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Saving Motivations: A Study of Faith-Based Community Organizing in Pomona, California

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SAVING MOTIVATIONS: A STUDY OF FAITH-BASED COMMUNITY ORGANIZING IN POMONA, CALIFORNIA

by
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<u>Chapter One</u>

Introduction

In this thesis, I seek to engage with broad questions regarding religion and its interaction with the secular political world by examining a specific historical trend and a particular case study example of that phenomenon. In the American Christian tradition, religion and social justice have become inseparable entities; indeed, the Christian tradition has a long-standing relationship with justice initiatives in the United States. This relationship has taken many forms over the past two centuries. A current trend in Christian civic engagement in the United States is involvement with community organizing – which itself is a relatively new method of pursuing the cause of justice. Since the onset of community organizing, its relationship to religion in general and to Christianity in particular has been a defining characteristic of the movement. Over time, tensions have arisen within both the theory and practice of organizing that have inevitably had an impact on the religious groups and individuals participating in it. Those tensions include the question of why individuals should organize, and issues with the extremely delicate nature of the organizer-community relationship. This thesis examines how Christian theologies have addressed those tensions using the example of the First Presbyterian Church of Pomona, California. In short, I will argue that certain Christian theological values serve to answer those tensions effectively enough to motivate long-term organizing, particularly though

scripture-based religious education.

In this introductory chapter, I give an overview of the communities under examination, and their socio-economic and religious contexts. I also clarify my own role as participant-observer in the community organizing efforts of the First Presbyterian Church of Pomona and its affiliated organizations. In chapter two, I overview the history of community organizing in the United States, with particular attention paid to the intersections of religion and community organizing. Next, I turn to the specific problems with organizing and the theological responses provided by Christians at First Presbyterian Church of Pomona. Chapter Three explores the doctrines of judgment and salvation as related to the fundamental question of why one should organize. Chapter four describes how "incarnational ministry" is used as a model for the organizer-community relationship. Finally, I will make concluding remarks about the efficacy of these strategies.

The City of Pomona and First Presbyterian Church

The First Presbyterian Church of Pomona is a small church located in central Pomona, California. It has a rich history as the first church in the city and actually predates the city itself – it was founded just after railroad lines were constructed across the nation; Pomona was a convenient half-way point between two other main railway stops, and an agricultural city grew up around the train station built there. The church grew significantly during the early twentieth

century as the city itself also became more populous and affluent, drawing much economic strength as an agricultural center. The United States military used the city as an important manufacturing hub during the Second World War, which brought many jobs to Pomona During the latter half of the twentieth century, however, the church began to decline in size as the city experienced a demographic shift. (Linthicum "An Introduction" 7).

When the war ended, unemployment became a major problem. More African American families began moving to Pomona as its housing became more affordable following the war, and the "white flight" phenomenon that affected many other Los Angeles suburbs characterized Pomona. Many wealthy white residents moved out of the city and left the church; eventually FPCP's congregational size was less than a tenth of that at its largest point. On an average Sunday morning in 2010, perhaps thirty people attend the English-speaking worship service and another twenty attend a Spanish-speaking service that happens concurrently. The congregation is mostly white, but includes a strong Filipino component as well as some Hispanic members. The church building itself is quite large, as its education building hosted literally up to a thousand students during FPCP's most populous years. Currently, the Youth Program of FPCP includes between ten and twenty middle- and high-school students who live in the surrounding neighborhood – very few of whose families actually attend the church ("Annual Report" 29). FPCP is structured according to Presbyterian order,

with a Session of members guiding decisions – particularly now, as the church's pastor resigned in February 2010 and has not yet been replaced. As the only Presbyterian church in Pomona, FPCP has forged connections to wealthier congregations from its denomination and works especially closely with La Verne Heights Presbyterian Church. Just across the street from FPCP stands the very large First Baptist Church of Pomona, which is primarily attended by commuter members who do not reside in the city ("Annual Report" 4).

Throughout the second half of the 20th century, Pomona's economy continued to decline and its demographics continued to reflect fewer white residents (though the city's Hispanic population has grown rapidly in the last decade). Crime and safety have become major problems, and the local government has oft been accused of corruption. During the 1990s, recent college graduates began moving to Pomona and integrating into the congregation of FPCP. Today, they make up about fifty percent of FPCP's small congregation, which is primarily well-educated and white but is situated in a starkly contrasting neighborhood (a tension that I will expand upon later) (Annual Report 9). These college graduates also formed a non-profit organization called Pomona Hope, which I will now introduce in more detail.

Pomona Hope

The Pomona Hope Community Center was founded in 2003 by a small group of graduates of the Claremont Colleges. The organization began as a small

nonprofit responding to conversations with members of the city of Pomona. It currently runs an After School Program three days per week out of FPCP's education building, which assists neighborhood elementary, middle, and high school students with homework and also hosts various recreational activities and one-on-one individualized tutoring tailored to their academic needs. The mission of the nonprofit, though, is much more broad than this programming and hopes to someday substantially add to it in accordance with its mission statement: "the mission of Pomona Hope is to bring hope, peace, and well-being to the city through engaging in community organizing, serving the people by providing educational opportunities, and working for neighborhood transformation" (www.pomonahope.org). A few community organizing projects have been taken on by members of the organization and have resulted in the addition of street lights to the neighborhood, the removal of a smoke shop that brought drug-related violence to the area, and the restriction of racially biased checkpoints being enforced by police in the city. In early 2010, Pomona Hope began developing a community garden in a large vacant lot located across the street from FPCP after many months of attempting to gain the land from the city.

Legally and officially, the organization has no religious affiliation. It is, however, very much connected to the Christian church – in particular, the First Presbyterian Church of Pomona. Many of Pomona Hope's founding members and current board members are part of this church, as well as some of the volunteers

who tutor at the After School Program. The Pomona Hope Kids Coordinator, who runs that program, is also the First Presbyterian Church Youth Ministries Director. The motivation for many of these individuals for creating and involving themselves in Pomona Hope seems to be connected to religion even when the nonprofit technically is not. The neighborhood surrounding Pomona Hope is predominantly Latino and Catholic (Linthicum "An Introduction" 13). Pomona Hope's connection to a Presbyterian church has sometimes therefore been a barrier in reaching out to members of the surrounding community, as neighborhood members make little (if any) distinction between the church and nonprofit, which is one reason that the nonprofit seeks to distance itself from religious affiliation.

OneLA – IAF

One LA-IAF is a branch of the Industrial Areas Foundation, a community organizing foundation that was started by Saul Alinsky and is the largest organizing body today. The IAF has supported organizing efforts in Los Angeles County since just after World War II. In 2004, One LA-IAF was officially founded to engage institutional organizing in the Los Angeles area. Its mission states:

> One LA-IAF is a broad-based, non-partisan organization of dues-paying member congregations, schools, unions and non-profits committed to building power for sustainable social and economic change. This is done through institution-based leadership development; the building of relationships within and between institutions; the identification of and

research on issues of mutual self-interest; and disciplined, organized action. Through this organizing strategy, One LA-IAF develops a constituency of leaders to become citizens in the fullest sense: participants in democratic decision-making and agents of the creation of a more just society through the exercise of relational power. One LA-IAF is affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), the oldest and largest national organizing and leadership development network in the United States (www.onela-iaf.org).

Essentially, One LA is a group of churches, non-profits, unions, schools, and other organizations which pay membership fees to be part of broad-based organizing in the city. It hopes that member institutions will work together to: (1) address root causes of injustice, (2) develop community with other member institutions and develop leaders, and (3) build relationship across barriers that separate many Los Angeles communities. There are three requirements for membership. A member institution must: (1) contain a core group of leaders whose responsibility is to do organizing work within their institution, (2) participate with other institutions in their "cluster," and (3) pay membership dues, which are negotiated based on each institution's ability to contribute.

Both Pomona Hope and First Presbyterian Church of Pomona are members of One LA, though they share membership dues because the church is unable to afford them. Most of the active organizers from each group are involved with One LA along with leaders from their cluster. One LA's clusters are organized as follows: South Los Angeles, South East Hub Cities, Pomona Valley, Pasadena/Altadena/Glendale, East Los Angeles, San Fernando Valley, Mid City

and West Los Angeles, Compton and Lynwood, and the San Gabriel Valley. Each

cluster has a core leadership team which meets multiple times throughout the

year, and clusters nominate members of those teams to serve as directors of the

entire organization on the Central Leadership Team (this consists of a two-year

term on the team, which hires its Lead Organizer and makes other administrative

and financial decisions). The cluster leadership gathers to address issues affecting

its institutions and to identify broader problems; multiple clusters collaborate to

address problems on a region-wide or even state-wide level (www.onela-iaf.org).

One LA's member institutions are expected to engage in the organizing

process, which will be described in detail in Chapter Two. Essentially, this

process begins with one-on-one meetings by each institution's core leaders with

neighborhood members, and eventually house meetings with multiple

neighborhood members. Indigenous leaders are to be located and trained up to

conduct those meetings themselves. Once issues have been identified, research

actions take place where leaders are appointed to specific tasks and strategy for

addressing problems is determined. Finally, public actions take place in which

leaders and their constituency address public officials in community-wide settings

in an attempt to hold authority accountable for decisions made regarding solving

the community's identified issues.

Servant Partners

The last organization which will be relevant to this thesis is called Servant Partners. It was founded by a college graduate who had been involved with Intervarsity Christian Fellowship, an international Christian organization working on college and university campuses, primarily in the United States. Servant Partners works to "plant" churches in the United States and internationally that engage with social justice through community organizing in their cities. The doctrine of incarnation is particularly important for both Intervarsity and Servant Partners, which will be detailed more in Chapter Four (www.servantpartners.org). Many of the college graduates that are members of FPCP, including the coordinator of Pomona Hope's After School Program, live in Pomona because they completed two-year internships with Servant Partners which placed them in Pomona to be trained in "incarnational ministry" and community organizing. The general directors of Servant Partners are members of the congregation and the organization's administrative headquarters are located in Pomona; it has thereby had considerable influence on the philosophy of the church.

Situating the Author

During my last three years at Scripps College, I have slowly become more involved with both Pomona Hope and the First Presbyterian Church of Pomona. My Christian faith has become much more serious in college, and I have been involved in that congregation along with a few other fellow students. During the summer of 2008, I worked as a summer intern at Pomona Hope by designing and

supervising a Summer Reading Program for neighborhood kids while living in

Claremont. During the following school year, I served as the Volunteer

Coordinator for the After School Program by recruiting, training, and supervising

student volunteers for the program from the Claremont Colleges. In summer of

2009 I worked at Pomona Hope a second time, this year with three other friends

and in a much more intensive internship program which involved living at the

Center itself and becoming more connected to the surrounding neighborhood and

to the church congregation.

Amy Johnson Frykholm's *Rapture Culture* explores popular apocalyptic

sentiment in America through interviewing readers of the *Left Behind* series of

novels. Her methodology and approach will be used as guidelines for this thesis,

as she focused broad questions about culture and religion through examination of

interviews. In particular, her relationship to her subjects is a model for this

project, which Frykholm describes as a combination of observation and

ownership:

> While I cannot say I became intimate with the participants in the way an
> ethnographer does who logs hundreds of hours in the field, I did accept
> hospitality, sip coffee and eat cinnamon rolls, cry when participants told
> me their stories, and listen through their own tears. Even after only a few
> hours, I grew to like most of the people I interviewed immensely and to
> dislike others with similar intensity. In other words, as is inevitable with
> ethnographic methods, I became personally involved. I feel now a
> commitment to both accuracy and kindness as I tell their stories. Part of
> the power of ethnographic methods is the obligation and intimacy that is
> built through personal encounter. Once I have heard someone's story or

received someone's hospitality, my commitment to them, regardless of ideological, political, or religious differences, grows along with my sympathy (Frykholm 8).

I therefore write this thesis as a member of both the organization and church which I study; this membership affords me a certain sympathy and level of understanding which would otherwise be absent, but hopefully does not curtail my curiosity or criticism as I analyze how religion and community organizing interact in this situation as a case study for broader issues and themes. I seek to understand how religion motivates and informs individuals as they engage in community organizing and how theological doctrine can both inspire and hinder organizing efforts. I do so as a student, a Christian, and an organizer.

<div align="center">**Chapter Two**</div>

A Brief History of Community Organizing

       The first era of community organizing can be defined as falling between about 1920 and 1940 (beginning as early as 1917 with the Cincinnati Unit Experiment, which I will soon describe; much of this history derives from Betten and Austin's *The Roots of Community Organizing*). A hiatus in substantial progress in the field followed the Second World War, and the "modern era" of community organizing therefore begins around 1960 and ends in 1980 – though some suggest it continues to the present day. Key elements of organizing are present throughout this entire history, and therefore a brief history of the movement from its proposed inception in 1917 will be detailed to provide groundwork for later discussions of the movement in its contemporary conception.

       Community organizing was recognized as a specific field by social scientists for the first time during World War I and has since experienced a great deal of growth, both in breadth and depth. The field can trace its roots as a response to immigration, urbanization, and industrialization occurring around the turn of the twentieth century. It is difficult to place the exact origin of modern community organizing, but sociologists Neil Betten and Michael J. Austin suggest that the Cincinnati Unit Experiment of 1917 serves as the first example of what

would today be labeled community organizing. The National Social Unit Organization sponsored the creation of "social units" organized on a neighborhood basis to focus on block development, coordination of resources, and a community council; the geography-based structure of this plan and its democratic emphasis are crucial elements of today's community organizing.

Throughout the 1920s, community organizing became increasingly professionalized. Schools of philanthropy were founded, which later became graduate schools of social work, and these institutions trained individuals to work in social organizing as a professional career. Organized fundraising also became more prominent during the 1920s. Philanthropic individuals or groups used organizing strategies to encourage social agencies to fundraise in unity towards common goals, often connected to social planning. Community organizing's early focus on democracy (epitomized in the Cincinnati Unit Experiment) was quickly lost as it became a subcategory of social planning through federations. However, its strategies continued to be employed; picketing, sit-ins, block voting, strikes, and boycotts were utilized, and self-help groups for immigrants were popular at the time. While its democratic principles were deemphasized, community organizing survived through the use of its tools and practices.

Greater sophistication in organizing resulted from the economic and social collapse of the Great Depression and strategies of organizing which developed during that period continue to be used by organizers today. The onset of the Great

Depression drew attention away from grassroots reform activities as many social workers were employed in organizations, committees, bureaus, and agencies. Meanwhile, intellectual activity that would later become significant for organizing thrived during the Depression. This is evidenced by the production of manuals about community organizing that were produced at the time; additionally, the emergence of the field of city planning indicates that creative intellectual work regarding urban areas and social reform was occurring in that decade.

The aforementioned manuals were written from the conceptual perspective of the organizer. Their framework was a response to the industrialization of cities, and most identified the organizer's goal as a reconstruction of small communities within the urban metropolis. The authors acknowledge their concern about the relationship between professional organizer and citizens – manuals recognize that a necessary tension arises between direction from leadership and public control by volunteer citizens. This same tension continues to play out into the twenty-first century, particularly in terms of race and class, as we shall later see when turning to the First Presbyterian Church of Pomona.

Social planners of the 1930s were process-focused. They were heavily influenced by John Dewey's ideas about democracy and community participation in decision-making. Intellectual efforts focused on developing technologies, and tools like social surveys emerged from this decade as a result. Influential authors and thinkers in the field during this decade included Steiner, McClenahan, Hart,

Pettit, and Lindeman; all authored and published what can now be considered

manuals for organizers. Despite the publication of these manuals, the definition of

organizing remained unclear in the 1930s and the training of professional

organizers was not standardized. In a 1939 report presented at the National

Conference of Social Work, Robert P. Lane proposed a definition of organizing as

a bridge for the gap between social welfare agencies and social welfare needs.

The Lane Report solidified community organizing as a subcategory of social work

and standardized education for professional organizers. This understanding

remains influential but has developed significantly since Lane's address. During

the 1940s, professional organizers began being trained at colleges and universities

for the first time. The field became increasingly standardized, but developments

reached a standstill during World War II.

   The fact that "community organizing" has historically been very affected

by its socio-political context makes it difficult to define and therefore a

troublesome concept to analyze, but a helpful framework has been proposed by

Jack Rothman. Rothman identifies three main trends in community organization

activities that can be useful in situating particular examples within a greater trend,

and his framework breaks down the field into variables that can be individually

identified and analyzed (see Table 1; Betten 87). These definitions will later

become important when I examine religious organizing; religion has significantly

influenced and defined the content of these categories for many groups, including

the First Presbyterian Church of Pomona.

