their hopes for a different future.

While the quilts may function in a general way to express the values of "black America and its past," they also function as personal reminders of the family and loved ones

⁵⁶⁷ Risatti, *Theory of Craft*, 145-46.

⁵⁶⁸ Beardsley, *The Quilts of Gee's Bend*, 20.

⁵⁶⁹ Arnett, ed. *Architecture of the Quilt*, 75. Beardsley, *The Quilts of Gee's Bend*, 18.

⁵⁷⁰ Beardsley, *The Quilts of Gee's Bend*, 12; Arnett, ed. *Architecture of the Quilt*, 75. See also W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2009), on the African-American sorrow song.

⁵⁷¹ Arnett, ed. *Architecture of the Quilt*, 68.

of the residents of Gee's Bend.⁵⁷² The women suggest that you can feel “spirits” and hear “voices” in the quilts. Work-clothes quilts embody their husband's or father's work in the field; they carry their grandmother's thoughts, songs, and prayers in the fabric of her old dress (Figure 22). By making a quilt out of reused fabric, they maintain the connection with people and places that might otherwise be lost to forgetfulness and time. The quilts become palimpsests of communal and personal memory, embodied in fabric and thread, and passed down among generations in both physical artifact and traditional craft practice. Their response to these memories, their contemplation and veneration of embodied “spirits” in quilts, is, furthermore, an act of religious import. These quilts become their icons—used to remember their “saint” of a grandmother or their father who provided sustenance throughout their lives.

As the quilts and quilt practices bind together past struggle with future hope, they function largely as “memory texts,” or vehicles of memory that unite the past with the present and future.⁵⁷³ This focus on quilts as “memory texts” is important theologically. Even when their memories are not explicitly theological or spiritual in their subject, the act of remembering itself is a command given to us by God; it links times and places through acts of sign-making that recall a past presence through placed action. In the Old Testament, God tells the Israelites to “Remember the Lord thy God,” along with the place both out of and to which they were called.⁵⁷⁴ Christ himself tells his followers to remember him by engaging in acts of sign-making in the Eucharist. In both Passover and the Eucharist, as Jewish and Christian communities continue to enact these stories, the act of remembrance through sign-making collapses the boundaries between the current time and the original event, allowing participants to experience the presence of the original moment itself. Taking the bread and

⁵⁷² Ibid., 74.

⁵⁷³ Ibid., 78, 73. This is compared to Michael Foucault's understanding of “counter-memory.”

⁵⁷⁴ Deut. 8:18.

wine, for instance, makes present the body of Christ in the *particular* community in place, even as it speaks to the presence of Christ in *all* Eucharistic communities. In a similar way, the quilt as a “memory text” serves as the place through which members of the community may recall other members and events, experiencing a kinship and continuity with deceased family members and friends through the use of the quilt artifact. Spirits of the deceased may live in the present place through stitched together cloth.

Some Theological Contributions of a Renewal of Placed Craft Practices

An investigation into the quilts of Gee’s Bend has reflected many implicit theological values that accompany the making of quilts and craft objects. I have focused mostly on the importance of quilting as an embodied social practice and its relationship to the landscape and community of Gee’s Bend. By making quilts, these women express a sense of place and form community. Here, I will suggest more directly that this embodied practice should be understood within the theology of placemaking as calling to participate in creation and redemption that I have expressed thus far. Earlier, Lucie-Smith suggested craft as a “calling” to make handicraft. While he had no theological assumptions in mind when he used that definition, it is appropriate especially as we consider three main things: 1) It suggests that the process of human making is a basic human activity that connects people to places and one another, and so can be understood as part of our original creational calling. 2) Craft practices can become a means of empowerment and transformation for communities, especially women, and so have redemptive significance. 3) It challenges the issue of placelessness and consumer culture, and so seeks to reacquaint us with what it means to be humans in place. Craft practices such as quilting reestablish a creative culture grounded in place and reveal the various dimensions through which humans engage in their calling to make places of God’s gift of creation. As they re-situate us in place, craft can become an avenue to work for the common good, seeking reconciliation in and to the world we live in.

Connection to the World through Craft

Everyone can make things, and while we largely lost this notion in the rise of the “expert,” Sennett suggests that focusing on the universal aspect of human craftsmanship can help us become better engaged with other people and the world around us.⁵⁷⁵ Sennett writes, “...the craft of making physical things provides insight into the techniques of experience that can shape our dealings with others. Both the difficulties and the possibilities of making things well apply to making human relationships.”⁵⁷⁶ Risatti also makes a similar claim, suggesting that craft practices “help shape how we see and understand the world, the things in it, and our relationships to these things.”⁵⁷⁷ We might extend these comments one step further to suggest that these practices might also apply to our relationship with God. As we saw in chapter three, human making can contribute to the divine-human relationship and even call forth an intensified sense of divine presence in place. The interaction, responsiveness, or conversation with physical materials renders insight into the world that God has made and his presence within it. And it is not just because the physical leads us to some “higher” place or meaning. It is precisely engagement with the physical that is important in connecting the “hand and head,”⁵⁷⁸ or the hand and heart. By creatively engaging with the material world, we are fulfilling our calling to participate in the continuing creation of the world as established by God. We participate with Christ through material acts of creativity, working with the stuff of this world in order to know it, and Him, more fully.

Craft practices can thus be understood as the work of creative love as they seek to draw together the “community of creation” through engagement with the material.⁵⁷⁹ In the example of Gee’s Bend quilts, we saw how the love of the women for their families and

⁵⁷⁵ Sennett, *The Craftsman*, 246. See also Wendell Berry’s lament of “specialization” in this regard and its relationship to the detachment of people from place. Among several other works, reference Berry, *Standing by Words*.

⁵⁷⁶ Sennett, *The Craftsman*, 289.

⁵⁷⁷ Risatti, *Theory of Craft*, 185.

⁵⁷⁸ Sennett, *The Craftsman*, 9.

⁵⁷⁹ Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*.

communities was expressed through quilting practices. Sennett implicitly reflects the idea of creation out of love in his account of the craftsman's attention to detail in his materials and work. The craftsman loves his materials and seeks to use them in the best way possible, obligating himself to the nature of the material itself. This love of the artist for his materials suggests a wider theological point about placemaking—that as we engage with the material world through creative practices, we participate in the work of divine love for creation. Christ made God's love tangible to us, and so as we incarnate that love through cloth or stone or wood we participate in that incarnational love in our own places and times. And just as Christ's love was reconciling for the relationship between Creator and Creation, as our creative work participates in the incarnational love of Christ, we do our part to seek reconciliation among all those who dwell in the places of this world.

Craft Practices as Transformative and Redemptive

This will call to mind the claim that I have been making all along—that through acts of artistic placemaking we can participate in both creation and redemption. The Gee's Bend quilts provide a particular example of the transformative and redemptive function of craft. We have already seen some of the ways this might be so, particularly in the reconciliation of church groups through communal quilting projects. But in a wider sense, the quilts of Gee's Bend allow their makers, and us as viewers, to imagine things differently and so transform our vision of the world and our place within it. Though their own lives have not always been easy, the women have always had a way to express the emotions tied up in living in the place of Gee's Bend. They put their hopes, dreams, and love into the quilt in physical form so that those emotions become something they can see and touch. Sennett suggests that we “become the thing on which we are working.”⁵⁸⁰ While this applies to the physical actions—Sennett

⁵⁸⁰ Sennett, *The Craftsman*, 174.

refers to the tacit knowledge associated with craft, how people acquire bodily memory of physical actions—it may also refer to the mental aspect of craft practices. When we envisage something different, new, or transformed, we can become that thing which we present. These women, since the time of their museum shows, have seen such a renewal in desire and imagination for future possibilities. The women have even established a quilting collective in Gee’s Bend to sell and market their quilts, and they receive many visitors a year to their small town to see the place where these beautiful quilts were conceived and made.

The community of Gee’s Bend has been transformed in many specific ways since their museum exhibits. But fame is not the only or best indicator of the transformative function of craft practices. Part of this transformative quality lies in the nature of craftsmanship itself. Sennett argues that three key elements are at the heart of craftsmanship: the ability to localize, to question, and to open up. “The first involves making a matter concrete, the second reflecting on its qualities, the third expanding its sense.”⁵⁸¹ Localization involves attending to the particularity of an object or material, to the “thisness” or the “hereness” of some thing or place.⁵⁸² It involves attending to the grain in a piece of wood or working with a particular type of fabric. It is ultimately a material attentiveness. “Questioning” involves further investigation of why things are the way they are and making connection to other things or relationships. It involves being reflective about the thing attended to or localized. The physical work of craft contributes to, rather than being opposed to, contemplation and self-reflection. Finally, “opening up” involves drawing connections out further, expanding their application or meaning, making leaps between tacit knowledge and new possibilities for the thing in question. This will involve what Hart called “added-value”; it makes something new out of the idea or thing in question. All of these aspects are essentially creative, involving

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., 277.

⁵⁸² Ibid., 278. Recall my discussion of *haecceitas* in chapter 6.

seeing something in its uniqueness, making connections between it and other things, and drawing out new possibilities for it.

Sennett argues further that *all* humans have these capacities, and this point is important to a theology of placemaking in several ways. First, the fact that all humans share a capacity for craftsmanship or creativity suggests something about our basic calling as humans. God made us to participate in the creation by cultivating and transforming it through acts of artistic making. This is related to a second point, which suggests the primary role of art in the practice of placemaking. Artistic practices (and this includes craft practices) are one of the very central, innate, and universal ways that humans make places in the world. By their nature (their making us attentive, questioning, and transfiguring), they are a paradigm of the way that humans acquaint themselves with and dwell within the places of this world. Finally, this transformative vision of craft will suggest something about its role in redemption particularly. Redemption is always transformation, but using the specific term here will call to mind the relationship of our own work to that of God—that through our own placed work with the materials of this world, we anticipate redemptive possibilities for all of creation. This, of course, is related to understanding the craftsman’s work incarnationally. Through an incarnational theology of craft practices, we can see how significant our localized placemaking can be; we can materialize, question, and transfigure specific aspects of this world and so reflect in a sort of crafted microcosm the structure of Christ’s love and redemption in place.