Table 1

Three Models of Community Organization Practice According to Selected

Variables

Variable	Model A: Locality Development	Model B: Social Planning	Model C: Social Action
1. Goal categories of community action	Self help; community capacity and integration (process goals)	Problem solving with regard to substantive community problems (task goals)	Shifting of power relationships and resources; basic institutional change (task or process goals)
2. Assumptions concerning community structure and problem conditions	Community eclipsed, anomie; lack of relationships and democratic problem-solving capacities: static traditional community	Substantive social problems: mental and physical health, housing, recreation	Disadvantaged populations, social injustice, deprivation, inequity
3. Basic change strategy	Broad cross section of people involved in determining and solving their own problems	Fact gathering about problems and decisions on the most rational course of action	Crystallization of issues and organization of people to take action against enemy targets
4. Characteristic change tactics and techniques	Consensus: communication among community groups and interests; group discussion	Consensus or conflict	Conflict or contest: confrontation, direct action, negotiation
5. Salient practitioner roles	Enabler-catalyst, coordinator; teacher of problem-solving skills and ethical values	Fact gatherer and analyst, program implementer, facilitator	Activist advocate: agitator, broker, negotiator, partisan
6. Medium of change	Manipulation of small task-oriented groups	Manipulation of formal organizations and of data	Manipulation of mass organizations and political process

7. Orientation towards power structure(s)	Members of power structure as collaborators in common venture	Power structure as employers and sponsors	Power structure as external target of action: oppressors to be coerced or overturned
8. Boundary definition of the community client system or constituency	Total geographic community	Total community or community segment (including "functional" community)	Community segment
9. Assumptions regarding interests of community subparts	Common interests or reconcilable differences	Interests reconcilable or in conflict	Conflicting interests which are not easily reconcilable; scarce resources
10. Conception of client population or constituency	Citizens	Consumers	Victims
11. Conception of client role	Participants in an interactional problem-solving process	Consumers or recipients	Employers, constituents, members

Saul Alinsky and Social Action

The best representative of the third model of community organizing,
which Rothman calls the "social action" model, is Saul Alinsky. Alinsky's work
represents the definitional beginning of the modern era of community organizing,
and his influence on contemporary organizing is completely unmatched. He first
received widespread attention when Charles Silberman published *Crisis in Black
and White* in 1956, which gave Alinsky's strategies credit as effective and
creative responses to poverty. Though he is often treated as a major innovator in
the field, Alinsky borrowed much of his philosophy and strategy from labor
organizing models and practices. This connection highlights similarities between

community organizing and the labor movement which still exist today.

His main inspiration came from the Congress of Industrial Organizations of the 1930s. Alinsky wrote in his book *Rules for Radicals* that his approaches differed from the CIO, but sociologists Betten and Austin suggest that perhaps he owed the CIO a greater debt than he realized. They trace many of Alinsky's later organizing successes to his experiences working on the fringes of the CIO as an organizer for their Newspaper Guild. The CIO was a dissident rival group to the American Federation of Labor and identified itself as more liberal and radical than that parent organization. Alinsky's work with the CIO also included representing portions of the United Mine Workers, who were fairly conservative relative to the socialist Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union with whom Alinsky was also involved. Some members of the United Mine Workers opposed the organization's president, John Lewis, but Alinsky borrowed many strategies from Lewis; he later credited Lewis as an inspiration and even wrote a biography of him (Betten 171).

Alinsky only organized where a community invited him to do so. He required a fee from any group who contracted him as an organizer, and responded to sufficiently high desire from the constituency. The CIO had a similar policy by working exclusively with industrial workers who requested their organizing assistance during and following the Great Depression. This policy becomes particularly relevant in my later discussion of the theological responses to

tensions in community organizing – one such tension, as mentioned previously, addresses the organizer/constituency relationship.

The method of organizing that defines Alinsky's work is that of "controlled conflict," a strategy that uses "conflict as an organizational vehicle" which attempts to "wrest power from elite groups and redistribute it to their constituency" (Betten 153). Power was always the goal for Alinsky, which became difficult when transitioning from organizing industrial workers to organizing neighborhoods; geographically defined communities tend to have a vaguely identified enemy rather than a specific employer whom the labor movement could address. This question of goal, motivation, and purpose will be addressed in greater detail later through examination of individual Christians involved in community organizing and larger groups that support and educate them.

The strategy that Alinsky borrowed from the Congress Industrial Organizations followed a predictable pattern. He began by finding local natural opinion leaders – people or institutions who could disseminate his philosophy to a broader constituency. Examples of such leaders include reporters and newspapers, natural leaders in workplaces, and religious leaders. The use of these leaders was a primary conduit through which religion became an integral part of Alinsky's organizing – he strategically used religious leaders to present his point of view to entire communities. Religion provides a huge array of resources for organizers

and, therefore, a strong relationship has almost always existed between community organizing and religion.

Next, Alinsky would find key issues affecting the population. He always addressed many of these problems in campaigns because he believed that individuals held a hierarchy of issues, and by presenting multiple issues he could appeal to more individuals based on their diverse hierarchies. Alinsky also knew that one-issue groups die off when their solitary issue is resolved, and he attempted to constantly replace solved problems with new unsolved ones so as to continue the struggle indefinitely. He primarily appealed to economic interests of both his constituents and their opposition, but also connected these economic issues to moral or ethical ones through use of religious structures and rhetoric.

A tool that Alinsky seemed to particularly enjoy using was the demonization of his opposition and polarization of his issues. Alinsky always made a point of targeting a specific personal enemy – an employer, a business owner, etc. – rather than a vague or nuanced elite group. From there, he ensured that no middle ground could be found on any key issue; everything was presented as black and white, such that his constituent's viewpoint was ethically good and the opposition's was ethically bad. This "tactic of polarizing the issues and personalizing the enemy has been controversial, particularly in church circles – where, nevertheless, Alinsky had considerable support" (Betten 155).

Perhaps the most necessary component of Alinsky's strategy was his

courting of potential supporters. To do so, Alinsky understood the importance of

being familiar with the culture and experience of the people he was organizing.

He recognized that people only knew or understood their own experiences, and

spent time immersing himself in that before he began to organize. He would then

make contacts within the community and take advantage of support that he had

gained in the courting process. The CIO had a similar approach, from which

Alinsky learned, which included a fundamentally religious aspect. Because the

CIO was often organizing immigrant groups that were ethnically defined, this

acculturation often took the form of engaging with religious leaders of those

ethnic groups; "the CIO organizing committees sometimes brought mutually

hostile ethnic associations together in loose alliances and combined them with

church groups" (Betten 157). The CIO was supported by some middle-class

Protestant ministers, but primarily drew support from religious leadership close to

congregations that included workers being organized. In order to enhance its

religious appeal, the CIO partnered with the Association of Catholic Trade

Unionists, the Catholic Radical Alliance, and the Catholic Worker Movement.

Catholic priests traveled to areas that were primarily Catholic in order to speak

out in support of unionization, denying claims that the CIO was run by

Communists – these priests were known as "labor priests," and included

theologians Charles Owen Rice and John A. Ryan. Though Alinsky did not so

formally align himself with religious organizations or institutions, he became very

adept at working with religious leaders to influence their constituency. In fact, sociologists have later noted the same skill in the next generation of organizers who were trained under his philosophies: "Alinsky organizers have been particularly adept at gaining support of clerics and using their church facilities" (Betten 156).

We will see this process of familiarization enacted by religious organizations such as the First Presbyterian Church of Pomona and its related institutions; once more, we will see how the tension of "becoming part" of the community receives new coloring through the theological emphases of Christian organizers. Though Alinsky had no particularly religious motivation for that strategy, there are Christian individuals and groups who work among the poor using tools like community organizing and following Alinsky's strategy for explicitly religious reasons. Tensions between organizer and community are both exaggerated and alleviated through the use of theology.

Critics of Alinsky and the institutions that his organizers have left behind notice "bourgeois tendencies" in their administrations and goals (Betten 160). Some labor unions have faced a similar complaint, but these unions face the tension of seeking to accurately represent the goals of their constituency. Some critics of Alinsky's legacy suggest that organizing efforts are actually defending middle-class interests rather than those of the working class (for example, fighting the deterioration of housing so that nicer middle-class homes nearby don't

diminish in value). The organizations that Alinsky left behind tend to be run by white, middle-class organizers from outside the community, or by leaders from within the community who are better off and better educated than any other members (including religious clerics). In short, critics note that Alinsky's organizations are made up of "middle-class persons [who] are trying to combat lower-class problems" (Betten 163).

This problem becomes very relevant in the specific case study that I examine in this thesis. The people and organizations that I have researched tend to be run by better-educated, wealthier, white leaders who have committed themselves to the cause of the lower class. Though a level of self-awareness about this dynamic is certainly present, the groups have yet to successfully reflect the demographics of the people they live and serve among. In order to address this tension, theologies of incarnation and salvation are invoked, both of which will be detailed in later chapters.

The influence that Alinsky has had on organizing today, including organizing by religious groups, is almost immeasurable. In fact, scholar Jeremy Posadas notes that one definitive aspect of religious organizing groups is their relative allegiance to Alinsky and his strategies. One identifiable characteristic of congregation-based community organizing groups is their level of disagreement with Alinsky's strategies (Posadas 278). For many religious groups, Alinsky is too aggressive, combative, and conflict-oriented. For others, his extreme methods

are consistent with radical theologies of liberation and justice. Despite these issues, religious organizing today follows an Alinskyite model in a variety of incarnations.

Community Organizing Today

The picture of community organizing today is strikingly different from some if its appearances throughout history, but it retains its main principles. While at different points in time social justice efforts were focused on institutions and fundraising, organizing today has more of a grassroots ideology. A basic process outlines modern grassroots geographic community organizing. I will follow the outline of Millennium Tools, a nonprofit think tank working to improve the long-term success of community organizing, because their description of the organizing process takes into account international stories while focusing on the most universally utilized techniques (millenniumtools.org).

Individual Meetings. First, the organizer has many one-on-one conversations with members of the community. In these, residents are encouraged to share about their experiences and concerns in an open and safe environment. By meeting with community members face-to-face, the organizer is able to identify widespread local concerns. Through these conversations, the organizer attempts to identify indigenous leadership potential. A group of local leaders will ideally be formed into an organizing team and will lead this and the rest of the process (www.milleniumtools.org).

House Meetings. Often, house meetings are used as the next stage of the process. Seven to fifteen people meet at the home of a neighborhood member, or at a community center or church. This setting provides the opportunity for neighbors to build relationship with one another in their home context. The group at the house meeting can be connected by geography (they live in the same neighborhood), issue (a common problem affects them all), or institution (they all belong to the same church, organization, school, etc). The house meeting is similar to the individual meetings in that members are invited to share their experiences and concerns; the organizer or indigenous leader guides the discussion by asking questions of individuals and encouraging depth and vulnerability. Once key issues of concern are agreed upon by the group, action teams are delineated and each is assigned a particular issue – it is that group's responsibility to research the issue (such as crime and gangs) and develop options for action to take in response to it (www.milleniumtools.org).

Research Actions. In organizing, an "action " is "an intentional and deliberate act on the part of the community organization to require a response of an official or leader on the issue the organization has determined needs to be acted upon" – research actions are particular types of actions that seek to gather information and data for the organization (Linthicum *Transforming Power* 156). Teams created out of the house meeting propose actions that will eventually be used in response to an issue, and then do any necessary research to make those

actions effective. For example, a team might put on an event in which a public

official is invited to a local church where the community can voice its concerns to

the leader and ask the leader to commit to responding to those concerns in specific

ways. Research action teams are responsible for determining which public leaders

should be present, how to invite them, and what types of questions should be

asked of them. Research action teams also meet with leaders of other institutions

or congregations in order to build broad-based support for the issue, or gather

statistical data that can be presented to public leaders. The process is essentially

five parts:

(1) Determine issue and tentative action
(2) Test tentative action to see if it is winnable
(3) Determine what data is necessary to evaluate tentative action
(4) Undertake research and gather results
(5) Examine results and undertake actual action in light of results

Actions. Actions are designed with a particular response in mind; often,

this response is garnered from a public official or another person of leadership

and influence. Essentially, the community makes a demand of that official and

calls for a commitment in response. The organization often sets a date by which

an issue should be resolved so as to avoid empty promises, and hopes to have

done adequate research to disable the official from suggesting that he or she is

somehow unable to perform the task requested. These actions are the climax of

the organizing process:

an action is an exercise of power. It is the ultimate act of power of a

relational organization… it is calling that official to accountability before the people who elected him to office or who supply the tax dollars to pay his salary, or who purchase that company's services or products. An action is democracy in action, expecting officials to be servants of the people rather than to act as if they are the people's lords and masters (Linthicum *Transforming Power* 160).

The basic underlying principle that guides community organizing is to always empower the people. Affectionately known as the "iron rule" of organizing, this rule states that the organizer should "never do for people what they can do for themselves." This iron rule guides all action that the organizer takes, and seeks to create a community led by indigenous and local leaders rather than by professional organizers from the outside. It grants dignity and respect to people who are often not afforded those affirmations, and assumes that people have the capacity to change their own circumstances (Linthicum *Transforming Power* 161).

Since Alinsky, many other social movements have been influenced by organizing – the Civil Rights movement, the feminist movement, the Chicano movement and Cesar Chavez, multiple anti-war movements, and the contemporary gay rights movement among them. Even current President Barack Obama has training and experience in organizing, and some noticed its principles enacted throughout his campaign for presidential office; his vice-presidential opponent Sarah Palin brought great publicity to Obama's organizing experience during a public event during the campaign in which she noted that her experiences

as the mayor of Wasilla, Alaska were "sort of like being a community organizer, except that you have actual responsibilities." One rebuttal to this statement, though somewhat comedic, well-illustrates the deep connections between organizing and religion: a series of buttons and stickers that stated, "Jesus was a community organizer; Pontius Pilate was a governor" (Davis 1).

Today many organizations and institutions exist that follow Alinsky's methods, like the recently-controversial ACORN and the large Industrial Areas Foundation (or IAF, founded by Alinsky himself). Professional organizers continue to be trained and employed by similar groups, and work is being done in institutional organizing as well. The IAF now has affiliates which work to organize preexisting institutions (such as churches, schools, unions, and non-profits) around wide issues. As I mentioned in my introduction, the First Presbyterian Church of Pomona is a member institution of the southern California affiliate of the IAF, called OneLA.

Religion and Community Organizing

<u>The Catholic Worker Movement</u>

Just as any exploration of contemporary community organizing must include an understanding of Saul Alinsky's life and philosophy, a discussion of religion's involvement in organizing must begin with the Catholic Worker Movement. Most scholars identify this movement as the first example of an explicitly religious organizing movement (Betten 171); the Catholic Worker

Movement enjoyed much success and lasting influence within religious communities and for the organizing movement as a whole. The particular groups of religious people involved in organizing that will be the focus on this thesis have been inspired by the Catholic Worker Movement, and that comes as no surprise.

As I noted previously, the Great Depression offered ripe ground for experimentation in social work. The economic collapse of the Great Depression is evident from a cursory examination of the decade's unemployment rates. In 1933, about thirteen million Americans were unemployed; between 1934 and 1936, that number wavered between ten and eleven million; and by 1940 almost ten million remained unemployed. According to *Fortune* magazine, one out of every four employable people were out of work during that decade – the unemployment rate skyrocketed from three percent in 1929 to 25 percent in 1933. Racial tensions rose, especially for African Americans, and homelessness was a definitive social problem (Betten 174).

One social experiment was the growth of religious groups explicitly working for a particular social agenda, including the Catholic Worker Movement. The CWM was founded by Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day; Maurin served as the philosophical grounding for the movement while Day acted as its actual leader. An itinerant French philosopher, Maurin was influenced by the likes of Hillaire Belloc and Eric Gill. He espoused a decidedly anticapitalist utopian ideology that

led him to envision a social movement away from urban cities and towards more primitive, village-like structures. Maurin encouraged the creation of communes, primarily agricultural and non-mechanized, in which capitalism could be avoided. The communes that were created throughout the CWM were never actually forced to hold to Maurin's ideas. They were independently owned, financed, and governed, though Maurin's influence remained strong. By the end of the 1930s, over a dozen communes were working closely with the movement (some were formally affiliated and others not). The CWM is evidence of six main components of the relationship between religion and community organizing: a ready-made constituency, a mission, organizational networks, leadership pool and training capacity, financial resources, and a social action model of community organization (referring to Table 1's Type C). These components can be applied to other examples of religious organizations working for social change through organizing and are exemplified through the Catholic Workers Movement. Examination of these components helps illuminate why community organizing and religion have been so closely associated, and how their cooperation can be very powerful. I will now detail those components, using the CWM as an example throughout this explanation as a means of introducing the movement.

First, religious organizations provide a ready-made constituency. Sometimes community organizing focuses on a geographically defined group of people, and other times by another subset of the community (such as a particular

type of worker). In any given setting, one challenge for an organizer is to clearly define his or her constituency and ensure that all members solidly self-identify as a part of that group. Religious organizations make these tasks quite simple. Millions of Americans belong to churches or synagogues, and most of these include some form of program to educate new members. This membership is sometimes formal and sometimes informal, but members nevertheless tend to understand themselves as part of the larger body. Further, membership often carries some expectation of action in response to an educational message – this response, however, is usually only actualized by the minority of membership (Betten 176).

The CWM worked with an expectation that only a minority of members would take real action. Within the movement, individuals were encouraged to take whatever steps they could to respond to crises, and the group's philosophy included an understanding that "a change in the world began with man… he must put on the Christ and action which began his own salvation and that of the universe too" (Betten 179). The CWM itself represented a minority of American Catholics during the Great Depression, but has nonetheless had a lasting influence on Catholic circles. The ready-made constituency of working-class Catholics, idealistic clerics, and lay intellectuals provided a clearly defined group with which the CWM could work to organize (Betten 175).

In the United States, religious groups often treat theology as directly

prompting various kinds of ethical action – creating a mission. Members of the

religious constituency have already agreed on a common value or belief system,

and organizers then need to simply relate their cause to that theology. "The

mission or model for action is used as a reference point by organizers within the

church; it is the higher purpose to which one is committed and the daily strategies

are related to the higher purpose" (Betten 179). This education of mission is an

important process when considering the means by which congregations are

motivated from theory to action, and examples of that education will be addressed

in this thesis.

Another component of religious groups working in organization for social

justice are those groups' organizational networks and financial resources. Usually,

religious organizations are connected to national or even international networks

through denominations or other associations. This rootedness gives organizers a

broader means for information dissemination and can mean greater opportunities

for recruitment of leaders. Organizers tend to be locally focused, so this

connection is not always utilized, but creative methods of retaining locality while

taking advantage of network can be very beneficial. For example, the Catholic

Workers Movement leader Dorothy Day used national and international Catholic

print media to publish its theories and experiences to a wide audience, attracting a

large body of support. These broad support networks can be particularly useful

with regards to financial resources; Dorothy Day used the *Catholic Worker* to ask

for financial support from a wide Catholic readership who was sympathetic to her cause (Betten 181).

Religious organizations provide excellent bases for training. Most structured religious groups contain an educational element, in which members are educated from elementary levels sometimes through higher professional training. Some have subgroups, like committees, whose purpose is to sensitize and involve their congregation towards local or larger justice issues. Members of these organizations tend to expect an educational component to their participation, through things like sermons, studies of sacred scripture, books, and courses. This training capacity gives organizers a pre-structured environment in which their philosophy can be taught to members. The Catholic Workers Movement used structures like retreats, conferences, and educational forums to spread their theories because Catholics were already accustomed to being educated in these formats (Betten 178).

A leadership system defines most religious organizations, in which some hierarchy of membership exists with regards to decision-making power. As I noted above, community organizing groups have historically taken full advantage of religious leaders as means to influence communities. Finding leaders that already have respect, support, and allegiance from a community is a faster and more effective mode of winning people for a social cause than an organizer attempting to become a person of authority within a community by his or herself.

Further, lay people within religious organizations can be trained as leaders of a social organizing movement and thereby affect their religious community as a social leader rather than a religious one.

Finally, religious organizations are prime environments in which a social action model of community organization can take place. The social action model requires recognition of an entire segment of society as being disadvantaged; this perception can be defined in religious terms and within a religious-rhetorical framework. Groups of people can be given labels or titles using religious language, making that categorization easy. Religious groups can point to a discrepancy between a religious ideal and the social reality, which inspires and motivates members into collective action. The social action model attempts to change entire institutions, even in basic ways, which involves changing power dynamics, decision-making privileges, resources, and policies. Such broad change requires collective and collaborative action rather than purely individual involvement, though individuals must first be inspired to respond. During the Great Depression, religious organizers used tactics connected to the social action model of organizing, including nonviolent direct action, educational activities based on moral persuasion, boycotts and picketing, public demonstrations, and civil disobedience. The Catholic Worker Movement consistently called for this individual response by directing each person to "begin where you are with what you have," and from there organized increasingly larger groups of people. This

duality of individual response and corporate action is well-achieved by religious

groups (Betten 185). The relationship between religion and organizing has

evolved greatly since the Catholic Worker Movement, though the above

components remain salient today. A modern form of this relationship known as

faith- or congregation-based community organizing, a phenomenon that I will

now discuss in detail.

Faith- or Congregation- Based Community Organizing (FBCO or CBCO)

Religion's influence on justice movements is nothing new. As evidenced

by the Catholic Worker Movement, there is good reason for religion to be a

successful aspect of social justice initiatives:

> Religion can help provide some of the things that every social movement
> needs: people to help lead the movement; material resources such as
> money, phones, meeting space, and so on; and social capital and
> organizational structures that facilitate mobilization…more specific to
> religion are other factors: complex cultural resources that can
> simultaneously undergird both contestation and compromise; symbols,
> images, and stories that motivate and provide meaning for the struggle
> (e.g., the Exodus story, the Jewish social prophets, Jesus' confrontations
> with irresponsible authority the Jewish mystical tradition of "repairing the
> world," Islamic understandings of the just community); legitimacy in the
> eyes of the wider society; and a sense of primary community separate
> from the struggle that unburdens the organization from needing to provide
> primary social support for participants… religion, in fostering the spiritual
> dimension of human life, pulls people out of their embeddedness in the
> status quo of society, allow them to gain critical distance from it, and
> helps them to imagine alternatives to current social arrangement. In doing
> so, religion provides ethical leverage against the taken-for-grantedness
> that leads people to accept unjust social situations (Wood 398).

The story of the Exodus has inspired fights for justice by religious groups for centuries and continues to do so today; the early struggle against enclosure in England drew support from biblical definitions of justice; the American labor movement of the 1800s and that century's fight against slavery were backed by religion; during the 1950s and 1960s, the American Civil Rights Movement was crucially upheld by mobilization and organization by religion (Wood 387).

A more recent inception of this phenomenon is that of faith-based (or congregation-based) community organizing. I will use the term "faith" over "congregation" here because its broadness allows for inclusion of religious institutions or groups that are not defined specifically by congregation, though I do so with recognition that a majority of this organizing is done by religious congregations (and that some such organizing involves interfaith groups). Faith-based community organizing (FBCO) is defined as community organizing done by groups of people who primarily hold in common their religious affiliation. FBCO has primarily, though not exclusively, been enacted by Christians, and therefore Christianity will be the focus of this study.

FBCO is an international phenomenon. In Britain, working-class areas of London and other major cities have been organized by mostly Christian and Jewish groups who draw on indigenous literature and American sources for inspiration. The "Kairos Document" produced in 1986 by Protestant and Catholic clergy from South Africa was a significant argument for Christianity's opposition

to apartheid; it articulated why apartheid was incongruent with Christian tenets and demanded action by the church to reverse it. In the Philippines, liberation theology has been adapted to the nation's particular political culture. "Minjung theology" in Korea argues that Christianity must support democratization based on the people as an active historical agent (Wood 178).

In Latin America, *communidades eclesiales de base* (often translated as "base Christian communities") developed in the 1960s. In this movement, Catholic leaders applying changes from the Second Vatican Council reemphasized the social aspects of Christianity to address social inequality in Latin America. This was initially, at least in part, a response to the strong value for proselytism in protestant evangelical groups that led to more rapid growth than Catholicism experienced. The movement's focus on justice quickly intensified due to the pressures of economic inequality and political repression that only grew throughout the 1960s and 1970s, aided by Paulo Freire's works that articulated the influence of pedagogical models on political consciousness-raising. These *comunidades* later became significant in the redemocratization of many Latin American countries and to the rise of guerilla insurgencies in some (including Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Mexico) in the 1980s and 1990s. The theoretical framework underlying this movement is known as a "theology of liberation" and is most strongly associated with scholars Gutierrez, Sobrino, and Tamez. This liberation theology has had a lasting influence on FBCO

internationally, and especially in the United States (Wood 194).

In the United States, FBCO both follows and transcends Alinsky's organizing legacy. FBCO is institutionally based in urban religious congregations and is culturally based in religious culture; sometimes efforts are put forth by organizations linked to multiple religious congregations or denominations, operating as distinct tax exempt nonpartisan 501c(3) organizations under IRS code. FBCO has not been widely or deeply studied in academia but some research suggests that it is currently the most widespread social justice movement in the United States (Wood 200). Organizations are most strongly represented in California, Texas, New York, Illinois, and Florida, but are present in over thirty states and the District of Columbia. Over 3,500 congregations and over 500 other institutions (schools, labor unions, neighborhood associations, community centers, etc.) are affiliated with FBCO which plausibly leads to over two million members of religious congregations in the nation being somehow affected by the movement. Some impressive initiatives have been accomplished by the largest of these groups, including education reform in Texas undertaken by the Industrial Areas Foundation Network in that area (reform which, arguably, the then-governor George W. Bush later took credit for) (Dillon 97). The multi-racial nature of this movement is also impressive – though many congregations involved in FBCO are not very diverse, the movement as a whole represents a surprising number and proportion of ethnicities (see Table 2; Wood 184).

Table 2

Racial Makeup of Congregations Sponsoring Faith-Based Organizing

	Racial/Ethnic Diversity (majority ethnicity of _congregations_)
38%	White/European American
33%	African American
20%	Hispanic (includes native-born and immigrant)
9%	Other (mostly interracial; less than 2% majority Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American)

The religious diversity of FBCO is also interesting; very few non-Christian religions are represented, but denominationally the makeup of the movement is quite distinct compared to national averages (see Table 3; Wood 196). It is noteworthy that traditionalist and conservative Protestant traditions (such as Southern Baptists) are so scarcely involved, especially considering that they represent almost one-third of religious congregations in the United States today. The "other non-Christian" religions represented include Mormon, Islamic, Buddhist, and Hindu congregations; many of these are involved in interfaith efforts rather than single-denomination organizations.

But why these denominations in particular? One important aspect of this question is location – these denominations have the most congregations located in large urban areas, which is where much socioeconomic tension is strongly felt and where FBCO tends to take place. Also, funding has recently been made available to these denominations through the Catholic bishops' "Catholic Campaign for

Human Development" and some mainline Protestant and Jewish funding
agencies. Emphasis on "this-world" issues has been more common in liberal and
moderate Protestant as well as African American traditions in recent decades than
in more conservative denominations, which alternatively have focused on
personal morality and ethical issues rather than social justice. A final reason is
that some conservative traditions, like suburban Southern Baptists, are made up of
more affluent membership than average Catholic or liberal/moderate Protestant
congregations tend to be.

Table 3

Religious Makeup of Congregations Sponsoring Faith-Based Organizing.

	Religious Diversity (denomination of *congregations*)
35%	Roman Catholic
34%	Moderate/Liberal Protestant
13%	Baptist (mostly National, Missionary, and Primitive Baptists, thus mostly African American)
5%	Historically Black Protestant
3%	Traditional Protestant
2%	Jewish
2%	Church of God in Christ (Pentecostal, mostly African American)
2%	Unitarian Universalist
3%	Other Christian
<1%	Other non-Christian

Scholarly attention to FBCO has thus far been fairly limited, and has also
focused on the sociological and political aspects of the movement rather than its
religious roots. Many scholars have noted the great potential for furthering

democracy that lies in FBCO; Richard L. Wood condenses this academic work into six main foci. First, religious organizations have greater democratic import based on recent work regarding how Americans acquire civic skills that eventually contribute to their political effectiveness. Second, religion in the United States has not succumbed to privatization but has instead maintained a very public presence around various issues in diverse political settings. Third, cultural dynamics have been shown to play a central role in the success of grassroots political movements and religion provides a specific culture for these movements to be grounded in. Fourth, a key weakness in the last few decades of civil society in the United States is the erosion of "social capital" (that is, the quantity and quality of ties between individuals), and that weakness is answered by the relational capacity of religious congregations. Fifth, a structurally weak public realm in America can be compensated for by the presence of a bridging institution (that is, a church). Sixth and finally, studies suggest that the political sophistication and creativity of a social movement are crucial to its success; many FBCO organizations (such as PICO, IAF, and others) are impressively creative in strategy and sophisticated in structure. Despite how much attention has been given to FBCO's democratic potential (and that potential is serious and real), very little has discussed its relation to theology or doctrine – I seek to address this absence in this thesis.

Tensions Between Religion and Organizing

There may be a good deal of overlap in value between religion, Christianity in particular, and community organizing – but there has also been a history of tension between those two entities. Saul Alinsky was especially successful at garnering criticism from the Christian church. During the 1950s, Alinsky worked with Hispanic Americans in California, and trained later leader Cesar Chavez. He was heavily criticized for his work in California by Catholic churches in the area. Chavez himself had a difficult time gaining respect from other religious leaders because of his affiliation with Alinsky and his self-identification as a Christian. In fact, scholars have noticed unusual collaboration between Protestants and Catholics in their opposition to Alinsky. These forces tended to identify Alinsky strongly with Communism and fear him on those grounds. Throughout the 1960s, Alinsky received heavy condemnation from Lutheran churches in response to his work organizing Lutheran communities. Perhaps the strongest criticism as well as strongest support of Alinsky came from Christian institutions (Blanton 54).

Another issue that Christianity has often found with organizing is its pursuit of power. In his book *Transforming Power*, organizer and Presbyterian minister Robert Linthicum seeks to address the church and its fear of power by putting forth "a theology of power" (Linthicum *Transforming Power* 13). He begins by quoting the Apostle Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians: "for the kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power." The book goes on to respond

to Christians' common discomfort with power in general and their perception that power is un-Christlike. Linthicum explains that out of his experience working with organizing worldwide for many decades, he encountered many Christians who were unable to support the organizing cause because of their desire to avoid power rather than help anyone to gain it.

Of course, other tensions between religion and organizing arise because the religious *are* the ones with the power that organizing attempts to shift. Alinsky constantly associates religion with power and particularly criticizes the Judeo-Christian tradition in the western world for perpetuating inequality and upholding the status quo for its own benefit. Religious individuals and institutions are just as corrupt – or more so – as any others, and organizing therefore sometimes addresses that corruption through its philosophy and actions.

Tensions within Community Organizing

This thesis addresses two main tensions that have historically arisen within community organizing, from both religious and secular organizers and institutions. The first tension responds to motivation and purpose: why should someone dedicate his or her life to being an organizer? What is the point of organizing? Does it bring about long-term effective change? If not, what should inspire individuals or communities to engage in the process anyway? As the movement enters into its seventh decade of existence (the fourth of its contemporary era), organizers must consider questions of efficacy and purpose.

The second tension is distinct: what is the appropriate relationship between organizer and community? How can an organizer really become part of the community he or she seeks to work with, and to what extent is that immersion impossible (or even undesirable)? What does it mean to actually allow people to identify and solve their own problems, while avoiding colonialism? Articulations of these issues have been present throughout the entire movement and can be addressed from various worldviews and experiences. I have found that responses to these tensions that are grounded in Christian theology are especially engaging and original.

Conclusion and Overview – a Christian Theological Response

I will ground the Christian responses to such questions in research focused on a specific Christian community that is engaged with community organizing, the First Presbyterian Church of Pomona. This focus necessarily allows that other Christian individuals or groups have different viewpoints or may articulate similar positions in distinct ways; however, FPCP's responses have been expressed across a fairly broad Christian spectrum and other examples will be included to support that trend. Both questions are answered within the theological subset of Christology.

With regards to motivation, Christians working for justice at First Presbyterian Church of Pomona (FPCP) often invoke theologies of salvation and judgment, in connection with Christology, to explain their personal motivation.

Biblical passages in which God instructs his people to serve the poor are cited as authoritative, including stories from both the Hebrew Bible and Christian testament. Jesus' teachings regarding poverty and injustice are similarly inspirational. In particular, a teaching of Jesus' in Matthew chapter 25 is interpreted as connecting serving the poor with judgment and salvation. This provides a sense of purpose for many in the congregation.

The tense relationship between organizer and community is interpreted as being analogous to the doctrine of the incarnation, also a part of Christology. Jesus is viewed as an incarnation of the divine: God's choice to be a human among humans for the good of humans. This incarnation is understood as a model for the organizer – "incarnational ministry" is ministry that follows this example. John 1 is cited as a clear picture of that model, in conjunction with other Christian Testament sections. These scriptures inspire organizers to "incarnate" similarly into the neighborhoods where they organize, and serve to justify that acculturation by creating a positive model rather than allowing fears of colonialism to override the process. In the following two chapters, I turn to consider the effectiveness of these theologies in answering the tensions of community organizing in general, and faith-based community organizing in particular.

Chapter Three

Introduction

The community organizing movement has been lauded by social scientists as
holding great promise for the future of democracy in America (Posadas 293,
Wood 149). Faith-based community organizing has had even more positive
acclaim as it utilizes aspects of religion that enhance the organizing process
(Wood 149). However, the phenomenon is not without its problems. Critics have
noticed community organizing's bourgeois tendencies and strong affiliation with
the middle class, seemingly contradicting its supposed values (Betten 171).
Further, such an issue-based struggle leads to short-term achievements; as issues
are resolved, momentum dies. Professional organizing is an extremely time- and
energy-taxing job, and formal education for organizers is not available in
traditional colleges and universities. This combination leads to a huge shortage of
organizers relative to impoverished neighborhoods in the United States. The
relationship between organizer and constituency continues to be difficult to
navigate, particularly given issues of colonialist distinctions in race and class
between organizer and community. In the following two chapters, I focus on two
main tensions that arise within community organizing both in its secular and faith-
based incarnations: motivation and relationship. Using scripture from the Hebrew

Bible and Christian Testament, I will examine how Christian theology responds to these tensions in unique ways. This chapter addresses the question of motivation.

Saul Alinsky's Motivation

Published at the end of his community organizing career in 1971, Saul Alinsky's Rules for Radicals is a book designed to prepare and inspire the next generation of organizers who he hopes will follow in his footsteps. The book is subtitled "A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals," and it contains his personal philosophy, political ideology, thoughts about how organizers should be educated, general strategies and tactics, and finally some specific ideas that he was never able to actualize in his own career. In the first chapter of Rules for Radicals, entitled "The Purpose," a salient tension arises: why organize? I propose that Alinsky's answer to this question is less motivating than a theological response provided by Christian individuals and groups in Pomona.

Alinsky explains physicist Niels Bohr's concept of "complementarity," in which multiple difficulties within one experiment allow for comparison and hopefully progress. He notes that while in formal logic contradiction means failure, general human knowledge more generally is advanced by contradiction. Within Alinsky's "ideology of change," this complementarity becomes a core concept – he sees that social change occurs in just the same way. He later discusses the inherent duality of reality, in which all phenomena are understood in terms of cause and effect (Alinsky *Rules for Radicals* 13).

Based on these principles, Alinsky understands social change as inherently contradictory. He recounts many successful organizing movements and describes their outcomes; first the Back of the Yards movement, Alinsky's own most famous organizing achievement:

> in Chicago the people of Upton Sinclair's *Jungle*, then the worst slum in America, crushed by starvation wages when they worked, demoralized, diseased, living in rotting shacks, were organized. Their banners proclaimed equality for all races, job security, and a decent life for all. With their power they fought and won. Today, as part of the middle class, they are also part of our racist, discriminatory culture (Alinsky *Rules for Radicals* 16).