Craft as Combating Placelessness and Consumer Culture

As one final point about the theological contribution of craft practices and objects, I will draw attention to the landscape of our contemporary, global world. The story of craft practices, in which the story of Gee’s Bend fits, has no doubt changed over time. Lucie-Smith

recounts how the crafts were central to society for most of history, but how the Renaissance brought a divide between the arts and craft, and how that divide was further solidified after the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution.⁵⁸³ Citing the principle of the division of labor, the standardization of products, an increasingly consumerist culture, and a mechanistic view of the universe as reasons for this more permanent shift in ideology, Lucie-Smith's observations are similar to those cited in chapter one as the worldviews accompanying the loss of a sense of place in society. This should only serve to reinforce the claim I have been making already—that a renewed theology of place and a renewed theology of the arts go hand in hand. The same worldviews and societal structures that accompany one area follow suit in the other.

We may look, then, to the types of craft practices explored here as one potential way of discerning and solving the problem of modern, placeless society. Craft practices might actually be able to combat the placeless and consumerist culture in which we now live, cultivating instead a renewed focus on place and particularity. Engagement in craft practices such as quilting might actually be “a means of reintegrating ourselves into the material fabric of the world” and making places.⁵⁸⁴ Isis Brook, in her short article on craft practices and placelessness, promotes a “new materialism” that focuses on engaging with matter. She writes, through engaging with matter, “I will be forging a new connection to where I am at the micro level of sitting here doing this and at the macro level of engaging with the material world with its attendant limits and balances.”⁵⁸⁵ This engagement with matter is a shared ability to work with the world by all humans.⁵⁸⁶ By engaging with things on a physical level,

⁵⁸³ Lucie-Smith, *The Story of Craft*.

⁵⁸⁴ Isis Brook, "Craft Skills and Their Role in Healing Ourselves and the World," *Making Futures* 1(2011): 304. There has recently been a rise in interest in women's domestic craft more generally as a way to combat consumerism. See for a more popular example, Shannon Hayes, *Radical Homemakers: Reclaiming Domesticity from a Consumer Culture* (Richmondville: Left to Write Publishers, 2010).

⁵⁸⁵ Brook, "Craft Skills and Their Role in Healing Ourselves and the World," 307.

⁵⁸⁶ Sennett, *The Craftsman*, 269. See also Wendell Berry on the shared role of either responsible or irresponsible work, as I outlined in chapter one.

we are more closely acquainted with the places that we find ourselves in. For instance, the unavoidable imperfections of craft-work actually speaks to the importance of human individuality and the particularity of human engagement with materials, while encouraging continued focus on manual skill and attentiveness to the materials being used.⁵⁸⁷

William Cavanaugh argues for the value of being “productive” rather than “consumptive” in this regard. He writes, “Making things gives the maker an appreciation for the labor involved in producing what he consumes. It also increases our sense that we are not merely spectators of life...but active and creative participants in the material world.”⁵⁸⁸

Making things should ultimately be used for the sake of the “common good.”⁵⁸⁹

Consumerism gives us a sense of detachment and deprives humans of their sense of vocation as active sharers in the creative activity of God.⁵⁹⁰ But making things through craft practices (and in other more varied ways) focuses our attention back on this sharing in the work of God. As producers—as makers—we reflect our calling by God to the vocation of transformative placemaking.

Cavanaugh ties this discussion specifically to a different type of consumption in the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, we consume Christ’s body and blood and so take part in his presence in the community gathered in place. The sacrament is a place of transformative presence, and while the Eucharist is undoubtedly the most particular kind of divine-human encounter through the material, other actions of sign-making are called forth of us and considered in similar ways. While understanding all art and craft as “sacramental” may lend

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., 84. Sennett cites John Ruskin here regarding the importance of imperfections in craft-work and his distaste for the new use of machines for producing craft during his lifetime. The imperfections of the quilts of Gee’s Bend also reflect this wider point in their sometimes odd stitching patterns and shapes or mismatched style and piecing.

⁵⁸⁸ William T. Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 57.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., 58. For this same language and goal for placemaking practices, see Gorringer, *The Common Good*.

⁵⁹⁰ Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed*, 57.

additional theological difficulties,⁵⁹¹ considering Christ's incarnational presence expressed through the physical can help us understand the value of all material "sign-making" practices. This incarnational vision of placemaking suggests that Christ's presence is actively revealed to us in particular ways and places. And by understanding the quilts of Gees Bend and other craft practices through this lens, we can begin to understand the immediate impact of our artistry as it cultivates a sense of particular place and as it potentially makes a place on earth for heaven and earth to meet, for "spirits" and "voices" to be heard, and for Christ's presence to work through the material in transformative and redemptive ways.

⁵⁹¹ See my discussion of David Brown earlier. I prefer to keep the term "incarnational" to suggest a more direct sense of divine action in the material encounter.

CHAPTER 8

PLACEMAKING IN THE MEMBERSHIP OF PORT WILLIAM: WENDELL BERRY ON PLACE, COMMUNITY, AND A LOCAL IMAGINATION

As we turn from material object to written word, the farmer, poet, and author Wendell Berry (b. 1934) will perhaps be one of the most obvious choices for a theological engagement with art and place. To say this will certainly call attention to the fact that Berry has found his way into the work of many theologians and philosophers who appreciate his practical approach to place, community, and religion in particular. In a global culture of placelessness and constant transition, Berry gives priority to staying put, writing about the significance of belonging to “a place on earth.”⁵⁹² In over forty books of poetry, fiction, and critical essays, he addresses a variety of topics that include: agriculture, art, community, imagination, marriage, place, politics, racism, and religion, among other things. But despite the diversity of his writing, Berry delivers a unified picture of living in place and teaches us that we need “the whole horse.”⁵⁹³

This final chapter will explore how Berry’s work communicates a theological understanding of place and placemaking, and how his fiction in particular is a concrete example of placemaking through artistry. In the fictional “Membership of Port William,” Berry presents a concrete picture of communal life in place. Several themes emerge as central to the notion of membership, including memory, fidelity, hospitality, good work, and love; and these will be assessed specifically as they emerge from a strong sense of place. After a close reading of some of Berry’s work I will briefly assess the contributions of his fiction, poetry, and essays to a theological understanding of place and placemaking through the arts.

⁵⁹² This phrase is taken from Wendell Berry, *A Place on Earth* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 1983).

⁵⁹³ Berry, *Art of the Commonplace*, 236.

Particularly, Berry's writing will bolster the claim that placemaking is a religious act, participating in both creation and redemption.

Placemaking in the Membership of Port William

Berry's stories and novels provide particularized pictures of daily life rooted in place.⁵⁹⁴ The main character in Berry's novels may be described not as any one particular person but as the place of Port William itself, the whole "membership" of its inhabitants.⁵⁹⁵ Burley Coulter explains membership in "The Wild Birds": "The way we are, we are members of each other. *All of us. Everything.* The difference ain't in who is a member and who is not, but in who knows it and who don't."⁵⁹⁶ Burley's description of the membership will remind readers of St. Paul's writing in Romans on being members of Christ's body.⁵⁹⁷ But Berry suggests that Burley "improves on" St. Paul by "telling a more comprehensive truth."⁵⁹⁸ While Paul suggests we are members of each other and Christ, Berry reveals what he calls a more "inclusive" view that takes into account the rest of Creation in the membership.⁵⁹⁹ His view encompasses not only God and people, but widens the notion of membership to include God, people, and place; the membership of Port William "keeps the memories even of the horses and mules and milk cows and dogs."⁶⁰⁰

While Berry's oeuvre is much too large to provide a comprehensive overview here, I will explore a few of the most pertinent themes that relate to both the fictional membership and his broader theological vision of life in place. Particularly, I will consider how memory and fidelity to place have an important role in community, how hospitality and neighborliness

⁵⁹⁴ For the value of particularization, see Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*. She writes, "Stories cultivate our ability to see and care for particulars, not as representatives of a law but as what they themselves are" (184).

⁵⁹⁵ Fritz Oehlschlaeger, *The Achievement of Wendell Berry: The Hard History of Love* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 25-6. Wendell Berry, *Hannah Coulter* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2004), ch. 11.

⁵⁹⁶ Wendell Berry, *That Distant Land: The Collected Stories* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2004), 356. My emphasis.

⁵⁹⁷ Romans 12:4-5.

⁵⁹⁸ Morris Allen Grubbs, ed. *Conversations with Wendell Berry* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 207.

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁶⁰⁰ Berry, *Hannah Coulter*, 134. While I do not think Paul is necessarily denigrating Creation in his writing, Berry brings out the fact that he does not *directly* address it in many places where it could be helpful.

to others is fully realized when rooted in place, the value of good work and proper stewardship of resources in community, and how love that binds together a community can be said to grow out of place and be cultivated from a local or place-based imagination. Following this close reading of some of Berry's best-known works, I will examine how his picture of community life in place has a decidedly theological bent and apply these findings to the "place-based theology of the arts" that I introduced in chapter five.