He explains that the Tennessee Valley Authority shifted from exemplifying democracy to destroying the countryside; the CIO moved from being a champion of workers to an "entrenched member of the establishment" by supporting the Vietnam war; high-rise public housing projects once provided an alternative to slums but then became essentially slums themselves (Alinsky *Rules for Radicals* 17). Each supposed victory eventually produced a new setback. In his understanding of class distinctions, Alinsky articulates this contradiction further – he knows that the "have-nots" will become the "haves," and that this process necessarily implies that a new group of "have-nots" will arise as well (Alinsky *Rules for Radicals* 19).

Despite these seemingly bleak prospects, Alinsky describes himself as an optimist – more specifically, he notes that he *must* be an optimist, because otherwise he would have no will to fight. Such a will is necessary because of the

inherent endlessness of the struggle:

> If we think of the struggle as a climb up a mountain, then we must visualize a mountain with no top. We see a top, but when he finally reach it, the overcast rises and we find ourselves merely on a bluff. The mountain continues on up. Now we see the "real" top ahead of us, and strive for it, only to find we've reached another bluff, the top still above us. And so it goes on, interminably. Knowing that the mountain has no top, that it is a perpetual quest from plateau to plateau, the question arises, 'Why the struggle, the conflict, the heartbreak, the danger, the sacrifice. Why the constant climb?' (Alinsky *Rules for Radicals* 21).

Continuing with this mountain metaphor, Alinsky likens the struggle of an organizer to the myth of Sisyphus – destined to endlessly roll a boulder up a hill, only to have it roll back down again upon reaching the top. The organizer, unlike Sisyphus, is in a constant upward push, changing directions all the time.

The answer that Alinsky provides to this deep inquiry as to the purpose for organizing is surprisingly simple: "because it's there" (Alinsky *Rules for Radicals* 22). In some ways, there is no mountaintop by design – instead, the goal is simply to keep finding new directions to push the boulder. He explains that one can choose a life of adventure and challenge, or one of disengagement and delusion. The excitement of the struggle makes fighting for justice worthwhile despite its cyclical ineffectiveness. Those who choose to instead remain content with the status of the world end up living constantly in fear of the loss of their security, which is how Alinsky thinks the majority of people choose to live.

It is significant to note that Alinsky chooses an individualistic justification for

participating in organizing. Instead of trying to argue that his methods are ultimately successful, or at least enough so to justify the amount of time and effort he has dedicated to them, he wants to convince individuals that organizing is a good way for them to live. The basic premise of *Rules for Radicals*, and particularly this chapter on "The Purpose," is that community organizing is worthwhile – Alinsky specifically authored the book as an inspiration to younger organizers. However, when it comes down to it, that inspiration comes not from the effectiveness of tactics but from the desire to live an exciting, adventurous, purposeful life.

Frankly, Alinsky's argument doesn't convince me to become an organizer. The short and almost pessimistic (despite his optimist self-identification) explanation by Alinsky of his own decision to organize seems paradoxical. It is clear that Alinsky is looking to find fulfillment and satisfaction through how he lives, and that might be true of just about everyone. However, the simple fact that organizing is exciting and difficult doesn't seem like a good enough reason to dedicate almost all of my time, energy, and life to the cause. When I first read Alinsky's explanation of his purpose as an organizer, I was struck by how discouraged and uninspired I felt afterward. There are plenty of difficult tasks that I could dedicate my life to completing – why this?

Motivation in Pomona

This problem has played out in Pomona as well. The First Presbyterian Church of Pomona has shrunk significantly from its most populous years, and has even decreased in size within the last decade. When many recent Claremont College graduates moved into the neighborhood and began attending the church during the 1990s, the church experienced a brief revitalization. According to one such graduate, between thirty and fifty students joined the congregation after their graduation within the 1990s, but now less than fifteen of those remain in the city (the congregation also still includes some ex-Servant Partners interns from other parts of the country who joined around the same time). Some left to attend graduate school or pursue careers in other areas, others had originally only intended to live in Pomona for a limited period of time, and still others had to leave for family or personal reasons. Many, though, experienced what one remaining resident described as becoming "burnt out."

I once attended a Bible study in the home of one graduate who had helped found Pomona Hope and remained a Pomona city resident. The Bible study was attended by other similar graduates and by city natives, and we were discussing the book of Hebrews. At the end of the study, participants were invited to share prayer requests. One man spoke up, explaining that he and his wife were feeling discouraged about the city. Their family, from out of the area, was experiencing hardship and he was having a difficult time feeling motivated to stay in Pomona when he might be needed elsewhere. He shared that he was questioning, yet

again, why he had come to the city in the first place and what good he was actually doing there. He asked the group to pray that he and his wife would feel encouraged, and would be reminded about why they had come in the first place.

Not a lot of significant change has happened in the city since the 1990s. While initiatives have taken place that dramatically impacted the lives of certain neighborhoods or residents, the city at large remains poor and FPCP members describe its government as incapable and somewhat corrupt. The neighborhood immediately surrounding Pomona Hope has experienced considerable improvement with the removal of a smoke shop that served as a center for drug and sex trade. A few streets in the city now have streetlights that have increased safety and comfort for residents, making it more difficult for gang members or drug dealers or thieves to hide from police in residents' yards under the cover of darkness. Other actions have taken place to build solidarity among neighborhood residents and call city officials to respond to problems. Overall, though, substantial change is happening very slowly, if at all.

At First Presbyterian Church of Pomona, the city government is not highly regarded. The mayor of Pomona, Elliot Rothman, is perceived by some to be a part of the city's problems. Elected in 2008, Rothman has been generally disliked by members of the FPCP congregation and particularly by those involved in organizing. In December 2009, the Los Angeles *Times* published an article entitled "Pomona's Politics in Turmoil" (the title alone sheds light on the

situation). Rothman beat seven other candidates for mayor but had only won one third of the votes to do so – and only a small percentage of city residents voted at all – indicating that his support is very limited. During the first city council meeting that Rothman oversaw, other local leaders applauded calls for a recall and accusations of the mayor's corrupt removal of well-liked police chief Romero – the chief happened to have arrested Rothman for failing a sobriety test during a routine traffic stop; later, Rothman included a photo of Romero on campaign literature and Romero publicly complained, noting that he was "particularly" not endorsing Rothman for mayor. With Romero out of office and Rothman in, city leaders and residents alike have voiced serious concern (Gold 1).

With a perception of politics as having this level of corruption and ineffectiveness, it isn't hard to understand why individuals hoping to seek justice in Pomona might feel discouraged. Such has regularly been the case at FPCP and Pomona Hope. One congregation member explained that it's difficult to remain optimistic in Pomona when people like Rothman continue to be elected, and where an ethos of hopelessness seems to have overcome the city. Some past members of FPCP were so affected by that ethos that they moved out of the city. Others wondered if Pomona Hope is only creating yet another program that will fail to produce long-term change. Still others simply became fatigued by the mammoth-seeming task of improving the city.

Another congregation member has noticed this problem and is therefore beginning to consider options besides community organizing as models for enacting change. The non-profit organization Millennium Tools was founded as something of a think tank for social change. Seasoned organizers founded and run the organization, some of whom live in Pomona or the surrounding area and attend FPCP. I met with two founders of Millennium Tools to discuss this thesis, and both of them relayed the same story to me. It was about a priest in the Philippines who they have worked with in community organizing. He oversees an incredibly impoverished parish area and struggled to know how he could help his constituency meet its practical day-to-day needs. He learned about community organizing and helped residents form a homeowners association to allow families to own the lots on which they lived. They boast an incredible organizing story of confronting government entities to purchase their own community, and thereafter improve it by rebuilding homes and fences, digging canals, and creating communal solidarity. However, the priest who led this effort remains frustrated – despite these vast improvements, the majority of his parish constituency continues to live on about one dollar per day. The organizing process has only brought limited improvement.

Thinkers at Millennium Tools have begun to consider how organizing could work with the private sector more productively by partnering with businesses and economic interests in order to further goals. They seem inspired by

this story from the Philippines as they wonder how job creation and economic infrastructure could be implemented in that community. Some Millennium Tools organizers have recently received business degrees as a means of continuing to think about this opportunity. They are also brainstorming frameworks of organizing that work more cooperatively with government entities and NGOs in creating a larger network of organizing power. These ideas have been motivated primarily by a recognition of the failures of community organizing.

In a city with bleak prospects using a strategy with recognized problems, organizers in Pomona have felt a need for motivation. Saul Alinsky well-expressed the hopelessness that one can easily feel when working in community organizing, though perhaps he did not answer that problem in the most effective and inspiring way possible. Previously, I have discussed how religion provides a useful pairing for community organizing because of how it can motivate and inspire individuals and communities around common values. That phenomenon has taken place in Pomona and elsewhere as Christians fighting for justice seek to know why that struggle is important and worthwhile.

Biblical Response: Matthew 25:31-46

In talking with members of FPCP about their involvement with justice issues, the following question inevitably arose: why do you do this? I was surprised at the frequency with which members cited passages from the Bible as having been significant in their decisions to originally get involved in Pomona

and in motivating their continuing work there. The story that was cited most

regularly in response to questions of individual intent was a parable that Jesus

tells in Matthew 25:

> 31 'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. [32]All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, [33]and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. [34]Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; [35]for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,[36]I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." [37]Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? [38]And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? [39]And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" [40]And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." [41]Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; [42]for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, [43]I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me." [44]Then they also will answer, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?" [45]Then he will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me." [46]And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.' (NRSV)

Themes of salvation, judgment, justice, and service certainly seem present in this

passage and are relevant to the work of FPCP in Pomona. I will now examine the

textual underpinnings and theological context of the parable, and proceed to present how it is used by people in Pomona.

Theology of Matthew 25

This story has recently been called a "summary of the gospel," and it is seen by some Christians as one of the most challenging parables that Jesus tells in any of the canonical gospels (Gutierrez 86). It is one of the most widely cited across denominational and even religious boundaries and has affected countless Christians (Donahue 3). Historically, it has most often been interpreted to define the "least of Jesus' brothers and sisters" as "suffering Christians or members of one's ecclesiastical community" (Donahue 3). However, since the 19th century, a more universalistic interpretation has become common (particularly among Catholics) which suggests that those sufferers actually refer to all the least in the world. Documents from the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church cite this passage often with a universalistic interpretation; it was quoted at the close of the Vatican II by Pope Paul VI and was later referenced regularly by Pope John Paul II (Donahue 4).

Liberation theologians have also made use of this passage in attempts to engage the Christian world with injustice. Gustavo Gutierrez, perhaps the most important articulator of liberation theology, often uses this story in his writings. He extracts three main points from it: (1) communion and brotherhood is the ultimate meaning of life, (2) love should be manifest in concrete actions, and (3)

contact with God takes place through human mediation (Donahue 4). For

Gutierrez, these points are based in some fundamental aspects of liberation

theology. In his book *A Theology of Liberation*, Gutierrez writes about "Christ in

the Neighbor" in chapter entitled "Encountering God in History." Gutierrez

chooses to interpret the parable to imply that "the least" include all people who

are needy, whether or not they are Christian (Gutierrez 112). He points out that,

according to the parable, failure to act brings as much culpability as express

refusal to act. This culpability is based on an understanding of salvation as

reaching "the fullness of love," which includes establishment of right

relationships with other humans (Gutierrez 113). That love must be manifest

through real actions. In fact, loving God must happen by loving others (see 1 John

3, 4). The Christological implication of this parable in Matthew is that Jesus

Christ *is* in the poor and the oppressed – "it is not enough to say that love of God

is inseparable from the love of one's neighbor. It must be added that love of God

is unavoidably expressed *through* love of one's neighbor. Moreover, God is loved

in the neighbor" (Gutierrez 115). Other liberation theologians have also cited this

passage in desiring to help the Christian church meld faith and action more

successfully instead of separating the concepts. Finally, Gutierrez' liberation

theology leads him to see the parable as an inherently political statement:

"indeed, to offer food or drink in our day is a political action; it means the

transformation of a society structured to benefit a few who appropriate to

themselves the value of the work of others. This transformation ought to be directed toward a radical change in the foundation of society" (Gutierrez 116).

Though the universalistic interpretation of Matthew 25:31-46 has been popular, scholarship within the past two decades has suggested that such a shift was problematic. Interpretation seems to hinge on a key question: who is being judged? Answers that have been argued for include (a) all people (including Jews, Christians, and pagans), (b) all nations (excluding Jews, but including Christians), (c) all gentiles (excluding both Jews and Christians), or (d) leaders within the Christian community (Donahue 15). Some have argued that Matthew's author used another story in which Jesus spoke generally about the poor and edited it in order to meet missional needs of his community, adding the missionary- and nation-themed elements to his version of the tale. Others, including Lamar Cope, have suggested that the story is directed at gentiles being judged based on their rejection or acceptance of Christian missionaries. This theory is based on the story's connection to Jesus' instructions to his disciples in Matthew 28 to make disciples of "all nations." Interestingly, a commentary produced by InterVarsity Christian Fellowship seems to agree with this final (and generally least popular) interpretation. It states:

> In some Jewish apocalyptic texts, the nations would be judged for how they treated Israel. In the Bible, God also judged people for how they treated the poor. But given the use of 'brothers' or 'sisters' and perhaps 'least elsewhere in Matthew, this passage probably refers to receiving messengers of Christ. Such missionaries needed shelter, food, and help in

imprisonment and other complications caused by persecution… receiving them was like receiving Christ. The judgment of all nations thus had to be preceded by the proclamation of the kingdom among them (Keeler 118).

Interpreters have felt hesitant to identify this as a parable because of its setting in a futuristic heavenly realm, though at the very least the comparison between king and shepherd is parable-like. It has also been called an "apocalyptic prediction," but due to its metaphoric nature I prefer the term "apocalyptic parable." Apocalypticism is thematic throughout Matthew and like most similar literature the book does not portray one clear picture of the final judgment. Various stories in Matthew in which this final judgment is referenced contain different categories of who will be judged and on what basis, and attempts to definitively answer those questions of this book as a whole do not do justice to the nature of apocalyptic literature as a genre.

Within the Gospel of Matthew, this story is part of a series of predictions about the future that Jesus makes after a disciple prompts him by asking, "what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" (Matthew 24:3). He then describes the destruction of the temple, a theme that the gospel of Mark focuses on more intently than Matthew chooses to. This placement suggests that the disciples, as his audience, are included in those who will be judged as the surrounding narrative instructs them on how to live until that time comes.

The Christology of this apocalyptic parable is highly significant but has often been overlooked by interpreters who, from an ethical standpoint, are more

concerned about who will be judged and why. Within this brief tale, Matthew

employs major Christological themes from the throughout the rest of his gospel:

the image of Jesus as the Son of Man, the Son of God, the King, the Shepherd,

and *kyrios*. The structure of the story emphasizes its Christological elements: the

introduction and conclusion create a chiasm which highlights the central dialogue

(verses 44-46) between the king and those who are judged (Donahue 17). The

story is rhythmic in its repetition and parallel in its structure, serving to frame and

highlight this interaction: "the primary thrust of the text is in the disclosure of the

King/Son of Man as hidden in the least, rather than an exhortation to the specific

works of charity of even the identification of the least" (Donahue 17). This

suffering-focused Christology is typical of Matthew and his integration of the

Suffering Servant of Isaiah as connected to Jesus Christ. Additionally, the Son of

Man Christology of Jesus offers a picture of a powerful and exalted judge who

will punish sinners and reward the suffering, taken from Daniel and Enoch

(Keeler 118). The combination of suffering servant and powerful judge is

epitomized in the story of the Sheep and the Goats in Matthew 25:31-46.

A tension exists within this story in which the Son of Man is also called

the King who welcomes the righteous into his kingdom. Scholars have argued in

two main directions for this tension: first, that the original pericope was a parable

about a king which Matthew appropriated with his Son of Man Christology, and

second, that the story with which Matthew worked was about the Son of Man and

he added the imagery of king and kingdom. Historically, Israel has always connected God and the king – God is concerned with justice and attends to the poor, and he passes this mandate along to appointed kings. Some have argued that this king imagery is connected to the Jewish concept of *messiah* (the word translates as "anointed one," and kings were anointed as a symbol of God calling them into that office) (Pond *Background* 206). This combination of Son of Man Christology and a royal image create a picture of Jesus as "the one who suffered and was exalted" and as the "eschatological Messiah who will execute judgment and vindicate those who were defenseless" (Donahue 22).

Apocalyptic literature not only points to the end times but serves to explain what actions should be taken prior to that day. Matthew's story follows that pattern as Jesus reveals to his disciples how they should be living until he returns as the exalted, judging Christ. Matthew evokes themes common to his gospel in which ethics and actions are connected. Though it is unclear whether or not his call is universal or to a specific people group, and despite contention regarding who will be judged, it seems certain that Matthew presents a harsh and specific image of the judgment which focuses heavily on the actions relating to the relationship with the suffering and marginalized. It is in this theme that the First Presbyterian Church of Pomona is inspired by Matthew 25:31-46.

Matthew 25 in Pomona

The parable of Matthew 25 is not regularly referenced at FPCP during congregation-wide gatherings. No sermons have been preached about the passage during the past year or two, and neither of the weekly Bible studies have discussed it (they studied the books of Hebrews and Exodus most recently). Despite this absence, it seems to be one of the most significant passages for a few key organizers in the congregation.