Fidelity and Memory

Berry emphasizes memory as one of the key features that holds us in place. A community in place is built on remembered things, events, people, and actions that have taken place over the course of history. Berry writes in *Standing by Words*:

In its cultural aspect, the community is an order of memories preserved consciously in instructions, songs, and stories, and both consciously and unconsciously in *ways*. A healthy culture holds preserving knowledge *in place for a long time*. That is, the essential wisdom accumulates in the community much as fertility builds in the soil. In both, death becomes potentiality.⁶⁰¹

The keeping of memories, or the action of remembering, is the key element of remaining faithful to a community. In "The Gift of Good Land," Berry links memory and faithfulness in the story of the Israelites.⁶⁰² Israel's own sustaining of community in exile was tied to their acts of remembering. "It is what Israel 'remembers' that determines whether it remains faithful to the covenant."⁶⁰³ In their writings, songs, and traditions (all *embodiments* of the memories of their covenant with God), the people sustained their own community of God even while they were out of place.⁶⁰⁴ The Israelites' historical status as the people of God was linked with their present and continuing future as the chosen people of God, despite the fact

⁶⁰¹ Berry, *Standing by Words*, 73.

⁶⁰² Berry, *The Gift of Good Land*.

⁶⁰³ Joel James Schuman and L. Roger Owens, eds., *Wendell Berry and Religion* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 120-21. God's own faithfulness to the covenant is related to memory as well. See Leviticus 26:41-42: "And I will remember my covenant with Jacob, and yes, my covenant with Isaac, and yes, my covenant with Abraham I will remember—and the land I will remember."

⁶⁰⁴ The Torah itself became "a portable Land, a movable Temple," the place of God's presence, likened to their relationship to "home." Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 228.

that they were now removed from the Promised Land. The Israelites' memories provided them with a "continuity of existence," and served to bring past events and promises into the future.⁶⁰⁵ Their faithfulness to God's promises, gifts, and communities lay precisely in their ability to preserve those memories and act in accordance with their calling, even if current circumstances suggested otherwise.

This Jewish notion of remembering is influential for Berry, and he suggests further that memory is embodied in our relationship to the place itself. Faithfulness to both physical land and the people in a place are key elements of maintaining a membership and its memories. Perhaps one of the most complex and illustrative examples of both memory and fidelity is Berry's depiction of Jack Beechum in *The Memory of Old Jack*. The novel takes place on the last day of Old Jack's life as he remembers a lifetime of relationships and work in his life in Port William. Jack's own memory serves as the guiding device through which we learn about his life. This alone might lead one to highlight the novel's attention to memory, but a central plotline in the book, I think, serves to bring together memory, fidelity, and place in a subtle and interesting way. Jack was married to Ruth Lightwood who from the beginning sought to make Jack a "better" man by persuading him to move up in the world and "improve himself" by acquiring more land, working less on it, and taking more from it.⁶⁰⁶ But, ultimately, Jack's devotion was to the land itself, and he never acquired the status in her eyes that she desired. This is because Jack is a faithful man, both to his own farm and his community. "He would be faithful to what he belonged to: to his own place in the world and his neighborhood, to the handful of men who shared his faith."⁶⁰⁷ But in a surprising twist in the story, we find out that Jack has an extramarital affair with Rose McInnis, a widowed woman living alone on a farm in Port William. Jack's infidelity to his wife at first seems out of

⁶⁰⁵ Warnock, *Memory*, 170. See also for the relationship of memory to present and future: John Leax, "Memory and Hope in the World of Port William," in *Wendell Berry: Life and Work*, ed. Jason Peters (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2007), 66-75; Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*; Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, 16; Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 82-90.

⁶⁰⁶ Wendell Berry, *The Memory of Old Jack* (Washington D. C.: Counterpoint, 1999), 50.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 140.

sorts for one of Berry's most centrally placed characters. However, as we learn more about Jack, we see that he is one of the most complex characters Berry draws.

Jack's relationship with Rose was wholly different from that of Ruth. Rose "loved him as he was."⁶⁰⁸ She did not wish to change him nor his love of the land. She lived humbly and wholly in her own place: "The order and abundance of the place seemed the emanation of a deeply indwelling artistry. Whatever she touch flowered and bore."⁶⁰⁹ But one day Ruth confronted him as he left for Rose's house, and in that moment, "He saw that his infidelity had touched her as his love had not, that she who could not abide his passion now helplessly and deeply bore his wound."⁶¹⁰ Jack was changed after this, and his relationship with Rose could not go on much longer; it was incomplete. "As long as he might come to her he would come, however welcome, as a guest."⁶¹¹ In fact, we see that neither relationship is complete: "With Rose he had come within the gates of Eden, but had found there no possibility for a worldly faith or labor. With Ruth he had made an earthly troth and travail that bore no delight; they had lost the vision of paradise."⁶¹² His relationship with Ruth stifled his faithfulness to the place. He could not be faithful to her because she did not want him to be faithful to or delight in the world beyond her. Rose, at first, gave Jack a renewed devotion to the place. She awakened in him his love for the land because she dwelt so harmoniously within it. But if, in another life, she might have allowed Jack wholeness, she then served to disrupt his fidelity to his marriage to Ruth, a relationship Berry places at the cornerstone of communal relations in place. Faithfulness and place are tied up in this story in a complicated way, and we learn that true faithfulness depends on cultivating our relationship to *both* people and place, along with remembering the vows and promises we have made there.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., 93.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., 95.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., 102.

⁶¹¹ Ibid., 103.

⁶¹² Ibid., 103.

Still, the Jack we know at the novel's end is a faithful man. What is more, his life and the memories he faithfully keeps binds the community together and to the place. "They know that his memory holds them in common knowledge and common loss."⁶¹³ As Andy Catlett speaks these words at the novel's end, we see that the memory of Old Jack's life—his whole, imperfect, life—teaches both his descendents in the novel and us as readers that fidelity is a virtue learned over time and cultivated by a strong sense of communal memory. Jack goes back to his wife and they live the rest of their lives together. Though their relationship is never perfect, Jack shows us through his own act of remembering, and continuing to keep the memories of the community, the value of being faithful to the keeping of one's life in place and all that it entails.

Neighborliness and Hospitality

If community life is preserved over time through faithfulness and remembering, it is held together in the present through hospitable actions between neighbors. Though Berry writes extensively in his essays about neighborliness, the hospitable relationship between people and places is probably best expressed in his fiction. While some of Berry's characters are permanently placed in the community, others slowly gain membership, while still others always remain on the periphery. In their study of Berry's work, Matthew Bonzo and Michael Stevens outline six levels of relationship of the characters in Berry's fiction and situate them directly in terms of hospitality and neighborliness. Bonzo and Stevens recognize that while placedness is the primary intent, the notion remains incomplete and misleading "without an understanding of the boundaries as permeable."⁶¹⁴ Berry allows his characters to "make

⁶¹³ Ibid., 170.

⁶¹⁴ J. Matthew and Michael R. Stevens Bonzo, *Wendell Berry and the Cultivation of Life: A Reader's Guide* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008), 141.

room” for those outside the community, or the “strangers in their midst.”⁶¹⁵ The offering of a place, both physically and metaphorically, suggests the theological connotations of Berry’s hospitable community.⁶¹⁶ Christ commands us to engage in radical and particular acts of hospitality not just to our neighbors, but to our enemies as well. In doing so, we participate with Christ himself, who emptied or “made room” within himself at creation for creatures to participate in his life and work.⁶¹⁷

In addition to their six categories of hospitality, Bonzo and Stevens also cite a prior category of people who have always been a part of the community and who are “initiators of much of the hospitality that is offered.”⁶¹⁸ The character Mat Felter is the most prominent example of this and is the focus of the novel *A Place on Earth*. Bonzo and Stevens identify characters such as Mat as “the first principle of hospitality, a sort of ‘sustainable hospitality’ rooted all the way back to creation.”⁶¹⁹ While these characters are never the most explicitly spiritual, they are always the ones most dependent on their connection to place beyond its material value. Upon a close reading of *A Place on Earth*, we notice that hospitality is always born out of relationship to a particular place and is actually pictured as the granting to people a “place on earth.”⁶²⁰ Mat Feltner, having always been a stable part of Port William, provides a quiet picture of neighborliness that is always firmly grounded in his relationship to the place. This longstanding, placed hospitality is contrasted in the novel with the preacher of

⁶¹⁵ See Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999).

⁶¹⁶ Brueggemann describes strangers, or those most in need of hospitality, as “people without a place.” Walter Brueggemann, *Interpretation and Obedience: From Faithful Reading to Faithful Living* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 294.

⁶¹⁷ See my discussion of kenosis in chapter two.

⁶¹⁸ Bonzo, *Wendell Berry and the Cultivation of Life* 145.

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 145. Beyond this are the unknown stranger who enters only briefly, the outsider who enters for a short but significant period of time, though they never develop a relationship to the people or place. The third and fourth categories are “various shades of the prodigal,” the children of Port William who leave and must choose whether to return and outsiders who choose to enter fully into the community offered to them. The fifth category embodies the risk inherent in community; it consists of those who are a part of the community and create wounds by various actions. And finally, there are those members of the community who choose to remain at the margins or boundaries for whatever reason.

⁶²⁰ Berry, *A Place on Earth*, 83.

Port William, Brother Preston, in what is perhaps one of the clearest expressions of Berry's theology in *A Place on Earth*.⁶²¹

Mat has recently found out that his son, "his only begotten son," who has gone to war is missing in action.⁶²² While Mat suffers this loss throughout the course of the novel, we see an interesting exchange between him and Brother Preston, the town's preacher, that is unsettling to readers yet indicative of Berry's theology of place. Brother Preston comes to offer comfort to the household on their recent loss, but instead finds himself being comforted by the Feltners in an interaction that is, despite the circumstances, generous and hospitable. The reason for the unsettledness of the interaction is the profound disconnect between Brother Preston and the rest of the members of the Port William community. In most of his novels, Berry presents a strong dualism that pervades the church. It is most often too abstract, separated from the earthly, and dependent on hope in Heaven set apart from the world.⁶²³ Following his wider trend, Berry depicts the preacher's hope as mounted solely in Heaven; "he is free of the world."⁶²⁴ "He belongs to the governance of those he ministers to without belonging to their knowledge, the bringer of the Word *preserved from flesh*."⁶²⁵ But Mat, bound to the particular and earthly, "is not free, and never has been. He is doomed to hope in the world, in the bonds of his own love....His hope of Heaven must be the hope of a man bound to the world..."⁶²⁶

While the preacher came to give them comfort and extend hospitality, he ultimately fails to make a real connection to their lives. But the Feltners, rather than turning Preston away, listen to his unsolicited sermon on the afterlife and show grace toward the preacher's

⁶²¹ Another aspect of Mat's hospitality in the book, though, is his relationship with Hannah, whom he lets live with him after Virgil goes away to, and later goes missing in, the war.

⁶²² Hannah Coulter describes Virgil in this way in her own telling of the story to Andy Catlett in Berry, *Hannah Coulter*, 51. The language explicitly calls to mind Christ as the "only begotten son" in John 3:16.

⁶²³ See *Jayber Crow* especially for this theme.

⁶²⁴ Berry, *A Place on Earth*, 99.

⁶²⁵ *Ibid.*, 101. My emphasis.

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

disconnectedness. While Brother Preston is simultaneously unsettled, he also feels “that he has become again the object of their generosity, that they are offering to *him*, out of some kind of hospitality, the safe abstraction of his belief. They are releasing him from the particularity of the time and place, and of the life he is talking about.”⁶²⁷ While they are in most ways opposite to the preacher, the Feltners’ outreach to Brother Preston offers him a place on earth. And while Mat does not advocate the preacher’s disconnect from particularities of life in place, his attitude toward the preacher remains one of generosity and grace, allowing room for Brother Preston to abide with them in the only way he knows how. The Feltners’ hospitality is made real to the preacher, fully realized as it extends from a household grounded imaginatively in particular place.

While the “place” of the household—his marriage with Margaret—serves as the center from which hospitality originates, in other parts of the novel, Berry draws the connection between neighborliness and the gift of physical place itself in his depiction of Mat’s hospitality to the land. Mat describes his work on the land as devoted to the place itself and to future generations rather than for any personal gain: “The new work must be done for the sake of the land itself—for the sake of no one he can foresee, someone who will come later, who will depend then on what is done now.”⁶²⁸ Not only do they have to imagine the land in the future, but they must also see how their work on it will affect those who live in relation to it. Their relationship to future generations depends primarily on their ability to *imagine the particular place* and *treat it well* despite any immediate personal benefit. Later, Mat explains to his son about the responsibility involved in the gift of place: “...the most dangerous kind of irresponsibility is to think of your doings as temporary...What you do on the earth, the earth makes permanent.”⁶²⁹ In this and all of Berry’s fiction, he shows us that when place is allowed

⁶²⁷ Ibid., 99.

⁶²⁸ Ibid., 154.

⁶²⁹ Ibid., 180.

to fully enter the imagination, neighborliness born out of community life is made possible and permanent in *both* the present and the future.

Good Work and Stewardship of Communal Resources

Hospitality towards the land is expressed more generally in Berry's notion of good work. What we do and how well we do it are indicative of our views not only of the materials that we are using, but also the people that they belong to, and more broadly, God who provided them. People must engage in "kindly use" of the natural environment through responsibility and responsiveness to that which is given.⁶³⁰ Berry says in the essay, "Conservation is Good Work,"

The name of our *proper* connection to the earth is 'good work,' for good work involves much giving of honor. It honors the source of its materials; it honors the place where it is done; it honors the art by which it is done; it honors the thing that it makes and user of the made thing. Good work is always modestly scaled, for it cannot ignore either the nature of individual places or the differences between places, and it always involves a sort of religious humility, for not everything is known.⁶³¹

Again, Berry's fiction particularizes some of these ideas about work for us in an interesting way. In the short story, "Don't Send a Boy to do a Man's Work," we see an example of bad and irresponsible work with resources, along with the *dishonor* it brings on materials, the physical process of work, and the person for whom the work is being done. In this story, we are introduced to Athey Keith, who as we see in later novels, grows up to become one of the best farmers in Port William.⁶³² But here, he is a twelve-year-old boy who is put in charge of his father's farm when he goes out of town. His father, Carter Keith, had some hogs that were near time to be slaughtered and he told Athey to keep an eye on the men who would come to do the killing. There were two dozen hogs to kill and about ten men coming to do the work. The story begins well: the men do good work in a fairly quick and orderly manner. But then

⁶³⁰ Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1977), 31. See also Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 108.

⁶³¹ Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom, & Community*, 35-6.

⁶³² Berry, *That Distant Land*, 12-24. We see Athey as a grown man particularly in the novel *Jayber Crowe*.

Put Woolfork, “a man who believed in thinking if it would get him something for nothing,” shows up with a bottle of Jim Pete Markman’s homemade whisky.⁶³³ The story digresses fairly quickly from here. Though they take a while to start on the bottle, working around it as it sat there “like the golden calf,” when they do decide to give it their attention, they swiftly make up the time they spent looking by making the bottle repeatedly say, “Good-good-good-good-good.”⁶³⁴

Now they drank as they worked, and the men began to take shortcuts and make mistakes. “They wielded their axes and knives with something like abandon,” resulting in poor quality cuts of meat and waste that makes the reader uncomfortable.⁶³⁵ This depiction of poor work only gets worse when the Regulators show up, a “kind of Ku Klux Klan” whose business “was not Negroes” but rather, “sins against domestic tranquility.”⁶³⁶ What this really meant was that the Regulators were comprised of all the town’s makers and sellers of whiskey so that they might root out competitors and newcomers. Berry highlights this group of men in a humorous way, describing how, though the men wore sheets over their heads and clothing, every member of the town knew them by their horses and mules. When the men show up, they act as they please with Carter Keith’s things—“impounding” the other men in the barn, letting out all the men’s mules and horses in order to stable their own, using the Keiths’ wood to make a fire, and eating in abundant amounts the meat that had recently been cut from the slaughtered hogs. They “made work for somebody besides themselves” and “feasted on free pork” that they had not helped to raise or butcher.⁶³⁷ After the Regulators get too drunk to do anything else, a fight ensues between them and the recently sobered up men in the barn which ends only minutes before Carter returns home in the early morning. Carter sends the

⁶³³ Berry, *That Distant Land: The Collected Stories.*, 15.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, 16, 17.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶³⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶³⁷ *Ibid.*, 20, 21.

Regulators away and tells Athey to run to the house for coffee for the remaining men. At the site of the hogs and state of the men, Carter only says, “If there’s anything I can’t stand, it’s a damned nasty hog-killing.”⁶³⁸

At the end of the story, we are left feeling sorry for most of the characters involved. We feel sorry for Carter for having his animals and tools taken care of poorly, Athey for his inability to stop the grown men, for the men who helped and fell temptation to the desire to take shortcuts and do poor work, and for the Regulators for being too cowardly to own up to their own actions or work of any kind. Alluding to the bad work of the Israelites with their “golden calf,” Berry gives us a more modern picture of what bad work might look like and suggests that in the same way as the Israelites, their acts of making were condemned outside the covenant relationship (both to God and to Carter in friendship). In both allusion and example, there is a failure to honor materials and a breaking of faith from a covenant relation. It is a picture that leaves us with a bad taste in our mouth for work of this kind, and this, I think, is exactly what Berry wants.

Love Grounded in Place

Just as we concluded chapter one with the recognition that a sense of place is dependent on love, so also Berry reveals his community as turning on love and imagination grounded in place. Berry’s novel *Hannah Coulter* is in many ways a typical love story. But what readers immediately notice is that it is not just a story of a couple’s love, but of a love embedded in a place and community. In the novel, an older and twice widowed Hannah Coulter reflects on her life in the community of Port William. As someone who was not born into the community but accepted into it with open arms, she offers a different perspective than many of the characters on the notion of membership and reflects on the loving

⁶³⁸ Ibid., 24.

hospitality that brought her into community. The novel centers around the her two marriages, first to Virgil Feltner, who was killed in World War II, and second to Nathan Coulter.

Hannah's mother dies when she is young, and after her father marries a woman with two sons already, she becomes a peripheral concern in the house where she grew up. Her "Grandmam," the only one concerned for her, sends her to Hargrave in order to "make something of herself" after she graduates high school. In Hargrave, she meets Virgil Feltner, a boy seven years older than her and part of a family that she saw as "above" her in many ways. Their relationship develops slowly, and in time, Virgil asks her to marry him. Here, we begin to faintly see the role of place and the whole community in their relationship. When Virgil proposes, Hannah reminds him of their difference and otherness: "You are all prosperous people with a place in the world, and I don't have anything. Listen! I don't have anything to offer but what's walking around in my clothes."⁶³⁹ But we immediately see the Feltners' hospitality and openness to her as someone "other": "They let me belong to them and their place, and I needed to belong somewhere."⁶⁴⁰ Hannah is immediately taken into the entire family. They choose her, and she chooses to embrace them wholly.⁶⁴¹ The marriage she makes with Virgil becomes part of the place already made: "But Virgil's and my marriage...was going to have to be part of a place already decided for it, and part of a story begun long ago and going on."⁶⁴² When Virgil is called away to war the Feltners let Hannah continue to live with them, and after she becomes pregnant with Virgil's child during his two-week return of leave, and after they later receive the letter that he is "missing in action,"

⁶³⁹ Berry, *Hannah Coulter*, 30.