The founder of Pomona Hope explained to me that studying this story was the direct inspiration for him to move to Pomona after he graduated. He participated in a Bible study with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship at the Claremont Colleges that focused on Matthew 25; out of that specific study, both he and other students committed to living in Pomona. Another organizer from FPCP who is involved with both Pomona Hope and Millennium Tools cited a study of Matthew 25 from his InterVarsity experience (though the two are from different colleges and different InterVarsity chapters) as inspirational to him. In our conversations, both organizers highlighted how seriously Jesus considers the task of caring for the poor relative to the assumptions about poverty that they had grown up with. Both were "convicted" by the severity of Jesus' expectations regarding service among the poor – enough so to influence their future plans quite significantly.

This use of Matthew 25 suggests primarily self-interested motivations for working in community organizing: it is for the eternal benefit of the organizer that

he or she should follow Jesus' commands. The Claremont College students seem to have interpreted Jesus' parable as meaning something like this: someday Jesus will return and will decide who will be rewarded eternally and who will be punished eternally; that categorization will be based on who loved and served the poor during their lifetime and who did not. In order to secure or at least work towards this eternal salvation, one must obey Jesus' instructions. At the very least, this passage highlights the priority that God places on the suffering. Even more so, perhaps, it becomes a formula for salvation.

Another passage that should be mentioned here is found in Isaiah 58. The chapter reads:

Shout out, do not hold back!
  Lift up your voice like a trumpet!
Announce to my people their rebellion,
  to the house of Jacob their sins.
[2]Yet day after day they seek me
  and delight to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that practiced
righteousness and did not forsake the
ordinance of their God;
they ask of me righteous judgments,
  they delight to draw near to God.
[3]'Why do we fast, but you do not see?
  Why humble ourselves, but you do not
notice?'
Look, you serve your own interest on your
fast-day, and oppress all your workers.
[4]Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight
  and to strike with a wicked fist.
Such fasting as you do today
  will not make your voice heard on high.
[5]Is such the fast that I choose,

  a day to humble oneself?
Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush,
  and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?
Will you call this a fast,
  a day acceptable to the LORD?
[6]Is not this the fast that I choose:
  to loose the bonds of injustice,
  to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
  and to break every yoke?
[7]Is it not to share your bread with the
hungry, and bring the homeless poor into
your house; when you see the naked, to
cover them, and not to hide yourself from
your own kin?
[8]Then your light shall break forth like the
dawn, and your healing shall spring
up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you,
  the glory of the LORD shall be your
rearguard.

[9]Then you shall call, and the LORD will
answer; you shall cry for help, and he will
say, Here I am.
If you remove the yoke from among you,
　the pointing of the finger, the speaking of
evil,
[10]if you offer your food to the hungry
　and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
　and your gloom be like the noonday.
[11]The LORD will guide you continually,
　and satisfy your needs in parched places,
　and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
　like a spring of water,
　whose waters never fail.
[12]Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
　you shall raise up the foundations of many
generations; you shall be called the repairer
of the breach,
　the restorer of streets to live in.
[13]If you refrain from trampling the sabbath,
　from pursuing your own interests on my
holy day; if you call the sabbath a delight
　and the holy day of the LORD honourable;
if you honour it, not going your own ways,
　serving your own interests, or pursuing
your own affairs;
[14]then you shall take delight in the LORD,
　and I will make you ride upon the heights
of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage
of your ancestor Jacob,
　for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.
(NRSV)

The eighth verse and preceding verses are used with sentiment similar to that employed with Matthew 25. This passage is interpreted as meaning that God is upset with the people because they are going through religious motions but are meanwhile ignoring and oppressing their poor; he promises that if they begin to fight injustice, they will be benefited personally – their "light will break forth like the dawn," and their "healing shall spring up quickly," and God will hear and respond to their calls for him. One staff member of Pomona Hope includes Isaiah 58:6-8 as part of an email signature. Another member of FPCP who works with Servant Partners, an organization I described previously, helped create a website called shoutitaloud.org which is inspired by that chapter and is designed to be a resource for Christians working for justice. The website includes a recording of the chapter of Isaiah that visitors can listen to, and a Bible study guide for the chapter.

The Bible study guide includes the questions: "if you 'fast' in the way the LORD asks you to, what does He promise you?" and "which of these promises do you desire to see answered most in your life?" and "what concrete steps do you want to take against injustice, oppression, hunger, and poverty to worship in a way that the LORD desires?" (shoutitaloud.org). I will not go into more detail about the theological background of this chapter, but do want to present it as an example of a similar use of Scripture. Both Matthew 25 and Isaiah 58 are appropriated to suggest that Christians should involve themselves in the fight for social justice for the sake of their personal salvation.

The shoutitaloud.org Bible study guide for Matthew 25 is similar, but emphasizes issues of judgment more heavily than the salvation-focused Isaiah 58. The questions designed for the Bible study leader are:

1. How is the LORD dividing all the people of the world before his throne?

2. Who is on His right and what do they receive?

3. Who is on His left and what do they receive?

4. How can people from every nation serve "the least of the King's brothers" on this earth?

5. *Every Person Answer*: How do you feel about standing before the LORD for this "final exam" at the end of your life and what can you do to prepare for it?

<div align="right">(shoutitaloud.
org)</div>

The final question of this study invokes the punishment that will be received by those on the King's left. The guide implies that this punishment is directly connected to whether or not individuals choose to "serve 'the least of the King's brothers'" on this earth based on the preceding question. That connection between service and judgment seems to be the main takeaway point that the leader of this Bible study should guide his or her group to understanding. It is possible that leadership highlighted similar themes in the Bible studies in Claremont that Pomona Hope founders were inspired by.

Biblical Response: Jeremiah 29:7

Another scripture that is cited at FPCP is a verse from Jeremiah's letter to the exiles:

"but seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD

on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." The larger context of the

passage is from Jeremiah's letter to the exiles; the surrounding passage reads:

> [4]Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent
> into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: [5]Build houses and live in them; plant
> gardens and eat what they produce. [6]Take wives and have sons and daughters;
> take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear
> sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. [7]But seek the welfare of
> the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in
> its welfare you will find your welfare. [8]For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of
> Israel: Do not let the prophets and the diviners who are among you deceive you,
> and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, [9]for it is a lie that they are
> prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, says the LORD.
> 10 For thus says the LORD: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed
> will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this
> place. [11]For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your
> welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. [12]Then when you call
> upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. [13]When you search for me,
> you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, [14]I will let you find me, says
> the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and
> all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back
> to the place from which I sent you into exile. (NRSV)

Though the context of the passage at large greatly affects the content of any single verse,

it is verse seven that is repeatedly cited and used and I will therefore focus upon it.

Theology of Jeremiah 29

The word "welfare" is a translation of the Hebrew "shalom," and "sent" is a

translation of the Hebrew "galah," so the verse reads: "seek the *shalom* of the city where

I have *galah* you, and pray to Yahweh on its behalf; for in its *shalom* you will find your

shalom." "Galah" has a double meaning of "exiled" and "sent," so there is a two-part

definition that is lost in the English translation. Author Robert Linthicum notes, "God

uses our circumstances to call us to ministry in the city God chooses for us to live in" –
people can be both exiled and sent simultaneously.

"Shalom" is identified by Linthicum as possibly the most important word in the
Hebrew Bible and he explains that it should not be translated as "peace," as is often the
case. The word is used almost 400 times in the Hebrew Bible and is translated in
numerous ways: *weal, welfare, completeness, to cause to be at peace, to make peace,*
peace offering, at rest, at ease, secure, safe, to finish will, to prosper, to be whole, to be
perfect, to be victorious, and *peace*. Shalom's use in the Hebrew Bible includes bodily
physical health, security and strength, long life ending in natural death, prosperity and
abundance, successful completion of enterprise, and victory in war. The word is
communal and corporate, not individual. It is not intended to describe the internal well-
being of a particular person but instead the state of a group of people – a society. It is
therefore, arguably, a political word, an economic word, and a religious word (Linthicum
Transforming Power, 37).

The Greek translation, "eirene," is used almost 100 times in the Christian
Testament and is translated as *peace, unity, concord,* and *to desire peace*. This Greek
word is somewhat redefined by Christian Testament authors as its use is more expansive
than its classical Greek understanding allowed. Shalom encompasses God's intentions for
the world (in Jeremiah, specifically for Babylon) and is what Linthicum interprets as the
foundation for the Deuteronomical laws. A concrete image of this "shalom community"
is present in Deuteronomy's laws, which seek to ensure political and economic justice for
the poor through structures like the Jubilee Year. He also notes that the concept appears

regularly throughout the prophets and the books of I and II Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles in determining what makes a "good" king of Israel, and it "permeates the teaching and actions of Jesus and of the apostolic writings… it is the vision of society as 'the shalom community' or 'the kingdom of God' (Linthicum 24). Many authors have argued that the "kingdom of God," of which Jesus seems to have spoken quite often, is simply synonymous with the concept of shalom – "personified and particularized in the life of God's people" (Linthicum <u>Transforming Power</u> 37).

This concept of shalom can be applied not only to the Deuteronomical community but to the world today. Christians seeking the welfare of their city use the biblical image of shalom as an inspiration and a standard – an ideal to strive for. As one urban minister put it, "the Lord guides us into the streets of the city to bring God's peace, for in shalom there are no lame; all walk. There are no poor; all have sufficient means. The God of Israel is also the God of the poor and needy. Our Lord is committed to shalom, where there is no injustice or oppression" (Greenway 86).

<u>Jeremiah 29 in Pomona</u>

The bulletin board in the front entry way of Pomona Hope's After School Program has a picture frame with Jeremiah 29:7 written inside, indicating the connection between that verse and the purpose of the program. Jeremiah 29 was also the content of a recent sermon at FPCP. The sermon took place during the "discernment phase" of the church, in which the congregation participated in guided reflections and retreats in order to discern a new focus or direction for the group. This activity followed the resignation of the church's pastor. It was led by Robert Linthicum, a Presbyterian minister from the

nearby La Verne Heights Presbyterian Church. Linthicum has worked extensively with urban ministry and for many years served as the director of urban work for World Vision International, a large Christian organization. He has taught urban ministry courses in various seminaries and graduate schools in the United States and abroad. He has also authored many books on the subject, one of which has been especially influential at FPCP. Linthicum preached on Jeremiah 29 as a part of FPCP's discernment process.

His notes from that sermon were handed out to the entire congregation in a packet entitled "Report on the Mission Discernment of First Presbyterian Church of Pomona, CA." He begins this section of the packet (called "Key Biblical Images on Mission") by explaining the importance of understanding two main issues: God's intentions for the world, and how the world actually is. He warns that focusing too much on one or the other of these topics will cause a church to be completely without vision, pessimistically overwhelmed by their city's problems, or naïvely optimistic, with no realistic picture of the world. Linthicum uses Jeremiah to answer those questions by calling the chapter "the mission of the people of God in the city" (Linthicum 23). This section of Linthicum's notes concludes by stating:

> "the church, as a mediating institution in society, is to be about the task of both seeking to pressure its society's political institutions to be truly just in their management of public life and, at the same time, being particularly compassionate toward those who are powerless. In this way, the church contributes toward bringing each throne, each dominion, each ruler and power under the lordship of Christ and fulfilling that role that God intends it to fill. And this is what First Presbyterian Church of Pomona should be all about!" (Linthicum 28).

At FPCP on the Sunday after Linthicum preached this sermon, members of the congregation were asked to share openly about their reactions to the previous week. One

woman raised her hand and explained that she had lived in Pomona as a young girl and never liked the city. Her mother, who had actually grown up attending FPCP and who gave birth to her as a teenager, moved out of Pomona when the woman was a youth and their family lived for many years in the city of Ventura (about two hours north in a somewhat more affluent area of California). She later moved back to Pomona with her mom and her three daughters. She was distraught about this move and felt angry at God for sending them back to the city. For years, she had even prayed that God would help them get out of Pomona. She shared that Linthicum's sermon seemed to be written just for her – it responded strongly to what she had been thinking and feeling for a long time. She had felt exiled by God into the city and was angry at God for that. The sermon, she said, gave her renewed hope for the city of Pomona and had helped her to begin to see the potential for its future improvement. Further, it helped her to understand that God had *sent* her to the city rather than only *exiled* her there – that God could intend for her to be there purposefully rather than as punishment. She now felt excited to be involved with the community organizing that OneLA was doing in the city and has since enthusiastically joined the community organizing team from FPCP that works with OneLA-IAF.

The essence of Jeremiah 29 seems to evoke similar themes to Matthew 25 – working for justice is for your own benefit. This passage pays specific attention to a city, which increases its power in Pomona as it simply sounds and feels particularly relevant to geographically-based community organizing principles. The theme of exile is also a powerful image, as it includes a sense of lack of control. While Matthew 25 urges people

into action, Jeremiah 29 instructs them on how to respond to a situation that they did not choose. Many city residents seem to feel "exiled" in Pomona; high school students at the After School Program express embarrassment at their city and desire to move away. The population of Pomona is highly transient and families rarely seek to intentionally make their homes there permanently. Jeremiah 29 is useful in its ability to speak to people who feel stuck in a city that they do not want to be in, and inspire them to care about the welfare (the shalom) of that city – in order to ultimately seek their own shalom.

Conclusion

Why is this motivating? As explained by the FPCP members that I spoke with, redefining the goals of the organizing process is necessary in order to remain invested for the long-term. If the ultimate goal of community organizing is to rid society (or a particular neighborhood) of social injustice, the process will be tiring in its futility. If, instead, the goal is for the individual or community struggling for justice to work towards eternal salvation, the corruption and complication of the city seems less intimidating. Jeremiah 29:7 suggests, although somewhat abstractly, that seeking the good of one's home city (whether or not one actually wants to live there) will ultimately benefit oneself. Of course, there must be concrete action taken to help the poor – both Matthew 25 and Isaiah 58 make that clear. But the very final end of those means is eternal life rather than eradication of injustice. The difficulty of the fight feels worthwhile when compared to eternal punishment. The promise of eternal reward can be clung to when concrete organizing goals are hard or even failing. The FPCP members that invoked this passage

as their purpose have found it to be a great comfort and credit their interpretation of that

scripture as sustaining them in Pomona for such a long-term commitment.

<u>**Chapter Four**</u>

<u>**Introduction**</u>

      The relationship between the organizer and the community he or she works with

is of fundamental concern to the practice of community organizing. The concept of power

is essential to the issue of this relationship. When examining the differences between

organizers and their constituency, most distinctions come down to differences in power.

Class, race, economic status, social status, education level, native language, and virtually

every other form of individual or communal identification are used to indicate the relative

amount of power that a person or group of persons has. Christian organizer Dennis A.

Jacobsen notes that for secular organizers, power is neutral – it can be used for good or

for evil, and it is the ultimate goal of the people with whom they work. Christians, on the

other hand, tend not to have such a straightforward approach to power. Some see it as

inherently evil and corrupting, and therefore virtuously avoid the subject. Others interpret

biblical texts like "turn the other cheek" as being inherently pacifist and therefore power-

averse; complications arise, of course, when the Bible can be just as easily used to

suggest that power should be sought after (Jacobsen 38). Rollo May argues in his book

Power and Innocence that "most people seek innocence to avoid the responsibility of

power… those who avoid power out of fear of being corrupted are probably doing so to

avoid the high cost of having power: conflict, controversy, ridicule, defeat… [they] are

making a virtue of their cowardice… power does not corrupt; power attracts the

corruptible" (Jacobsen 38). Meanwhile, "good people sit on the sidelines, wrap

themselves in virtue, and allow other people's values to dominate society" (Jacobsen 39).

The issue of power is therefore integral to the category of faith-based community organizing, and will be important to keep in mind as discussions of organizer-constituency relationship continue.

Robert Linthicum categorizes community organizing as a form of "relational power" as opposed to "unilateral power." Unilateral power exists when one person or group of persons has power *over* another; from tyrannical domination to sophisticated constitution, unilateral power is most commonly practiced in our world today and describes the structure of most governments and other systems. Relational power, on the other hand, is power *with* another (Linthicum 80).

Linthicum breaks relational power into two types: mutual power and reciprocal power. Mutual power exists when two people or groups hold equal power. Instead of competing or destroying, these two powers act cooperatively and respectfully. The biblical example of mutual power that Linthicum provides is the relationship of David and Jonathan – both had power (one as a military leader and the other as son of the king) which could have been used against the other, but instead the men acted together (Linthicum 81). Reciprocal power is "the deepest form of relational power…in which the people understand that both parties or forces can benefit from power decisions if they authentically share those decisions" (Linthicum 82). Both parties should have equal decision-making weight but also equal investment in great common good rather than individualistic gain. In community organizing language: "if power is the ability to act, relational power is the capacity to organize people and their institutions (churches, social

clubs, schools, unions, and so on) around common values and relationships so they can act together as one to bring about the change they desire" (Linthicum 82).

Understanding community organizing as a form of exercising relational power helps to illustrate the importance of relationship. Interaction between people is at the very heart of the community organizing process, from one-on-one meetings to large social actions. Relationships between members of the community are of utmost significance as cooperation is a requirement of the process; the nature of the relationship between community and power holders (like government officials) can determine the results of organizing efforts; and relationship between organizer and constituency must exist for the venture to even begin.

Tension in Community Organizing

In order to understand the tense relationship between organizer and constituency, I again turn to Saul Alinsky. The problems that Alinsky faced while organizing can be used as exemplifications of issues found elsewhere in the movement, because Alinsky is often treated as the father and culmination of community organizers. Issues that had been developing within the early iterations of the movement before Alinsky's time came to a full head when he began using community organizing in its most controversial and large-scale ways to date, and few of those problems have been reconciled as Alinsky's model remains the primary basis for community organizers to the present day.