⁶⁴⁰ Berry, *Hannah Coulter*, 41.

⁶⁴¹ Chosenness or choosing is also a main theme running throughout Berry's essays and fiction. Especially see: "It Wasn't Me," in *That Distant Land*; Wendell Berry, *Jayber Crow* (Washington D.C. : Counterpoint, 2000).

⁶⁴² Berry, *Hannah Coulter*, 33.

Hannah and the child continue to live there. She becomes a daughter to the Feltners and is accepted fully into the “membership.”

If her marriage to Virgil served to initiate her into the hospitality of Port William, her marriage to Nathan serves to root it permanently and make a new place from which their hospitality and love might be generated. Hannah’s description of Nathan communicates the way place factors into their relationship. Nathan has been in the war too, but he survived and came back changed. When Nathan comes back he is driven by his love for the place:

He saw Port William as he never would have if he had never left and never fought. He came home to these ridges and hillsides and bottomlands and woods and streams that he had known ever since he was born. And this place, more than all the places he had seen in his absence, was what he wanted.⁶⁴³

Nathan was a member of Port William as Hannah had become, and so their marriage, unlike her and Virgil’s, was more “knowing.”⁶⁴⁴ It is fully placed in the community, and so their love is a communal endeavor, being both sustained by and sustaining the community of Port William. Hannah describes their love as “one of the acts of the greater love that holds and cherishes all the world.”⁶⁴⁵ Not only was it an effort to hold themselves and others in the same place for a long time, but it was also an effort against the war, the backdrop for the beginning of *Hannah Coulter*, as well as *A Place on Earth*, where we see the beginning of Hannah’s relationship with the Feltners. “There can be places in this world, and in human hearts too,” Hannah says, “that are opposite to war. There is a kind of life that is opposite to war, as much as this world allows it to be. After he came home, I think Nathan tried to make such a place, and in his unspeaking way to live such a life.”⁶⁴⁶ In order to love, which is opposite to the hatred of war, one needs to imagine and make one’s life in place.⁶⁴⁷ Hannah elaborates, “Love in this world doesn’t come out of thin air. It is not something thought up. Like

⁶⁴³ Ibid., 67.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid., 66.

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid., 68.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., 68.

⁶⁴⁷ See “American Imagination and the Civil War” in Berry, *Imagination in Place*.

ourselves, it grows out of the ground. It has a body and place.”⁶⁴⁸ The making of their place in Port William is described as the proper work of love (and imagination), but their love also grew out of the place that they made and which was already made. The place is the materialization of their love, being both the cause and effect of their work of love in the membership of Port William.

The rest of the novel recounts the birth of Hannah and Nathan’s children, the children’s leaving Port William, and the cultural change that occurs as people begin to look for “someplace else.” But at the novel’s end, when Nathan dies, and Hannah reflects on the war and its effect on their relationship and to the place of Port William, she makes an important connection between love and a placed imagination. She says, “It is hard to live one life and imagine another. But imagination is what is needed. Want of imagination makes things unreal enough to be destroyed. By imagination I mean knowledge and love. I mean compassion.”⁶⁴⁹ Hannah shows us not only that love grounded in place is important and necessary, but that that placed love must also be extended out; it must imagine the other and by that act of imaginative placing, invite and provide the avenue through which others share in the community of creation. Imagination and love are both grown out of a place. They are both enfleshed in a place. But the imaginative act of love is also the means by which we come to belong in place and invite others into it as Christ commanded.

While Hannah particularizes love for us throughout the entire novel, it is interesting that in the end, she makes the connection to its more universal significance, identifying it with Heaven itself. “The room of love is the love that holds us all, and it is not ours. It goes back before we were born. It goes all the way back. It is Heaven’s. Or it is Heaven, and we are

⁶⁴⁸ Berry, *Hannah Coulter*, 88.

⁶⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 168.

only in it by willingness.”⁶⁵⁰ Earlier in the novel she alluded to this connection, concluding that the “room of love” is “a love almost not of this world, and yet entirely of it.”⁶⁵¹ As it communicates both heavenly and earthly significance, the love in place that *Hannah Coulter* presents is a clear paradigm for imaginative placemaking. Not only does it provide a concrete picture through which we might see and imagine life in place, but Hannah’s description of Heaven’s love expressed in a community’s belonging in place shows us the importance of seeing and loving our neighbors, of letting them into the “membership,” and of teaching them how to live in and love place.

Berry’s Theological Contributions

Berry’s fiction gives us a whole picture of communal life in place. While much more might be explored in his fiction, I have chosen these themes in particular because they correspond to the theological view of place he espouses in his critical essays. Particularly, in “The Gift of Good Land,” Berry highlights three aspects of placemaking in the community of creation that he draws from the Old Testament: 1) fidelity, which he associates with memory, 2) neighborliness or hospitality, and 3) practicing good husbandry. All of these things are then situated broadly under the category of charity, or love.⁶⁵² Ultimately, it is the threefold relationship between God, people, and place to which he draws attention (fidelity to God, neighborliness to the aliens among them, and good stewardship of non-human creation and ecological resources, which are all driven and enacted by love grounded in place.) This threefold relationship preoccupies Berry elsewhere as well, seen in another important metaphor from an earlier work. In the early essay “Discipline and Hope,” these relationships (God and

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid., 158-59. Compare with the ending of Berry, *Jayber Crow*, when he alludes to the relationship between heaven and community life on earth. “This is a book about Heaven. I know it now. It floats among us like a cloud and is the realest thing we know and the least to be captured, the least to be possessed by anybody for himself.” (p. 351)

⁶⁵¹ Ibid., 55.

⁶⁵² I introduced this in chapter five to suggest an ethic of responsibility in relation to artistic placemaking. See Berry, *The Gift of Good Land*.

people; people and other people; people and place) are brought together under the central metaphor of atonement, or “at-one-ment.”⁶⁵³

Berry’s use of the theological term here indicates some important points for readers. First, in using a term that pictures reconciliation between parties,⁶⁵⁴ Berry guides our attention to the brokenness of the relational system as he sees it, which he observes mainly in the detachment of people from place and community.⁶⁵⁵ “Like any interlinking system,” Berry suggests, “this one fails in the failure of any one of its parts.”⁶⁵⁶ This is not to say, however, that God fails or that human responsibility eliminates the idea of grace. Rather, it insinuates that being in place and community is a feature of life that God gifted us and which is our responsibility to uphold and cultivate, the particular ethic of which is elaborated in “The Gift of Good Land.” Second, our relationships to each other and to creation “stand for” our relationship to God.⁶⁵⁷ In this sense, how we make places has ramifications for our relationship to God and his dwelling among us. Third, Berry is trying more or less to *extend* our theological view of reconciliation or atonement between humanity and God to the rest of the created world. Colin Gunton suggests that all metaphors for atonement are in one sense relational (between humans and God), but by highlighting this particular *three-way* relationship between God, people, and place, Berry draws our attention to the wider relationship between all parts of creation that Christ’s atoning sacrifice covered. Creation is pictured in unity, and humans are viewed as responsible stewards commanded by God to love, live in harmony with, and responsibly care for all parts of the created world.⁶⁵⁸ In a

⁶⁵³ Wendell Berry, *A Continuous Harmony: Essays Cultural and Agricultural* (Washington D.C. : Shoemaker & Hoard, 1972), 152. Several biblical scholars have drawn attention to this three-fold relationship, including for example, Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*; Davies, *The Gospel and the Land*.

⁶⁵⁴ Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition*. Gunton highlights the various metaphors that are used in the Christian tradition to picture atonement, suggesting that they are all “relational” in some sense.

⁶⁵⁵ Janet Goodrich notes that he uses this metaphor as an “an alarm in a society in the process of detaching the farmer from the earth” through mechanization and the values that industrial society holds. Goodrich, *Unforseen Self*, 60.

⁶⁵⁶ Berry, *A Continuous Harmony*, 154.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁸ See for similar view, Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*.

similar way to the writers of scripture, Berry poetically draws out the relational aspect of our reconciliation to God by focusing on the significance of human placemaking in the one particular community of Port William. But this microcosmic picture of communal life in place suggests his broader understanding of the community of creation, where humans responsibly participate in the continuing of creation and its redemption through localized placemaking.

My first three close readings of Berry's fiction correspond to these three aspects of placemaking in the community of creation: memory and fidelity, hospitality, and good work. The final theme—love—though, is the unifying thread running through Berry's theology of place. Berry's view of place is informed by the love of God for creation, expressed most poignantly by Christ in his Incarnation here. Christ came because God so *loved* the world (John 3:16). Rather than an "easy formula for getting into Heaven," the gospel writer tells us that the lovability of the world is the key theme expressed in both creation and Incarnation, theological concepts intertwined in Berry's worldview.⁶⁵⁹

This love of God for creation is the backdrop for Berry's focus on the particularity of place. In *A Timbered Choir*, he writes:

To sit and look at light-filled leaves
 May let us see, or seem to see,
 Far backward as through clearer eyes
 To what unsighted hope believes:
 The blessed conviviality
 That sang Creation's seventh sunrise...⁶⁶⁰

By giving attention to the particular, to things like light-filled leaves, Berry believes we are sharing in God's attentiveness to and presence within his creation. This is because the heavenly resides right here in the earthly. "To know the world at its best," he says, "is to know something heavenly."⁶⁶¹ Each aspect of creation deserves our attention, and so Berry's

⁶⁵⁹ Berry, *Art of the Commonplace*, 308.

⁶⁶⁰ Wendell Berry, *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997* (Washington D. C.: Counterpoint, 1998), 8.

⁶⁶¹ Grubbs, ed. *Conversations with Wendell Berry*, 140.

careful approach to place and placemaking is grown out of this incarnational approach to the world.

Berry's emphasis on the particular is expressed in other ways in his essays, specifically as he writes about the importance of the local.⁶⁶² A community in place always starts with the most particular, local ideas and allegiances possible and branches out from there.⁶⁶³ Thus, he says, "What succeeds in Port Royal succeeds in the world."⁶⁶⁴ It would be tempting, upon hearing this, to ascribe to Berry the common modern mantra, "act locally, think globally," in the sense that what we do locally might affect things in the world more broadly. But, in fact, Berry tells us to "think little," an instruction in stark contrast to the "global thinking" mindset that colors most contemporary thought from religion to economics to art.⁶⁶⁵ Berry suggests that the very act of thinking locally, or thinking little, implies a more universal application. The particular and the universal are always intertwined, so that "the local, fully imagined, becomes universal."⁶⁶⁶ If we think and act locally, the global will take care of itself.

This will remind readers of the discussion of the Eucharist in chapter four, which pictured the local Eucharistic community as a microcosm of the whole worldwide Christian community. William Cavanaugh, as we saw in that discussion, presents a similar view to Berry, suggesting that, "The closer one is attached to the particular community gathered around one particular altar, the more united one becomes to the universal."⁶⁶⁷ Cavanaugh lends strikingly theological language to the discussion by utilizing von Balthasar's notion of

⁶⁶² For examples of his discussion on the local, see especially Berry, *A Continuous Harmony*.; Wendell Berry, *The Way of Ignorance and Other Essays* (Washington D.C. : Shoemaker & Hoard, 2005).; Berry, *What Are People For?*

⁶⁶³ So he says, "My devotion thins as it widens. I care more for my household than for the town of Port Royal, more for the town of Port Royal than for the County of Henry, more for the County of Henry than for the State of Kentucky, more for the State of Kentucky than for the United States of America." Wendell Berry, *The Long-Legged House* (Washington D.C.: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2004), 77.

⁶⁶⁴ Berry, *A Continuous Harmony*, 50. Port Royal is the small town in Kentucky where Berry lives, which Port William was largely modeled after.

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁶⁶⁶ Berry, *Imagination in Place*, 37.

⁶⁶⁷ Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed*, 71.

Christ as the “concrete universal.”⁶⁶⁸ While Berry as theologian never makes the explicit connection, his understanding of the relationship between the one and the many resonates clearly with both Cavanaugh and von Balthasar as they understand the intermingling of the particular and the universal in the person of Christ and in us as the place of his abiding presence. But despite the relationship between the particular and the universal as such, Berry insinuates in his essays on place, as Cavanaugh points out, “All of this *can only* be instantiated in concrete, local practices.”⁶⁶⁹ We encounter the “concrete universal” of Christ in Creation only through concrete, embodied interactions with other people.⁶⁷⁰ The actual practice is always particular, concrete, and local.

This localized encounter between God and people, and people with each other, is expressed clearest in Berry’s notion of the “local imagination” grounded in place. It is the communal encounter and relationship *in place* that Berry emphasizes in both his fiction and essays, and his religious ethic is largely founded on our ability to imagine the “other” and so truly love her. *Hannah Coulter* expressed this idea of the local imagination in its account of the Coulters’ love born from and embodied in a particular place. In his essays, though, Berry elaborates on what it means for the imagination and love to be grounded in place, and so makes an important contribution to our understanding of Christian calling, specifically our calling to love our neighbors as ourselves.

For Berry, the imagination is the mind’s highest faculty, connected with knowledge and truth. Through it, we practice love in community and place, and by its failure, we enact much of the history that has been practiced so far in the world: war, hate, ecological destruction, and rampant consumerism to name a few examples. The imagination is the key faculty we actually use to cultivate a sense of place, but it is also “native to the ground

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid., 75. See von Balthasar, *The Word Made Flesh*, 170.

⁶⁶⁹ Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed*, 86.

⁶⁷⁰ So he says of the idea of a “virtual community” that it is only a metaphor and not a real community, which always requires placed interactions. Grubbs, ed. *Conversations with Wendell Berry*.

underfoot,”⁶⁷¹ always grounded in a particular place itself.⁶⁷² In his 2012 Jefferson Lecture for the US National Endowment for the Humanities, Berry elaborates on this understanding of the imagination:

I will say, from my own belief and experience, that imagination thrives on contact, on tangible connection. For humans to have a responsible relationship to the world, they must imagine their places in it. To have a place, to live and belong in a place, to live from a place without destroying it, we must imagine it. By imagination we see it illuminated by its own unique character and by our love for it. By imagination we recognize with sympathy the fellow members, human and nonhuman, with whom we share our place. By that local experience we see the need to grant a sort of preemptive sympathy to all the fellow members, the neighbors, with whom we share the world. As imagination enables sympathy, sympathy enables affection. And it is in affection that we find the possibility of a neighborly, kind, and conserving economy.⁶⁷³

Berry makes some very important points here. First, there is a mutual interaction between place and imagination, or the “imagination in place.” Place is the “informing ambiance” of one’s imagination, but the imagination is also the faculty by which we actually come to know, understand, identify, and belong in place.⁶⁷⁴ This is a thread that runs through the rest of Berry’s work.⁶⁷⁵ Both imagination and place instruct and provide the means for the other’s existence and flourishing in the world, as we saw in *Hannah Coulter*. Thus, placemaking, for Berry, is always an imaginative activity. In order to make or add value to places, we must imagine how they could or should be, while at the same time inviting the participation of past inhabitants, traditions, events, and stories to inform the current placemaking practice.

⁶⁷¹ Berry, *Imagination in Place*, 32.

⁶⁷² Berry’s suggestions here are continuous with his beliefs about the importance of localness for place and community that we explored earlier. So he emphasizes, “there can be no general or official or sectional or national imagination. Ibid., 21.

Considering the myriad of things that the imagination is and does, this quotation seems a slight overstatement. Charles Taylor might counter his claim with his notion of “social imaginaries,” which are shared by a large group of people, perhaps even an entire society or nation. It is what binds together the shared practices of particular people in a group. Taylor’s point is important, but Berry’s persuasion of his readers to narrow their view is significant especially in a time of such “global” thinking. While the imagination may indeed be wider or more universal, the particularity of the imagination in relation to community and place is not to be dismissed. For Taylor’s concept, see Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 24.

⁶⁷³ Wendell Berry, *It All Turns on Affection: The Jefferson Lecture and Other Essays* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2012), 14.

⁶⁷⁴ Berry, *Imagination in Place*, 12. See also his remarks on page 32.

⁶⁷⁵ Several of Berry’s earlier essays deal with this topic of the imagination in place: *What are People For?*, 84; *The Long-Legged House*, 67; *Life is a Miracle*, 86.

Correspondingly, our placemaking practices also further attach us to place and enhance our imagination of both its particular and universal significance.

Second, and related to the issue of the particular and the universal, is Berry's point that the imagination in place is the faculty by which we approach the "other" in sympathy, affection, kindness, and love. The imagination is the key faculty by which we "love our neighbors as ourselves." Berry says in the essay "American Imagination and the Civil War," with similar language to his Jefferson Lecture: "By 'imagination' I do not mean the ability to make things up or to make a realistic copy. I mean the ability to make real to oneself the life of one's place or the life of one's enemy—and therein I believe, is implied imagination in the highest sense."⁶⁷⁶ The imagination here is closely tied with what we might identify as the Christian practice of neighborliness. It is most importantly, the way that we envision the "other," the way that we place ourselves in one another's shoes, empathize, and "see one another, across our inevitable differences, as living souls."⁶⁷⁷ Berry suggests here, as he did in *A Place on Earth*, that by being grounded imaginatively in our place we can imaginatively understand the other in his place. We can perform hospitable actions only out of a deep sense of who we are as particular people in place.

This notion of the local imagination resonates with some of the wider work on the moral or ethical imagination. Mark Johnson suggests the relationship of imagination to lived experience, focusing on the role of the imagination in the way that we experience the world, that is, the way the imagination gives rise to our thoughts about and actions within the world (especially those of a moral nature).⁶⁷⁸ He says of the empathetic imagination: "it is the chief activity by which we are able to inhabit a more or less common world—a world of shared

⁶⁷⁶ Berry, *Imagination in Place*, 30.

⁶⁷⁷ Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom, & Community*, 173.

⁶⁷⁸ Johnson, *Body in the Mind*.; Mark Johnson, *Moral Imagination: Implication of Cognitive Science for Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1993).

gestures, actions, perceptions, experiences, meanings, symbols, and narratives.”⁶⁷⁹ Johnson’s work directs its initial focus on the imagination, and only indirectly addresses the concept of place as informing the imaginative faculty.⁶⁸⁰

Trevor Hart also closely relates the moral imagination to carrying out Christ’s second command to “love our neighbors as ourselves.”⁶⁸¹ Hart argues that necessary to a proper view of “the other” as neighbor is an imaginative response to his or her particularity. While we must recognize sameness in our neighbors as fellow human beings, we must simultaneously recognize them as particular—as people who are necessarily *different* from us. In order to understand where they really come from, we must enter into their particular place or world and relate their own lives imaginatively with our own.⁶⁸²

While Hart does not attach this particularization of people to the concept of place as such, it seems implied that “putting ourselves in one another’s shoes” might relate to the issue of place in very significant ways. Specifically, our own placement in the world will become a marker of our relationship to the place of another. As we seek to identify with them, we must extend our hospitality from some kind of center, a place through which that hospitality is grounded so that it may work imaginatively in the lives of others, “making room” for others to respond and be truly loved. Berry takes this notion of responding to particularity one step further, though, to imply that *actually belonging* to a particular place is the way that we will

⁶⁷⁹ Johnson, *Moral Imagination*, 201.