When we read Rules for Radicals, a book I discussed previously which was designed to educate the next generation of organizers, it becomes clear that Alinsky is very thoughtful about how he relates to the community that he is organizing. One policy

of Alinsky's, which he learned from the CIO, to only organize when he was invited to do so. To be sure, there were plenty of neighborhoods in the United States that could benefit from some community organizing. Alinsky, though, never initiated the organizer-community relationship. He even charged a fee of the community in order to ensure ownership over the issue. This policy was enacted in order to ensure that communities were always motivated to change their situation. Rather than needing to spend time convincing people of their problems and inspiring a movement, Alinsky guaranteed that at least some portion of the community was aware of their issues and ready to take action.

Alinsky recognized that the relationship between organizer and community needed to be treated with much care, and considered that relationship to be the most fundamental aspect of his work as an organizer. Gaining and building the trust of the people was Alinsky's first step of organizing. One chapter of Alinsky's book is dedicated to how he thinks organizers should be educated. This chapter includes details about certain personality traits that organizers should have, ways that organizers should learn to behave, and formal education that organizers should undertake. For the most part, these lessons are focused on the organizer-constituency relationship:

> Through his imagination [the organizer] is constantly moving in on the happenings of others, identifying with them and extracting their happenings into his own mental digestive system and thereby accumulating more experience. It is essential for communication that he know of their experiences. Since one can communicate only through the experiences of the other, it becomes clear that the organizer begins to develop an abnormally large body of experience.
>
> He learns to talk local legends, anecdotes, values, idioms. He listens to small talk. He refrains from rhetoric foreign to the local culture: he knows that worn-out words like 'white racist,' 'fascist pig,' and 'motherfucker' have been so spewed

about that using them is now within the negative experience of the local people, serving only to identify the speaker as 'one of those nuts' and to turn off any further communication (Alinsky 71).

Alinsky's small point here that the organizer should "refrain from rhetoric foreign to the local culture" becomes a much more significant issue in community organizing later. The idea that the organizer must become one with the community while simultaneously being an outsider is a tension that many have found irreconcilable. Critics point out that an organizer can never *really* become part of the neighborhood that she tries to organize, and therefore attempts to do so are futile (Betten 191). Alinsky seemed to make some version of that effort – to learn about the experiences of those he worked with, and to use those experiences to relate to the people. This "bottom-up" or "grassroots" approach to organizing requires that the organizer begin at a lowly place, but some doubt that such a relationship is even achievable. In that same chapter, Alinsky recounts and interprets the following story:

> And yet the organizer must not try to fake it. He must be himself. I remember a first meeting with Mexican-American leaders in a California barrio where they served me a special Mexican dinner. When we were halfway through I put down my knife and fork saying, 'My God! Do you eat this stuff because you have to? I think it's a lousy as the Jewish kosher crap I had to eat as a kid!' There was a moment of shocked silence and then everybody roared. Suddenly barriers began to come down as they all began talking and laughing. They were so accustomed to the Anglo who would rave about the beauty of Mexican food even though they knew it was killing him, the Anglo who had memorized a few Spanish phrases with the inevitable *hasta la vista*, that it was a refreshingly honest experience to them. The incident became a legend to many and you would hear them say, for instance, 'He has as much use for that guy as Alinsky has for Mexican food.' A number of the Mexican-Americans present confessed that they only ate some of those dishes when they entertained an Anglo. The same faking goes on with whites on certain items of blacks' 'soul food.'

There is a difference between honesty and rude disrespect of another's tradition. The organizer will err far less by being himself than by engaging in 'professional techniques' when the people really know better. It shows respect for the people to be honest, as in the Mexican dinner episode; they are being treated as people and not guinea pigs being techniqued. It is most important that this action be understood in context. Prior to my remark there had been a warm discussion of the problems of the people. They knew not only of my concern about their plight but that I liked them as people. I felt their response in friendship, and we were together. It is in this totality of the situation that I did what, otherwise, would have been offensive (Alinsky 71).

The "Anglo" that Alinsky negatively describes here exemplifies the tension between organizer and constituency. Due to their unchangeable differences in background, race, education, values, or other characteristics, relationship between organizer and community will always require crossing barriers. When the organizer comes from a status of greater power – from the majority race, from higher education, from dominant values – the crossing of that barrier always follows a sacrificial model in which organizer abdicates privilege in order to "relate" to the community. It could be argued that such abdication is inherently disrespectful rather than dignifying, because the organizer is necessarily in a position of agency and choice while the poor community is not. The organizer can, at any point, leave the poor neighborhood or stop eating the bad Mexican food or in some other way opt out of the situation. Commitment to the poor, then, is never complete or permanent, and therefore may carry patronizing undertones.

Due to the fact that organizers are almost always choosing to socially and economically descend into a poor neighborhood in order to organize, some see organizing simply as an activity for middle-class individuals. Alinsky himself noticed this

issue among his contemporaries: "when labor leaders have talked about organizing the poor, their talk has been based on nostalgia, a wistful look back to the labor organizers of the C.I.O. through the great depression… those 'labor organizers' were primarily middle-class revolutionary activists to whom the C.I.O. labor organizing drive was just one of many activities" (Alinsky 67).

In general, this tense relationship is yet to be reconciled. Organizers still struggle to create a sincerely respectful relationship between themselves and poor communities despite their place of privilege. It is easy to suggest that community organizing is inherently flawed based on dishonest presentation of itself as a bottom-up process. Some could go so far as to label it colonialist, arguing that organizers inevitably impose their own values on the communities they organize and thereby disregard the indigenous culture in favor of their own. The tension in relationship between organizers and community is clearly displayed in the city of Pomona, just as it was in Chicago and California and at Alinsky's many other organizing sites.

Tension in Pomona

At First Presbyterian Church of Pomona, the relationship between organizer and community is actually better expressed by examining the relationship between church and neighborhood. Due to its affiliation with OneLA-IAF, FPCP organizes institutionally – therefore, it is responsible as an institution to represent its constituency and surrounding geographic area. The church has recently gone through a discernment process regarding the resignation of its pastor. During that process, they were led through a study of the city

of Pomona and its demographics. That study resulted in reflections about the demographics of FPCP as it compares to its neighborhood.

On December 6, 2009, First Presbyterian Church of Pomona held the first of a series of congregational meetings regarding its future. At the meeting, a document was passed out to each family detailing statistics and other quantitative data about the cities of Pomona, Claremont, and La Verne. The report focuses on these three cities because each is home to a Presbyterian church. Most of the data is taken from the US Census Bureau and I will intentionally use this data in conjunction with other statistics about the city of Pomona in order to understand what is objectively and actually true of Pomona and also what perception this congregation has of its city. The document was produced by a joint task force created by the Sessions of First Presbyterian Church of Pomona and La Verne Heights Presbyterian Church, which was made up of one elder from Pomona, one elder from La Verne, and two pastors from La Verne. The purpose of this exercise was for the churches to better understand the cities in which they draw their congregations from, in order to better determine how to engage with those cities in the future.

The report defines the Pomona Valley as a twelve-square mile region, including the cities of Pomona, La Verna, Diamond Bar, Claremont, San Dimas, and Kellogg Ranch, plus parts of Ontario and Glendora. The population of the valley has grown by about 30,000 residents in less than a decade; its 2008 population was around 392,000 and projected 2013 population is estimated at 414,000. Pomona's population is over half of the total valley and also takes up over half of its square mileage. Pomona is a difficult city to describe quantitatively because it has a high number of undocumented residents.

The US Census is therefore unable to keep accurate counts of individuals and families who are not required to submit census data, but can estimate the number of undocumented residents through schools and other records. That being said, the statistical data collected regarding the city can be a useful tool in understanding its makeup and culture as long as this problem is kept in mind. The 2008 total population might have actually been closer to 505,680; the 2013 projection will likely be closer to 534,060. Pomona is expected to experience about 1.4% growth in population over the next five years, significantly greater than any other city in the valley.

<u>Culture and Ethnicity</u>

The Pomona Valley is 33.5% White, 45.3% Hispanic, 11.8% Asian, and 6.4% African American (compared to the average American city: 69.1% White, 12.5% Hispanic, 3.6% Asian, and 12% African American). Of 164,82 Hispanic residents in the region, 65,312 are Mexican and 57,825 are only fluent in Spanish. The city of Pomona is 9.6% White, 64.5% Hispanic, 7.2% Asian, and 10% African American. It is clear that while some statistics suggest that the entire Pomona Valley reflects demographics similar to national averages, this population is distinctly divided by geography; for the most part, these divides are seen between Pomona and the other cities. Ethnic groups which are national minorities and economic indicators of poverty are concentrated in the city of Pomona while white and wealthy residents are concentrated in Claremont and La Verne.

<u>Age</u>

This divide is also expressed in the age groups represented in the region. The area as a whole represents young adults, middle adults, and senior citizens in numbers about

equal to those reflected in average American cities; 81% of the entire Valley is between 15 and 54 years of age, with residents older than 54 concentrated in La Verna and Claremont which both include a large number of retirement homes. The city of Pomona is the youngest in the region – residents between 21 and 34 years of age constitute around 20% of the total population.

Family Structure and Housing

According to the Census, "family" is defined as two or more individuals occupying the same house who are related by blood or marriage; non-married partners constitute a "household" but not a "family," though if they have children together they are statistically a "family." The entire Pomona Valley is densely populated by families, including the city of Pomona. The Pomona Valley includes about 55% single-family homes, a bit less than the national average, and that housing is unusually old (about 80% built before 1980).

Education

Levels of education perhaps reflect the greatest disparities between the various cities of the Pomona Valley. Claremont's adult populace is 76% college-educated and 28% hold a graduate or professional degree (of course, the presence of the Claremont Colleges influences this statistic). Over 35% of adults in the city of La Verne hold a bachelor's degree. In Pomona, less than 8% of adults hold a bachelor's degree. About half of all public school students in the city are categorized as having Limited English Proficiency and about half drop out of high school before graduation.

Economics

The distribution of household income for the entire Pomona Valley mirrors national averages quite closely according to 2008 data, with about 10% of households with annual incomes below $15,000, about 17% between $15,000 and $34,999, about 13% between $35,000 and $49,999, about 19% between $50,000 and $74,999, and about 40% above $75,000. Almost half of the Valley's working population fill professional positions, and a quarter each are employed in the service industry or another "blue-collar" field. As has been thematic of these statistics, the division of income and labor is clearly geographic as both Claremont and La Verne are well above national averages in terms of employment and economic stability.

In south Pomona, west of the 71 freeway, a few neighborhoods report average incomes at almost $70,000 per year. This area, including a community known as Phillips Ranch, is something of an affluent enclave which has made attempts to separate itself from the rest of the city in recent years. The average household income for the rest of the city was about $30,000 in 2000, or $26,000 for families headed by women. The poverty level is currently defined as an annual income of less than $18,100 for a family of four, and over a fifth of the city lives at or below that level. These statistics indicate that while the region of Pomona Valley is economically stable, it is broken down into harsh disparities between the city of Pomona and the cities of Claremont and La Verne.

Crime and Safety

In 2007, 87 violent crimes were committed in Claremont and 82 in La Verne. 1,235 were committed in Pomona. Property crimes followed a similar pattern: 975 in Claremont, 821 in La Verne, and 5,211 in Pomona. Of course, it must be taken into

account that Pomona is a larger city than Claremont or La Verne; it is not, however, five

or ten times as large as an equalization of these crime rates would require. This reality is

further illustrated by the fact that Pomona's violent crime rate is double the national

average.

<u>Pomona Hope's Neighborhood</u>

The community immediately surrounding the First Presbyterian Church is described

by Pomona Hope as an "exaggerated" picture of the city as a whole. Within a two-mile

radius of its location, growth has been constant: 24,807 residents in 2000 to 26,296 in

2008 (pre-adjusted for undocumented residents). Within a one-mile radius of Pomona

Hope, 7% of residents are White, 80% are Hispanic, 5% are Asian and 8% are African

American. Almost 50% of residents in the parish area of First Presbyterian Church are

below 21 years old and 32% are between 21 and 28 years of age. Between 60 and 80

percent of the population surrounding the church is made up of families, although only

about half of couples heading families are married. About 22% of households nearby

have neither a father nor mother present and are therefore being headed by grandparents,

older siblings, or other relatives. Surrounding the church, less than 0.9% of housing has

been built since 1990 and 59% pre-dates 1959; 73% of homes are being rented (in sharp

contrast to only 42% in the city as a whole).

About 40% of adults in the parish area have less than a ninth-grade education and

about one quarter have graduated from high school. Within two miles of the church,

average household income in 2001 was around $35,000 per year. Within one mile,

however, over half of all households live at or below the poverty level ($18,100) and

another fifth make between $18,101 and $34,999. Most of those adults who are employed

work in hourly-rate, non-union jobs – 42% in industry and 22% in the service industry –

additionally, many undocumented residents who are difficult to include in this study are

not employed. The most common crimes committed surrounding the Community Center

are auto theft, theft of property, burglary, drug possession or sale, assault, and domestic

violence.

Summary Overview

In short, this neighborhood is young, Hispanic, poor, and growing. The Joint Task

Force concludes their study with a projection of the growth in the Pomona Valley for the

next five years, noting that population is expected to increase throughout the valley and

especially in the city of Pomona. The document concludes with the following:

> The greatest disparity in the Pomona Valley is between the wealth of La Verne
> and Claremont and the poverty of the city of Pomona. Although sections of
> Pomona are financially secure and stable, the existence of large pockets of
> poverty combined with a preponderance of first- and second-generation Hispanics
> threatens the continued viability of Pomona. The parish area surrounding First
> Presbyterian Church, for example, is extremely poor with families ill equipped to
> compete in the American economy, poorly educated, relatively powerless and
> marginalized. What it means to be the Church – and the Presbyterian
> manifestation of the church – in a region so economically, educationally, and
> culturally divided is a reality with which the five Presbyterian churches that hold
> parish responsibility in the Pomona Valley need to wrestle – and need to wrestle
> together. Perhaps we need to begin to act our way into a new way of thinking!
> (Linthicum "An Introduction" 19).

It seems that the Presbyterian church of the Pomona Valley is reconsidering how

to define its presence in and responsibility to its surrounding community, and has

interpreted demographical statistics to suggest that their response has, as of yet, been

inadequate or inappropriate. During a discussion which followed a presentation of the above data, church members expressed concerns about the disparities between the neighborhood and the congregation (whose demographics are much more similar to those of La Verne and Claremont). Some articulated desires for their church to more accurately reflect the demographics of its neighborhood. Others wondered if the differences were creating such a great barrier between church and community that families from the neighborhood wouldn't feel welcome attending a Sunday worship service. Still others questioned what could actually be done to change the situation – how could the makeup of the church be affected? A church member suggested that culture and values between the congregation and neighborhood were very different; in order to be more attractive to neighborhood members, the church would need to be willing to change its culture. The response was mostly frustrated or disappointed in response to the presentation of these demographics.

Biblical Response: John 1

Christians appropriate doctrine of incarnation as an analogical response to this tension. In this analogy, Jesus as God-incarnate represents the action that should be taken by Christians as they displace themselves into another cultural context. The concept of incarnation as a model for ministry is relatively new, and has only recently been used in urban settings like Pomona. Incarnation has been used by Christians as a model for youth ministry – youth pastors are supposed to be "like" youth, attempt to enter the world and culture of youth and relate to them from within their language and values (Billings 191).

In this same vein, "incarnational ministry" refers to ministry modeled after the

incarnation of God as Jesus Christ.

The Biblical passage most often referenced in discussion of the incarnation is from the

 first chapter of the Gospel of John:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2]He was in the beginning with God. [3]All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being [4]in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. [5]The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. [6]There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. [7]He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.[8]He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. [9]The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.[10]He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. [11]He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. [12]But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, [13]who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. [14]And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.[15](John testified to him and cried out, 'This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me." ') [16]From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. [17]The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. [18]No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known (NRSV).

The part which receives the most attention is the first half of verse 14: "and the Word

became flesh and dwelled among us." I now discuss the theology of incarnation through

John 1, and proceed to demonstrate the influence of such theology at FPCP.

Theology of John 1

The doctrine of incarnation is arguably one of the most important aspects of

Christian belief across denominational divides. It is in the incarnation that more broad

and complex Christian theology is founded. One Christian writer notes that "implicit in

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the Incarnation is the Atonement and the Resurrection. The whole meaning of spiritual truth is expressed in that tremendous word *Logos*" (Kirk 159). Various versions of John 1's description of incarnation are used by Christians to emphasize its importance. Some use modern-day language to describe God moving into the "neighborhood" of humanity, focusing on the intentional choice of God to live as a human being (this terminology comes from The Message translation of the biblical text, a biblical paraphrase produced by a Presbyterian minister that is used widely in evangelical Protestant communities). Others emphasize the permanency of God's choice by stating that "the Word became flesh, and pitched his tent among us, joining the caravan of our life for weal or woe, which means that when God comes into man's life, he comes to stay… this is the foundation of spiritual assurance; this is God's challenge to man that requires intelligent response" (Kirk 158). This understanding is based on the literal translation of "dwelt," which actually means "tabernacled" – just as God was with the wandering Israelites in the wilderness through the tabernacle, so is God with the people again in Jesus (Keeler 265). Gustavo Gutierrez articulates the incarnation as a fulfillment of the prophecy that "God will be present in the very heart of every human being" (Gutierrez 108).More simply, many see the incarnation to mean that "God became one of his own creatures… a contradiction in terms" (Chikane 37).