⁶⁸⁰ In another work, *Metaphors We Live By*, Johnson makes the connection between place and the way we structure our lives through metaphor, but it is in a less concrete way than Berry suggests. George Lakoff and Johnson explore among the many metaphors that guide our daily lives, the prominent role of place and spatialization metaphors in the way that we understand the world. While they are speaking of place in abstract terms here, it is easy to see the connection that might be made here regarding the role of place on our imaginative faculties. While Lakoff and Johnson do not necessarily relate these metaphors to physical structures, they do imply a relationship to physical place from which these metaphors arise. For instance, our understanding of the concept of things “looking up” is informed first of all by what we know about “up” from a physical standpoint. The way that we imagine and structure our reality, then, is grounded in our relationship to the physical, bodily things from which we derive our most basic metaphors. See Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, especially pages 7, 14, 17-19, 21, 107.

⁶⁸¹ Trevor Hart, “Migrants between Nominatives: Ethical Imagination and a Hermeneutics of Lived Experience,” *Theology in Scotland* 6, no. 2 (1999): 32.

⁶⁸² Caroline Simon suggests that it involves, “seeing someone as a destiny,” or we might say in other words, seeing them as being able to play a particular role in the membership of Creation that is significant or of value. Caroline J. Simon, *The Disciplined Heart: Love, Destiny, and Imagination* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 74.

understand how to love our neighbors as ourselves. He suggests that until we cultivate an imagination grown out of a strong connection to place and the created world, we cannot fully understand what it means to step outside of that place and truly love the other. Of course, the process of identifying with our neighbor requires, in one sense, a necessary “dislocation” from our own place and an imaginative stepping into the others’ place. But, in order to truly understand the other’s place—what it means for him to identify and belong within it—we must be able to conceive of what it means to be in place at all. In this sense, we cannot really understand what it means to love our neighbors as ourselves when we ourselves are out of place. Understanding our own particularity informs our sense of the particularity of the other.

The failure to particularize the other results in various forms of violence to people and place, what Berry highlights as the “failure of the imagination.”⁶⁸³ In *Life is a Miracle*, Berry describes the failure of imagination as obstructing compassion and obscuring the particularity of creatures and places.⁶⁸⁴ Hart references this same “failure of imagination” in the tendency to “pigeon-hole” or ignore particularity of the other.⁶⁸⁵ Graham Greene describes it in *The Power and the Glory* simply as hate.⁶⁸⁶ The point is that when the imagination fails to particularize people for us, we cannot see them as anything but foreign. By failing to understand the other, seeking instead to categorize him, we collapse and disrespect his otherness.⁶⁸⁷ While it may seem contradictory to present a “closed” or “local” view of the imagination in order to understand the outsider, we see that the boundaries that separate are also the boundaries that define and identify. If we want to love our brother without displacing him or ourselves, then, we have to recognize the sameness in his difference, and allow for mutual interaction as well as mutual difference through the permeable boundaries of place.

⁶⁸³ Berry, *The Long-Legged House*, 67.

⁶⁸⁴ Berry, *Life is a Miracle*, 86.

⁶⁸⁵ Hart, "Migrants between Nominatives: Ethical Imagination and a Hermeneutics of Lived Experience," 37.

⁶⁸⁶ Graham Greene, *The Power and the Glory* (New York: Penguin, 1962), 131.

⁶⁸⁷ Anthony Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self: On Meaning, Manipulation and Promise* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 75.

In Berry's attention to the particularity and locality of place and placemaking, he grants readers an alternative to the universalization of modern society. In that society, we are told to embrace the other by collapsing our own sense of place, dislocating ourselves permanently from attachment to one's particular community for the sake of "progress." But Berry meets this philosophy dead-on and suggests an alternative framework, one that seeks to be placed solidly in a particular locale and community in order to truly love the other. While God is the ultimate Reconciler, humans have a responsibility to restore the three-way relationship between God, people, and place from the "bottom up," from the places that we have sought to destroy and which we must endeavor to heal. God always has the final redeeming power, but our responsible actions of localized placemaking can contribute in some way to the transformation and redemption of the "community of creation." That "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son" is perhaps the most basic affirmation of our theology of placemaking—in an imitative way, we should pour our love into the world through active and transformative engagement with it.

Conclusions

By offering a complete picture of life in the "membership of Port William," Berry's novels teach us how to live responsibly in creation and community through acts of love grounded in place. That Berry uses artistry as a means for expressing this is indicative of his wider view of the arts as a tool and paradigm for placemaking.⁶⁸⁸ We are all responsible to make something of the world in which we are placed, and artistic attention to place is one way that we might attend to its particularities and so shape it in both imagination and reality. Furthermore, Berry shows readers how things like memory, fidelity, hospitality, good work, and love are all grown out of the places we are in—that they are the result of an active

⁶⁸⁸ See chapter one for my explanation of his art theory.

engagement with and making of place. We are all called to make a place on earth, and Berry's pictures of membership in place give us some helpful tools to satisfy that calling.

Berry's characters not only shape the landscape they are in, but are also shaped by it. Place as the "informing ambiance" of our imagination and identity is a key element of Berry's work and theology, and his artistic and poetic approach to illustrating place suggests the key role of artistry for revealing and expressing the particularity of place. In this sense, Berry, more than any of the other artists that I have considered, reveals the relevance of the "place-based theology of the arts" that I introduced in chapter five. There, I suggested that the redemptive function of the arts, the way they "add value" to the world, might be conceived through the lens of localized placemaking—particular responses to the immediate places around us. By using art to show us how to "think little," Berry provides a concrete picture of a placed or local imagination and reveals its potentially redemptive significance for human communities. As we identify with Berry's fictional characters and see how their actions and attitudes affect the place of Port William, we can also imagine how our own actions might impact and transform our own place. We learn that as we extend love to just one person, as Christ did in Jerusalem or Galilee, or as Mat Feltner did in *A Place on Earth*, we produce in microcosm a place of divine presence and love. Through placed hospitality and love towards the "other," whether it is a person, place, or animal, we play our part in the reconciliation and redemption of that three-way relationship between God, people, and place. And if our placemaking practices can show Christ's love to just *one* particular member of this community, we have succeeded in our calling to be responsible participants in both creation and redemption.

FINAL CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has been driven by two main goals, even while each of these has led to a variety of conclusions and questions. One is to re-focus our attention on the theological significance of places for human life, relationships, and personal identity. This theological interpretation suggests that being rooted in place is not just a matter of "staying put," but rather, a creational calling to *make* places and imbue them with further significance and value. I explored this calling to be placemakers by looking at the Creation narrative of Genesis, the tabernacle and temple theme, and the Incarnation and Christian community. In all of these cases, I appealed to the fact that God relates to creation through *particular* avenues and calls us to engage in particular, physical, and communal acts of making in order to meet him and one another in love. As a particular calling by God, human placemaking practices were ultimately understood to participate in both creation and redemption, imitating Christ as he pours forth his love in both Creation and Incarnation, making a dwelling place on earth so that we might dwell more fully in His presence. Our placemaking serves as a microcosm of Christ's abiding presence and presents parables through which to see and understand Christ's transformative presence in all of Creation.

My second goal was to integrate that theology of placemaking as participation in creation and redemption with a theology of the arts. My reasons for doing this were varied, but the particular overlap in language, focus, and meaning between theological discussions of place and human artistry were prominent among them. This not only provided a concrete image of placemaking practice with which to engage, but also resulted in a theologically rich view of the artist as central to making fitting places for divine-human meeting and presence. In their particularity, their physicality, and their relationship to community, the arts were seen as not just one important instance of placemaking, but as a paradigm for placemaking

practices—the main image through which we might understand and clarify our notion of placemaking as a calling by God to participate locally in both creation and redemption.

It is perhaps in this merging of the disciplines of theology, place, and the arts that the most contributions lay. First, by identifying artistry as a central paradigm for placemaking, we can learn more about the intricacies involved in placemaking practice and how to go about making places in a “placeless” global society. The particular, physical, and communal aspects of both place and artistry that I have identified are the most relevant of these features, though certainly one may think of others. Second, this interdisciplinary dialogue provides new ways of thinking about the “artistic” component of human action in sacred space, along with the relationship of artistic and symbolic placemaking to the divine presence. This “artistic” theology of place suggested that humans have an obligation and calling to creatively and artistically make places that are “fitting” for God's presence with us. This suggests that all humans might be understood as artists, making places that may potentially embody Christ's redemptive vision.

Third, this merging of disciplines allows us to understand what types of actions best embody our response to and participation in creation and redemption. Both discussions of place and artistry contribute distinctive elements to this theology. The theology of place I have outlined suggests that only as people act responsibly in particular, local places can they impact the wider creation in positive and transformative ways. As embodied people in place, we cannot act except from within the places in which we are located. But this is not limiting, as we might expect. Christ himself, embodying the perfect human life, loved his neighbors in place and transformed lives in his immediate vicinity even as those actions had universal redemptive impact. The community of Christ, as the temple of the Holy Spirit and a microcosm of Christ's continuing presence in Creation, will similarly work for and anticipate redemption—by acting in the places in which God has put us. Our work will be redemptive

as it works in the here and now, while it leaves open the possibility for future, eschatological significance and impact. These small-scale actions reflect the inherent goodness of the Creation God has given us. We perform actions of placemaking not for some utilitarian end (i.e. some definite eschatological impact or outcome), but rather, we make and re-make places out of thankful response to God for the goodness of Creation itself. In this way, our actions are Eucharistic as we take God's gifts and offer them back with thanksgiving. An engagement with the arts produced similar results, and in fact, the theology of place I endorsed contributed distinctly to a redemptive understanding of artistry as it makes places in the here and now, taking the materials of creation and offering them back with added-value.