An InterVarsity Press commentary on the New Testament focuses on the love of God that is displayed through the incarnation. Is author points out that the "logos" would have been similar to the Greek term for "reason," which was known to structure the entire universe. The corresponding Jewish concept was a personification of wisdom. That

personified character was divine but distinct from God, though created by God. Noted

evangelical New Testament scholar Craig Keener argues that Greek or Jewish audiences

would have been utterly blown away by the idea of this "logos" becoming flesh. Jews

strongly argued against the possibility that a human could ever be God, and thereby

heightened that separation such that God becoming man seems equally impossible. The

coming of God as man is here likened to God revealing his glory, "abounding in covenant

love and covenant faithfulness," to Moses in Exodus (34:6). Similarly, God's incarnation

in Jesus reveals his love. Throughout the rest of his life, Jesus continues to reveal God's

glory with his signs and ultimately with his death on the cross; "the Jewish people were

expecting God to reveal his glory in something like a cosmic spectacle of fireworks; but

for the first coming, Jesus reveals the same side of Gods' character that was emphasized

to Moses: his covenant love" (Keener 265).

"Incarnation" isn't actually a term that appears anywhere in the biblical text, but

the word "flesh" refers throughout the Bible to the physical body as well as to the

psychological self. Man is flesh, and that description connotes frailty, createdness, and

weakness. The concept of Jesus as both flesh and spirit – man and God – is therefore

seemingly nonsensical. Historians have wondered whether this claim was made directly

by Jesus himself or if the concept has later origins in Christian history. Some suggested

that the concept of incarnation can be traced to Jewish ideas about a superhuman

messiah; others argue that the claim comes from polytheistic myths common to Gnostic

and Hellenistic religions (Douglas 501). Many contemporary Christians, however, prefer

to interpret some of Jesus' actions and words in the canonical gospels to quite directly

imply his identity as God incarnate; the InterVarsity Press *New Bible Dictionary* states that: "it is now widely recognized that these attempts [to explain incarnational theology otherwise] have failed… a virtual claim to deity is embedded in the most undoubted sayings of the historical Jesus, as reported in the Synoptic Gospels, and that a virtual acceptance of this claim was fundamental to the faith and worship of the primitive Palestinian church" (Douglas 502). The biblical text is generally not concerned with some of the theological issues that have arisen throughout Christian history, such as the precise division of Jesus' "two natures" or the relationship between the virgin birth and Jesus' divinity. Instead, the New Testament writers who mention the incarnation (which happens quite rarely) are interested in the fact as an evangelistic tool in their proclamation of Jesus as Messiah (see Romans 8:3, Philippians 2:6-11, Colossians 1:13-22, and the book of Hebrews as examples) (Douglas 503).

Christology heavily influences theology when dealing with John 1. Tensions in Christology and one's answer to those tensions will affect interpretation and use of John 1, even if not intentionally. Those tensions date back many centuries. After Nicaea, the church in the fourth and fifth centuries developed two contrasting theories of Christological metaphysics (the Alexandrian and Antiochene). Both sides attempted to maintain a theory of Christ's nature which included his divine and human aspects while maintaining the soteriological emphasis on redemption in Christ. Alternative positions included one espoused by Athanasius and his follower Apollinarius, who so strongly argued for the divinity of Christ that they denied his having had a human soul or

consciousness; this idea was publically condemned in 381 at the Council of Constantinople (Billings 193).

The Alexandrian position was adapted from Apollinarius's logic. Cyril of Alexandria wrote that Christ was "one incarnate nature of the divine Logos" but modified this definition to acknowledge Jesus's humanity (Norris 21). Cyril understands the accuracy in the language of describing Christ as having "two natures," but prefers to highlight the union of those two natures. This union allows for no doubt as to the agent of redemption. Christ's inseparable divinity and humanity necessitate the identification of God as redeemer, through Christ's divine nature.

Alternatively, the Antiochene position chose to focus on the dual nature of Christ. By avoiding mixture or confusion between Christ's divinity and humanity, the integrity of neither is compromised. For example, "Christ was born of Mary in his humanity but performed miracles in his deity" (Billings 193). Antiochenes saw the Alexandrians' emphasis on divine Logos as a threat to the humanity of Christ.

An underlying problem that informs this debate is the question of suffering. When Christ suffered, was God also suffering? Antiochenes feared that a mixture of the two natures would result in the actual suffering of God. Alexandrians were concerned that too much separation would compromise the empathy and communion of God toward humanity's suffering – without intimate union of divinity and humanity in Christ, they argued, no distance between God and man was actually overcome through incarnation. This divide, which almost appears irreconcilable, is summarized well by Reformed theologian J. Todd Billings:

thus, on the two counts, one ends up with a Christological situation that appears to be a zero-sum game. If one emphasizes Christ's divinity, one risks deemphasizing his humanity, and vice versa. Moreover, if one pushes two-natures language toward that of one nature, one risks making God look like a fellow sufferer as a creature (rather than a healer like a Creator…). Yet, if one emphasizes the separation of the two natures, then an incarnational soteriology does not overcome the necessary distance for redemption (Billings 194).

Answers to this tension have been proposed, and I will highlight a few here. Theologians Moltmann and Barth use a similar strategy by basing their understanding of God on the incarnation (rather than attempting to reconcile a preexisting definition of God with the problems incurred by incarnation). This perspective questions the assumed understandings of divinity and humanity, particularly the dichotomy often set up between the two concepts. Costas agrees with Moltmann and Barth in this vein. He states that in Jesus, "God had become human in the man Jesus while remaining true to himself" (Billings 196). However, I suggest that the position of Barth goes one step further – one might read Barth to believe that God had become human in the man Jesus *in order to* remain true to himself. That is, God's incarnation in Jesus represents a necessary component of God's identity. God is fulfilled, rather than compromised, by incarnation.

Moltmann and Barth do part ways on a significant Christological issue. Moltmann, heavily influenced by post-Holocaust thinking, sees a separation in the Trinity between Father and Son. This separation is introduced by the problem of evil – the abandonment of the Son by the Father through the Son's suffering. The separation will not be reconciled until the eschaton, at which time the Kingdom will be run by God the Father. Costas uses Moltmann's viewpoint to interpret Matthew 25:31-46, which I discussed in detail in the previous chapter. He sees Christ as being found in the

abandoned and marginalized because the incarnation of God was specifically *to* those

members of society. The Son has solidarity with the abandoned and marginalized until

the eschaton. Meanwhile, that Christ is abandoned by the Father. Other theologians have

been taken with this interpretation as well; one writes that "… *what God suffered for*, he

means to have and to hold" (my emphasis added) (Kirk 158).

Barth moves in a different direction. He refuses the concept of a rift in the Trinity

and the idea of a suffering God that results, instead focusing on what can be learned

about God by starting with the fact that God willingly incarnated in the man of Jesus.

Barth warns against Moltmann's idea: "it is not for us to speak of a contradiction and rift

in the being of God, but to learn to correct our notions of the being of God, to reconstitute

them in the light of the fact that He does this" (186). While accepting a two-natures

concept of Jesus, Barth avoids compromising either nature by defining each in terms of

the other. That is, God's very Godness is somehow constituted, at least in part, by the

incarnation. God does not suffer in incarnation. Incarnation allows God to have solidarity

with humankind in order to forgive, reconcile, and redeem.

Today, incarnational Christology can be separated into that "from above" and that

"from below" (Chikane 37). Christology "from above," also known as "theocentric

Christology," follows in the path of earlier theologies by beginning with Jesus' divinity

and deriving beliefs about his humanity from that starting point. South African liberation

theologian Frank Chicane notes a few problematic effects he has seen of this approach.

First, it limits the humanity of Jesus to the point that Christians focus only on his deity.

This "has led to the Church over the years to see salvation only in vertical terms. It

uproots Christians and turns them away from the world, making them pretend to live in heaven whilst they are still on earth" (Chikane 38). Another problem is that the incarnation is necessarily negated when the humanity of Jesus is not embraced, thus nullifying the potent meaning of the incarnation for Christian theology. The final problem is almost psychological – all people have different, and necessarily flawed, definitions of God. Reyburn notes that "in his/her own image, after his/her own likeness, (wo)man in turn conceptualizes in his/her own image" (Chikane 38).

On the other hand, Christology "from below" – or "anthropocentric Christology" – begins with the historical person of Jesus to understand the divine Christ. This approach is most similar to Barth's. It looks to Jesus in order to understand God, and sees the opposite approach as likened to putting a cart before a horse. The words and actions of Jesus, under this framework, define God. Problems with this approach are simply the converse as the previous: his divinity is restricted, and salvation is presented too horizontally.

So, what do all of these Christological issues have to do with community organizing or the city of Pomona? Interpretations of incarnational Christology have potential to affect how persons or groups of persons go about the task of organizing. I now discuss the effects of Christological assumptions on the work of social justice in general and community organizing specifically. Then, I describe those effects at the First Presbyterian Church of Pomona.

Some theologians have articulated a difference between doing things "for" people and doing things "with" people (Billings 190). This distinction has been especially

relevant in discussions about Christian missionaries and their role in the communities to which they are sent. Critics of missionary work have suggested that missionaries should move more towards a "with" model than a "for" model; that they should "leave the compounds, leave their affluent, colonial methods of ministering 'for' the poor, and become 'immersed' in the situation of oppression. The incarnation of the Word was an Incarnation to oppressed humanity, and that is what the church must also do" (Billings 190). The advocating – particularly seen in theologians Bonk and Perkins – of a "with" model of missions, and ministry in general, comes from the model of Jesus. Instead of simply forgiving the sins of humanity from a distant or lofty place, God chose to become one of humanity and perform that gracious act among human beings themselves. Similarly, Christian ministers are encouraged to live among those they serve instead of solely providing services to those in need.

There are, however, problems that arise with this analogy. Critics of incarnational ministry, especially Hill, wonder whether or not the poor are to be left in their poverty based on this theology. Becoming one "with" the poor makes poverty the objective, which can dissuade everyone involved from actually tying to improve the lives of the oppressed. Idealizing the state of poverty based on its compatibility with incarnational analogy leads to a demonization of wealth. This dichotomy can paralyze attempts to alleviate poverty based on a reversal of ministry goal: "if a poor, oppressed person ascends to a middle-class position, for example, have they not literally been transformed from the state of Christlikeness into a state of ungodly worldliness?" (Billings 191).

This same risk is run by proponents of a Trinitarian conception in which Jesus is separated from the Father in his suffering. That separation is resolved by the coming eschaton, in which time God will rule heaven and earth and all suffering will be completed. Rift between Son and Father will be reconciled and the Trinity will finally be whole. A focus on waiting for this future eschaton contributes to an ambivalence toward working for justice in this life and on this earth. If the poor will be rewarded for their suffering in an afterlife, then perhaps it's even in their best interest to allow them to suffer here and now. Motivation for working towards justice is compromised by this Christology because it places so much emphasis on the eschaton.

If Christians have resources that could help the poor, shouldn't they use those resources instead of focusing on identifying with the community? An incarnational theology that believes God has actually suffered with the oppressed runs the risk of encouraging Christians to make their own suffering a primary goal, even before the benefit of those they seek to serve. Perhaps the "with" has become too important (relative to the "for"). There are multiple aspects of incarnational theology that provide opportunities for ministers to dramatically shift the focus of traditional ministry to the poor, and to even redefine the goals of that ministry completely. For community organizers, the "collapse of 'for' into 'with'" might be an even greater risk than it is for other ministers to the poor because organizing adds to the emphasis on the "with" aspect of ministry (Billings 194).

John 1 in Pomona

InterVarsity Christian Fellowship is an international organization that builds Christian communities on university and college campuses. It has existed at the Claremont Colleges for a little over thirty years, with varying degrees of size and influence. It is the only established Christian organization at the Claremont Colleges, though smaller student-led groups have also existed at different points in time.

The InterVarsity groups in Claremont are an important part of the FPCP story. All of the Claremont Colleges graduates who moved to the city of Pomona had been involved in IVCF during their undergraduate years. Many held leadership positions in their IVCF chapters or were involved in other formal ways. Some remain connected to the organization and its chapters in Claremont today. The Bible studies that specifically inspired students to move to Pomona after graduation were part of IVCF's structures on campus.

Servant Partners, the organization for which many FPCP members worked as interns before settling permanently in the city, is also connected to IVCF. Its founder was involved in IVCF and many participants in Servant Partners internships come out of IVCF fellowships. The current directors of Servant Partners were previously on staff with IVCF (in fact, one worked at the Claremont Colleges). The overlap between the two organizations is not official or legal but certainly present.

Therefore, the use of John 1 incarnation theology by IVCF is relevant to its use in Pomona. That use is somewhat regular as teachings about incarnational ministry is common for IVCF. I have personally encountered the use of John 1 in my involvement with IVCF, which has included leading Bible studies on campus and being trained in

leadership. When being taught about how to serve neighbors in the dorms, John 1:14 has been evoked. In particular, I recall a training about "missional living" in the dorms which used The Message translation of John 1:14: "the Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood." The analogy was made between Jesus as God living as a human and us as students moving into our dorms to serve and love our neighbors. Jesus moved into our neighborhood with intention and purpose, and we are to likewise move into the dorms.

One program, the Los Angeles Urban Project, sends IVCF members into the city of Los Angeles for six weeks during the summer to live and work with pre-established inner city ministries and churches. During those six weeks, interns learn about incarnational ministry and study John 1 (First Presbyterian Church of Pomona was a site for LAUP in previous years and may become one again in the future). More recently, IVCF used John 1 as a guiding theology for its largest conference. The conference is called Urbana, and it takes place just before New Year's day every three years in the city of St. Louis, Missouri (in the past it was held in Urbana, Illinois, hence its title). Up to twenty thousand students and non-students attend, not all of whom are necessarily involved with IVCF at colleges or universities. The topic of the conference is missions. Speakers are invited from all over the world, and worship music is performed from an international repertoire. Participants attend seminars on a wide variety of topics, from poverty and injustice to graduate school in natural sciences to dance ministry.

Another main component of the conference is an inductive Bible study of a particular text in which all conference attendees participate. This year (2009-2010), that

text was the book of John. Specifically, the first half of John 1:14 was used as the conference subtitle: "*the word became flesh* and lived among us." The brochures and informational fliers for the conference all included the phrase "the word became flesh," and the conference itself included performances, films, and speakers focusing on the topic of incarnation.

As it addressed the topic of world missions, IVCF used the image of incarnation to guide its conference content. Speakers discussed the use of Jesus' incarnation as a model for how missions should be undertaken. The term "missions" was used throughout the conference quite liberally, as seminar topics evidence, and attendees were taught that traditional missionary work was not the only way to serve incarnationally with their lives. Instead of using missions as the centralizing topic of the conference, IVCF used incarnation.

Though the connection is indirect, it is significant. The religious education provided by IVCF has quite clearly had a direct influence on current members of FPCP in the past, and FPCP members have been involved with IVCF as volunteer staff workers or paid employees. The ethos and theology of the organization are very present in the congregation: members see themselves as living missionally in their neighborhoods, just as IVCF teaches students to do in the dorms. IVCF's value for social justice, as evidenced by its Bible studies of Matthew 25 and other passages, has been transferred to college graduates such that they now live and work in the city of Pomona. The religious education of this organization essentially created and sustains FPCP, as the church's

youngest and most involved members were almost all heavily involved with IVCF in the past. That education undoubtedly included teaching regarding incarnation.

Servant Partners, an organization I introduced in Chapter One and mentioned recently, uses John1:14 similarly. At Urbana, Servant Partners had an information booth along with hundreds of other Christian organizations who were meeting and recruiting conference attendees. The brochures that Servant Partners handed out at the conference included statistics about world poverty, along with a large quote: "the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." This juxtaposition exemplifies the concept of living incarnationally among the poor, which Servant Partners identifies as its model of ministry.

On their website, Servant Partners includes a page outlining its "Core Values." These values are identified as servanthood, incarnation, making disciples, justice, and transformation. The value of incarnation is described: "'The Word became flesh and lived among us.' We live in neighborhoods among the world's urban poor, walking alongside them day by day and sharing in their lives and sufferings. We contextualize our lives and message by embracing the local culture" (www.servantpartners.org).

Contextualization and culture are major issues in Pomona, and with incarnational ministry in general. One theologian outlines the main lessons about incarnation to learn from John 1 as follows:

1. Incarnation is specific to a context. Jesus did not come as a universal man: he came as a Jew to the Jews.
2. Incarnation is involved in a context. Jesus did not just speak to Jews; he became a Jew. He identified himself with all aspects of being a Jew.
3. The cultural context is taken seriously. He came into real problems, debates, issues, struggles, and conflicts which concerned the Jewish people.

4. Humanity is taken seriously. Jesus did not address the Jews impersonally, as one abstracted from their cultural context. He addressed himself to economic questions, to the political groupings in Israel, and relationships of injustice that prevailed.

(Greenway 86)

What does it mean that Jesus was God and man, and how does one follow that duality? The particular Christology that one ascribes to, as I previously explained, can have major impacts on answers to this question. It also affects how one interacts with culture and context. True incarnation implies a complete becoming of that which one is not. In the case of Jesus, that complete becoming also included a complete remaining of what he was – divine. How to navigate the embracing of a new culture in this image can unsurprisingly become difficult.

In Pomona, FPCP members have embraced the mostly-Latino culture of the neighborhood in some ways while retaining their own upbringing in other ways. Simple aspects of Pomona life, like food (restaurants and cooking), have been appropriated by church members. Some speak Spanish well but others cannot. A few members walk around the neighborhood each Sunday before church to pray and talk. Some volunteer regularly with the Pomona Hope After School Program as a means of connecting to their Latino neighbors, and others do so by teaching in the high school youth group (which is made up primarily of Latino neighborhood kids, not children of church members). Many members shop, dine, live, and get their hair cut in the places where their neighbors would do the same.

All cultures have aspects that could be deemed negative. In a conversation I once had with a Servant Partners administrator about incarnational ministry, I asked how

anyone could ever really live incarnationally. My example was simple but illustrates the tension: food. Last summer, some friends and I lived at Pomona Hope and ran a Summer Reading Program there. We tried to live on a small budget that mirrored that of the neighborhood, and were therefore forced to mainly eat beans, rice, and other inexpensive staple foods. We noticed, however, that many neighbors were not nearly so meticulous about budgeting their groceries. Some freely bought bags of potato chips for their kids; others didn't discriminatingly compare prices on different brands of items; few bought fruits or vegetables; the Jack in the Box next door to the community center was a favorite location. In order to really do incarnational ministry, I asked, should we have lived likewise? Should we have eaten fast food and bought potato chips, instead of slicing carrots and celery while cooking pots of beans? By attempting to maintain health and finances, weren't we just forcing our cultural values into the situation and thereby compromising our attempt at an incarnational experience?

The response used a cultural framework and language. The Servant Partners administrator explained that there are aspects of cultures that simply shouldn't be embraced. Just as we should learn from the positive aspects of cultures that we missionally live among, we can retain the positive aspects of our own culture when they make up for problems in the other. For example, if a culture has normalized spousal abuse such that the activity is regular and not frowned upon, Christians living incarnationally in that context should not be expected to similarly practice spousal abuse. Instead, that Christian's cultural disapproval of spousal abuse should be deferred to.

Here, the concept of "shalom" comes back into play. Ultimately, it is the Biblical concept of shalom that should be treated as the cultural goal. Aspects of one culture which are consistent with a culture of welfare, peace, and prosperity should be chosen and lived out. Incarnationally ministering Christians should humbly accept the fact that parts of their culture are not consistent with shalom, and look for ways that their chosen context are consistent with it. This concept modifies the incarnational nature of the ministry being done in Pomona. Instead of following the avatar-like model of Jesus as God incarnate to the point of taking on practices or values that are damaging, Christians can use the idea of shalom as a standard against which a context can be measured.

In some ways, this shalom-standard model is actually quite similar to the Jesus-as-God analogy. All Christologies agree that Jesus, because he was fully God, never participated in human sin. While he was human in a complete way – feeling fatigue, hunger, thirst, anger, pain, sorrow – he did not sin like all humans do. Within this framework, incarnationally ministering Christians can reject the sin of a culture while not compromising their following of Jesus's example.

Conclusion

The use of the Christian theology of incarnation seems to help Christians in their efforts towards the pursuit of social justice. Specifically, that theology answers issues in community organizing with surprising relevance. Due to the tensions in relationship between organizer and constituency that have arisen in community organizing over many decades, a theology that speaks to relationships in an analogous way becomes a helpful model for these organizers. By identifying with God in this analogy as a model to imitate,

criticisms about organizers' privilege are assuaged because in choosing to identify with

the poor they are following God's model. In looking for guidance on how to navigate

relating to their neighbors, Christian organizers can look to the incarnation as a unique

model of how to organize.

<u>Chapter Five</u>

Thus far, I have demonstrated how theology at First Presbyterian Church of Pomona as a response to problems with community organizing. In this concluding chapter, I briefly review and summarize those theologies and their usage. I then make some assessing and analyzing points about this phenomenon. Next, I show that this strategy is not unique to the First Presbyterian Church of Pomona – indeed, it is being employed by Christian from various denominations in various cities around the world, and is therefore an important theological and sociological trend of which to take note. Finally, I suggest questions and issues that should be explored further in future study of this subject.

Community organizing is a relatively recent political strategy, and its modern inception dates back only a few decades. It finds its roots in social planning and fundraising efforts of the early 20th century. Rapid growth that the field experienced during the Great Depression was stunted by the onset of the Second World War. After the war, organizer Saul Alinsky appeared as a prominent leader of the field. His work solidified the grassroots, anti-establishment nature of community organizing and further secured its structure as focused on geographic neighborhoods. Alinsky remains a major influence on the field today as many organizing leaders were trained by him or under his methods.

The process of community organizing essentially begins with an organizer entering a neighborhood and beginning to have one-on-one meetings with its residents. From there, larger house meetings are held where groups of residents get together and

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discuss their concerns. Once concerns are distilled into a few key issues, research actions are formed to propose potential responses to those issues. Actions then take place. Often, these consist of inviting an authority figure such as a local politician to hear residents' concerns and to be asked to respond with a specific commitment to address problems. Organizers then follow up with leaders to ensure that action is taken.

In the United States, justice initiatives have tended to be connected to religion for a variety of reasons; indeed, religion and community organizing have always had an important relationship. The Catholic Worker Movement of the Great Depression epitomizes the ways that religion and justice can intersect, and also represents one of the first major organizing initiatives taken on by religious people. Today, faith-based community organizing is a major subset of the larger organizing movement and holds great promise as its growth continues. Religion, particularly Christianity, has proved useful to community organizing in many ways: it contains leadership structure and potential, it predefines a group of people with similar values, its connection to ethics often leads to action, it provides a fundraising base, and it often has an education system in place. Organizers since Saul Alinsky have taken full advantage of these aspects of religious structure by working closely with religious leaders and groups throughout the organizing process. Some religious individuals and groups act as organizers themselves, like many in the city of Pomona.

The First Presbyterian Church of Pomona was historically affluent and predominantly white, and has since become more concerned with issues of justice in its now-poor neighborhood. Members of the congregation come from other groups invested

in organizing. Servant Partners, an international organization which creates churches to organize in slums, is centered in Pomona; its executive directors are part of FPCP, and many other congregation members have worked or interned with Servant Partners. Pomona Hope is a nonprofit organization started by members of FPCP that has completed some organizing projects around the neighborhood and seeks to do so more in the future. OneLA is a branch of the Industrial Areas Foundation, Alinsky's organizing legacy, which includes institutions in Pomona like FPCP and Pomona Hope. These overlapping circles of Christian organizers were the focus of this study.

As with any social movement, community organizing is not without its problems. Though scholarly criticism is difficult to find due to the movement's relatively young state, organizers themselves have noticed issues with the practice. The two most universal and significant problems that I have encountered in my study of community organizing are those of motivation and relationship. Both are expressed by many organizers, beginning with Saul Alinsky. Both are responded to by theology at the First Presbyterian Church of Pomona.

Alinsky's Rules for Radicals is designed as an inspirational and educational book for would-be organizers working under him. In the book, Alinsky likens the process of organizing to a mountain climber struggling up an endlessly high mountain and to Sisyphus rolling a boulder up a never-ending hill. Despite the impossibility of long-term or final success, Alinsky writes that committing oneself to the task of organizing is, in the end, worthwhile. This is because the life of an organizer is always exciting and difficult. He is constantly presented with new challenges, new problems, new tasks. In fact, he is

often part of the process of inventing those problems for himself. Organizers are never bored or left questioning the meaning of their lives like most other people do. Rather, they are sure of their importance and purpose.

Alinsky's response to this tension is problematic and has ultimately not been completely successful. First of all, his reasons to commit to community organizing actually have nothing to do with community organizing itself. Instead, they seem to be based on his love of conflict. Many critics of Alinsky have noted that he and his trainees are so conflict-prone that the actual purpose of a justice issue is lost in a flurry of aggravated agitation. When an organizer is looking to feel important, it becomes easy for him or her to make sustaining conflict the main goal. Moreover, Alinsky's criteria of excitement and difficulty can be applied to a huge variety of life pursuits, not just community organizing. At the very least, most major justice initiatives involve both difficulty and excitement – but so might many other life pursuits that are completely unrelated to the broader cause of justice. Alinsky certainly felt motivated by his desire for purpose and chose to actualize that desire by organizing. His reasoning, however, leaves plenty of room for others like him to choose totally different routes.

Due to the difficulty of the organizing process, those involved in it must have compelling reasons to remain committed. Christians doing faith-based community organizing have used theology and scripture to answer this tension. This process should not be treated as a clear, linear, question-and-answer situation. It is not the case that Christians doing FBCO were presented with this question, thought about what their solution might be, and responded with Bible quotes and interpretations. Rather, the

interaction has been much more fluid and indirect. For some individuals, specific religious experiences or lessons directly inspired them to pursue FBCO. For others, religious aspects of the process came as an afterthought. Some have been motivated by different religious ideas or teachings at different points of their journey, adopting or even appropriating these ideas to relate to their current context. While individuals and larger bodies of Christian organizers have differed greatly in their use of theology in relation to FBCO, broad trends across denominations and locations can be identified and are quite significant.

With regards to issues of purpose and motivation, Christians in Pomona have found a few particular Bible passages to be useful. First is an apocalyptic parable in Matthew 25 where Jesus describes the end of time. When Jesus returns as a judge and king, he will gather people together before him and separate them into two groups: sheep and goats. Sheep are defined as those who have cared for the marginalized and the oppressed, and they are rewarded eternally for those actions. Goats are those who have failed to acknowledge the lowly and suffering – they are eternally punished. This passage has been interpreted by many at FPCP to highlight the priority that God places on such service. They have obeyed according to that interpretation by committing themselves to organizing in the city of Pomona. A similar passage from Isaiah 58, in which God tells the people of Israel that their religious activities are meaningless due to their oppression of the poor, is utilized in like manner as an inspiring scripture. In Isaiah, God tells the people that he will respond to their cries and finally be near to them as soon as they begin to improve their treatment the oppressed by doing away with injustice.

Another significant scripture at FPCP is from Jeremiah 29. Here, Jeremiah is writing a letter to exiled Jews to encourage them to truly make their homes in their land of exile. He instructs them to take wives and bear children, to build homes and plant seeds and there. He tells them that their shalom will come as they seek the shalom of their new homeland. This instruction is motivational to organizers at FPCP, as they commit to seeking the welfare of the city of Pomona. They are encouraged by Jeremiah's promise that they are seeking their own welfare in the process and are challenged by his specific directions about taking root in the city. The passage serves to remind them of the benefits of committing long-term to the city despite its brokenness.

The second tension of community organizing that I addressed was that of the relationship between organizer and constituency. Since organizing manuals first appeared in the twentieth century, thinkers have been aware of the fragility of that relationship. Alinsky understood the importance of relating well to a community, and that understanding is evidenced by his policies and anecdotes. Alinsky made it a priority to fully immerse himself in the neighborhood that he was organizing and to understand the peoples' experience. He wrote about the importance of collective experience, noticing that people can only interact with what they have experienced in the past – organizers, then, are supposed to take on the collective experience of the people and to engage with them within that framework only. The other aspect of engaging with a community is becoming an insider. Alinsky could then influence the organizing process as one of the community instead of as a hired hand from the outside.

Community organizing highly values the idea of grassroots organizing – that is, bottom-up organizing in which people are empowered to meet their own needs instead of having services provided for them. This value is illustrated in community organizing's "iron rule": never do for others what they can do for themselves. Organizers are encouraged to work *with* instead of *for* the people. Indigenous leadership is to be sought out and trained up so that the organizer is eventually rendered useless. The values of a community are to be prioritized above those of the organizer.

Despite these desires, organizing is still criticized as being based in middle-class values and serving middle-class interests. Most professional organizers are white and well-educated, and many come from economically secure backgrounds. Organizers usually enter a neighborhood very different from the one where they grew up. Often, they work across ethnic, religious, economic, and social barriers. Organizing has been criticized as simply an activity for the wealthy, and its failures are sometimes attributed to the vast rift in culture between organizers and poor communities. While they hope to truly work from the bottom-up, perhaps community organizing is just a more subtle version of top-down charity than traditional social work.

In Pomona, organizers at FPCP have used a Christological model to understand how they should navigate their relationship to the community. This model is found in the biblical image of Jesus as the incarnate of God. The phrase "incarnational ministry" has now become commonplace within some Christian contexts but only appeared within the past few decades. It suggests that Christians doing ministry should follow the process of incarnation. They are to truly become like those who they minister to, just as God became

a human in Jesus. It is from that equal place that they can minister most effectively. The ideology can be applied to youth ministers or overseas missionaries, but it has lately found a striking relevance to community organizing among urban poor neighborhoods.

John 1 is the primary Biblical reference utilized by writers about incarnational ministry as it describes the process by which God makes a dwelling among people. The theological implications of this statement are various and significant. Christians at Servant Partners, InterVaristy Christian Fellowship, and FPCP have all been inspired by this doctrine to similarly make their dwelling among the poor of the world. In this way, they are serving the poor in the same manner that God serves all people. Notions of pride or arrogance on the part of organizers are assuaged by the humble and sacrificial nature of God's incarnation which is translated onto the actions of organizers. Instead of fearing perpetuation of cultural imperialism, organizers are analogously obeying God's model of love and service. When one cultural norm must be chosen over another, I have seen a model of shalom used as a standard against which all cultures should be measured; use of this concept serves to create a constant cultural standard that places God's values over those of any people.

This phenomenon is not unique to Pomona. Christian clergy and laity alike have been interested in the concept of "incarnational ministry" for two to three decades, and Christian work among the poor has existed since the inception of the church itself. In the United States, the application of incarnational ministry to the poor – specifically to the urban poor – is a more recent trend that seems to be gaining speed. Organizations like Servant Partners have been established just within the past ten years, and are growing;

Servant Partners is now offering internships in six American cities and even more international sites ranging from North Africa to the Philippines. Books about protestant Christian work with urban poverty have also become popular recently, and document similar commitment across the United States from Orange County to Philadelphia (see Shane Claiborne's 2006 *The Irresistible Revolution* or John B. Hayes' 2006 *Sub-Merge* as examples).

This trend seems to have instigated Christian entry into the public sphere. Community organizing has become an apt medium for such entry, and faith-based community organizing has thereby proven an immensely effective mode of mobilization around justice issues. Some research suggests that FBCO is currently the most widespread social justice movement in the United States, and is present in over thirty states. More than 3,500 congregations and over 500 other institutions (including schools, labor unions, neighborhood associations, community centers, etc.) are affiliated with FBCO; this arguably means that over two million members of religious congregations in the nation being somehow affected by the movement. In some ways, Christianity and community organizing are easily compatible: both value the marginalized and oppressed, both treat poor individuals and communities with dignity and respect, both require relationship and community in order to function. Perhaps the future of the FBCO movement holds great promise for both religious communities desiring to work for justice and the state of American society as a whole.

Awareness of this movement provides opportunity for broader questions. Some are sociological in nature: how is FBCO different from secular community organizing?

Can its effectiveness actually be measured? If so, by what standards? The phenomenon of Christian organizing has not been well-documented, probably due to its novelty. How prolific is the movement? Is it growing? What denominations are best-suited to organizing and why? How should FBCO interact with the government or other NGOs? How can it cooperate with the private sector?

Other issues arise regarding religious education and texts. How does religious education function in these groups? How are bible studies, sermons, or other formats of education conducted in such a way that commitment to justice initiatives results? What is the role of sacred scripture in these contexts? Use and interpretation of biblical texts is of utmost importance in this thesis, and its role in Pomona invokes larger issues of biblical interpretation. By what standards should the Bible be interpreted? What are the implications of different means of interpreting? How do different denominations' relationships to the biblical texts affect their readings of the passages discussed here? How do those relationships affect involvement with justice causes? What does it mean for a community to call a text "sacred," and what is expected of that community as a result of that denotation?

Other questions arise which are perhaps more theological; first, those addressing motivation. How do definitions of God affect FBCO? How do doctrines of salvation and judgment function within other theistic communities? The use of eternal salvation as motivation for work among the poor seems highly charged. On the one hand, it is useful in its ability to heighten the importance of such work by placing it within an eternal and permanent context. It also highlights the priority with which God sees justice work by

connecting it to such fundamental and important issues. On the other hand, salvation as motivation can be problematized. Are the rich somehow "using" the poor by serving them in order to gain eternal salvation? Are motivations inherently selfish when they are connected to personal immortal gain? Gustavo Gutierrez wondered the same thing when examining Matthew 25: 31-46: "nevertheless, the neighbor is not an occasion, an instrument, for becoming closer to God. We are dealing with real love of real persons for their own sake… that my action towards another is at the same time an action towards God does not detract from its truth and concreteness, but rather gives it even greater meaning and import" (Gutierrez 116). The issue of motivation should be continuously probed deeper. Is anyone ever anything *but* selfish in committing to work among the poor? Even non-theistic motivations might be self-serving at final analysis. What does it mean for theology that these scriptures are being used in these ways? More theological questions arise in the issue of relationship. Incarnational theology is guiding and inspiring, but in the end creates an analogy in which the organizer is represented by Jesus and the poor are represented by humanity. Isn't that equation problematic? Could that analogy implicitly affirm the culture of the organizer over and above the culture of the poor? How can Christians simultaneously humbly identify with humanity while analogously identifying with God? What implications does this analogy have for Christology?

At its heart, this thesis asks why people do what they do. I have specifically asked that question through examination of faith-based community organizing at First Presbyterian Church of Pomona, but discussion of that particular instance has further-

reaching implications. I have identified the ways in which Christians are using the biblical text to inspire long-term commitment to the urban poor through organizing. Essentially, these Christians struggle with questions of *why* and *how* they should do so – and continue to struggle despite having formulated functional answers to those questions based on the Bible. The biblical responses to tensions of community organizing seem both unique and powerful, and perhaps shed light on what it means for people to be inspired and committed in general. Religion is a sphere in which people tend to seek answers to these questions – how should I live? with whom should I be in relationship? where should I commit my time? – and Christian organizers in Pomona have followed suit, finding some answers along the way but finally evoking even more questions about humanity itself.

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