This is related to a fourth suggestion, that a "place-based theology of the arts" might be one way to draw out a redemptive understanding of artistry that allows for human participation in divine aims but sidesteps the issue of the eschatological implications for our actions. While we may still speak thoughtfully about eschatological impact of human actions—that is, that we may contribute to or detract from the New Creation—levying too much on human participation is problematic for both an orthodox doctrine of God and a sufficiently hopeful eschatology. Rather than focusing on the final eschatological aims of redemption, we might construe the redemptive nature of the arts and placemaking as embodied in local transformative action in places. An artwork may thus serve as a sort of parable for Christ's transforming and redemptive presence in all the places of this world, while showing forth God's grace among the broken and alienated in particular and sometimes seemingly miniscule ways.

I explored the ways in which this locally-enacted redemptive significance might be pictured in all three of the examples of art grounded in relationship to place. This account also allowed for the participation of non-Christians in the redemption of places on earth, suggesting that all people might engage in a responsible ethic of placemaking and thereby

have the potential to contribute to and transform creation. By formulating a theology of the arts from the perspective of "place," we can allow for a variety of particularized actions to carry additional meaning, while integrating a useful theology of redemption into a theology of human participation in creation.

While there are perhaps many more questions left open than answered at the end of a project like this, I have sought at least to begin the dialogue between a theology of place and a theology of the arts, both of which seek to understand the role of human participation in creation and redemption. We are all, indeed, called in various ways to make a place on earth—to live responsibly in the given world and add value to it through imaginative and artistic acts of placemaking.

APPENDIX A: TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1:



Figure 2:

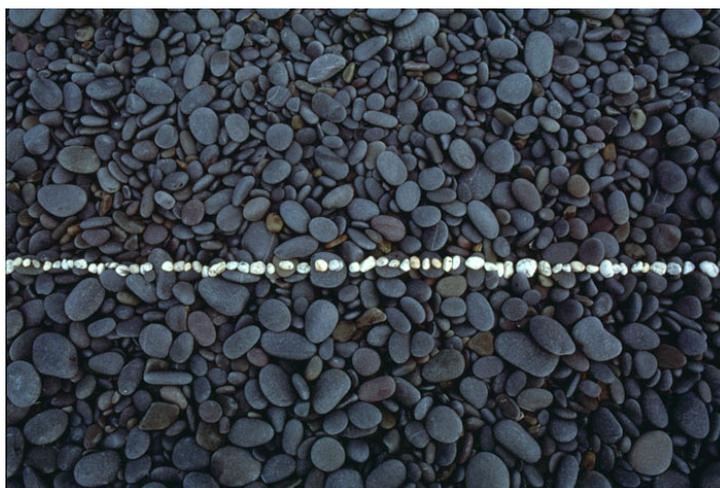


Figure 3:



Figure 4:



Figure 5:



Figure 6:



Figure 7:



Figure 8:



Figure 9:



Figure 10:



Figure 11:

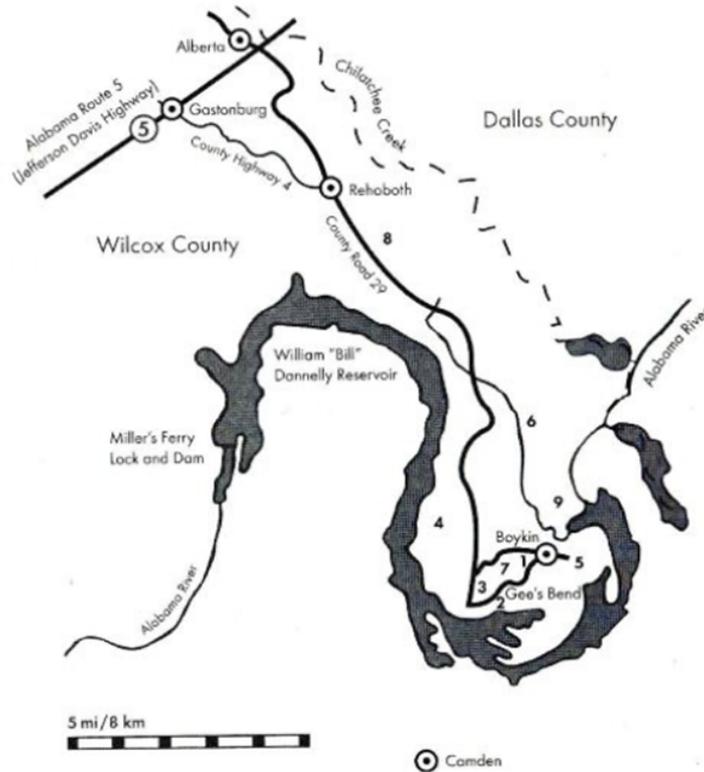


Figure 12:**Figure 13:**

**Figures 1-13 all taken with permission from the artist's website: www.marlenecreates.ca/*

Figure 14:

Map of Gee's Bend as illustrated in Beardsley, *The Quilts of Gee's Bend*.



- 1 Pettway 2 Sodom 3 Brown's Quarters 4 White's Quarters 5 Hotel
6 Foster Creek 7 Sandy Hill (site) 8 Freedom Quilting Bee 9 "Over the Creek"

Figure 15:

Annie Mae Young with Quilts and her great-granddaughter Shaquetta, Rehoboth. Roland Freeman photograph, 1993.



Figure 16:**Figure 17:**

(Left) Paul Klee, *Fire in the Evening*. 1929. Oil on cardboard, 13 3/8 x 13 1/4". (Right) Annie Mae Young's famous work-clothes quilt.



**Visual comparison of figure 17 continued on next page.*

(Left) Frank Stella, Hyena Stomp, 1962. (Right) Nettie Jane Kennedy (1916-2002).
 “Housetop.” Circa 1955. Cotton and synthetic metallic knit. 85x77 inches.



Figure 18:

Martha Jane Pettway (1898-2003). “Housetop”- nine-block “Half-Log Cabin variation.
 Circa 1945. Corduroy. 72x72 inches.



Figure 19:

Loretta Pettway, born 1942. "Housetop," 1963, cotton twill and synthetic material (men's clothing), 80 x 74 inches.

**Figure 20:**

(Left) Sue Willie Seltzer (born 1922). String pieces blocks and bars. Circa 1965, Cotton, denim, flannel. 87x 76 inches. (Right) Amelia Bennett (1914-2002) Blocks and Strips. Circa 1965. Cotton. 84x79 inches.

*Scanned images from Arnett, ed., *Gee's Bend: The Architecture of the Quilt*, 138-39.

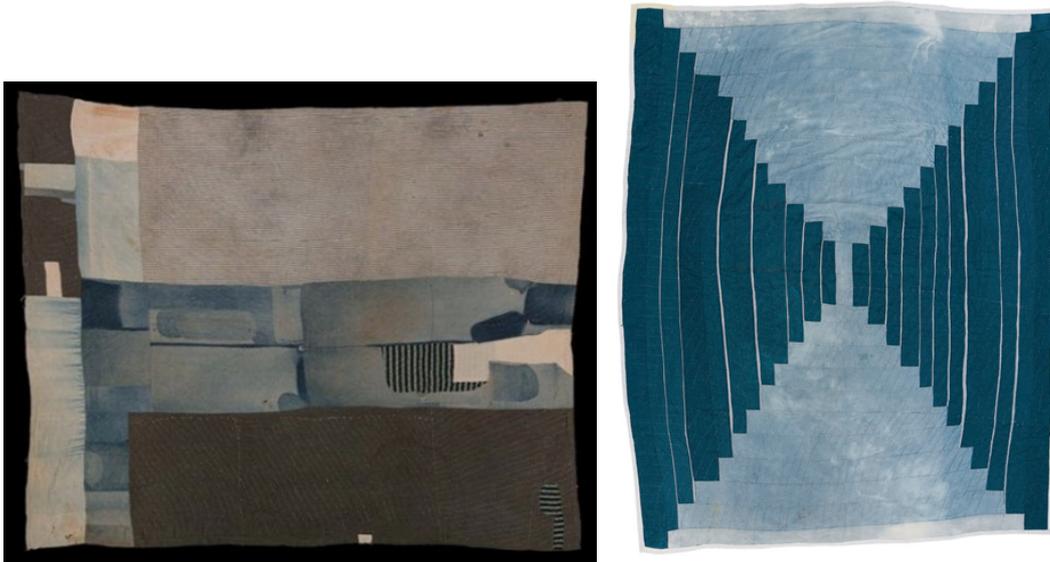


Figure 21:

(Left) Jessie T. Pettway, born 1929. Bars and string-pieced columns, ca. 1950, cotton, 95 x 76 inches. (Right) Loretta Pettway, born 1942. String-pieced quilt 1963, cotton twill and synthetic material (men's clothing), 80 x 74 inches.

**Figure 22:**

(Left) Rachel Carey George. Born 1908. Two sided work-clothes quilt. (Side 2) "Strips." Circa 1935. Denim, wool trousers, mattress ticking, cotton. 72x82 inches. (Right) Loretta Pettway. Born 1942. "Bricklayer" single block variation. Circa 1970. Denim. 84x66 inches.



*Unless otherwise noted, images of Gee's Bend quilts are used from *The Quilts of Gee's Bend in Context* Project Catalog on Auburn University's website:

<http://www.auburn.edu/academic/other/geesbend/explore/catalog/slideshow/index.htm>

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