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To Change the World

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TO CHANGE THE WORLD

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INTRODUCTION

What does an academic have to say to leaders in the business and political world? The popular conception, of course, is that the academic world is an ivory tower of abstract and impractical speculation far removed from the rough and tumble world of competition common in the world of business and public affairs. Their experience and the demands placed upon them would seem to be so far apart. How, then, could any academic relate to a corporate executive or a politician? Well, I think you would be surprised.

The academic world can be as vicious, cutthroat, and competitive as any corporation, business, or political campaign. But more than relating to each other's strong competitive spirits, the conversation between the world of business and the world of academia can be exceptionally fruitful, particularly when our common focus is a desire to use our gifts and talents to do good in the world we live in.

The topic tonight—of how we can be agents of change in the world—is one of great importance and very timely. Even our everyday experience seems to affirm the sense that the world is spinning faster and faster and the workings of the world are less and less stable; less and less predictable. Indeed, we live at a time of great fluidity and volatility in our social and political arrangements—both here in America and in the larger world—and while the capacity of evil seems magnified in our moment in history, there are also extraordinary, even unprecedented, opportunities to strategically engage the world we live in for good.

This is why the Trinity Forum exists and why we are here this weekend—to address these questions, yet again, head on.

Let me make a brief personal comment at this point. Some of you may know me as a bit of a pessimist. With books like the *Death of Character* and *Culture Wars*, it is not difficult to come to this conclusion. First, though, keep in mind that I inhabit an academic world in which the prevailing sensibility is one of smug complacency with the status quo. From the vantage point of mainstream academic discourse, there is no real decline in our common morality; what we see, rather, is a liberation from past forms of oppression. There is no real weakening in the American family; the family, rather, is merely changing forms to adapt to new circumstances. Truth may be fuzzier today or certainly less reliable, but that is not all bad; we live in an age of pragmatism where what really matters is what works, what gets us by.

What may appear as pessimism from me is simply a challenge to the dominant commonplaces that reign in the academic world. A part of what I aspire to is to challenge the assumptions and undermine the complacencies of the academic guild.

Needless to say, I prefer to be called a realist. It does a patient no good to be told they have the flu when they have a life-threatening disease. My position is that the sooner we understand the seriousness of the dilemmas we face, the sooner we can constructively engage them.

And engage them we can. We live at a time of unprecedented changes and challenges and it is important to understand them well. But precisely because of the change taking place around us, it is also a time of extraordinary opportunity. In a time like ours—fluid, unstable, volatile—everything is to play for.

AGENDA

In my time with you this evening, my agenda is to offer you a perspective on changing the world. This will entail a new vocabulary and, thus, new categories for thinking about cultural change. In the course of this, many of your instincts will be affirmed, just as many of your predispositions will also be challenged.

As to the Trinity Forum itself, it clearly cannot be all things to all people—and it would be suicide for the organization if it were to try. For this reason, it will be a useful contribution if, in the end of this discussion, there is a renewed affirmation of your core vision. At the same time, some of what I lay out here may prompt you to rethink some of your priorities and strategies for going forward; ways of branching off with new initiatives or new innovations.

The thrust of my comments tonight is divided into two main parts. The first examines the typical view of culture and how it changes. I also look at the problems that inhere within this view. The second part offers an alternative perspective on these things. The implications will be pretty obvious by the time I finish, but in the details will be much to talk about.



CULTURE—THE COMMON VIEW

To understand how to change the world—that is, the culture we live in—one must begin with an understanding of what is to be changed. In a word, everything hinges on how we understand the nature of culture.

I want to begin by laying out the perspective that most Americans have of the culture they live in. Here it is, in short order:

The essence of culture is found in the hearts and minds of individuals—in what we call “values” that individuals hold. Culture is manifested in the ways these values guide choices we individuals make about how to live—that is, how we spend our time, how we work, how we play, how and why we marry, how we raise our kids, what we worship, and so on.

By this view, civilizations are made up of the accumulation of values and the choices made on the basis of those values.

A slightly more sophisticated version of this is found in the perspective of those who speak of “worldviews.” But here again, worldviews exist primarily in the hearts and minds of individuals and take form in choices made by individuals. As Chuck Colson once said, “History is little more than the recording of the rise and fall of the great ideas—the worldviews—that form our values and move us to act.”

If a culture is good, it is because the good values held by people lead to good choices. By contrast, if a culture is decadent and in decline, it is because the values or worldviews held by individuals are mistaken at the least, or even immoral, and those corrupt values lead to bad choices.

And so, if we want to change our culture, we need more and more individuals possessing the right values and therefore making better choices. Consider what Thomas Jefferson said about this: “Enlighten the people generally,” he said in 1816, “and tyranny and oppressions of body and mind will vanish like evil spirits at the dawn of day.” This was the foundation for Jefferson’s commitment to public education and a sentiment that many of us continue to share.

It is this view of culture that also leads some faith communities to evangelism as their primary means of changing the world. If people’s hearts and minds are converted, they will have the right values, they will make the right choices, and the culture will change in turn.

This emphasis on choice has also predisposed us to *politics* as a means of changing the world. In short: bad law is the outcome of bad choices made by individual politicians, judges, and policy makers. In this view, changing the world requires that we get into office those who hold the right values or possess the right worldview and therefore will make the right choices.

Though there are variations on this theme, this view of culture—as values that reside in the hearts and minds of individuals and the choices that individuals make on the basis of those values—is pervasive. It leads to a view of cultural change that is equally pervasive—a view that the rise and fall of civilizations depend upon the kinds of values its people possess.

The problem is that this perspective is almost completely wrong. Just to get started, let me provide a few simple illustrations to make my case:

First, consider the fact that communities of faith have dominated the American society for the length and breadth of its history. As late as 1960, only 2 percent of the population claimed not to believe in God; even today, only 12 percent of the population would call themselves secularists. This means that in America today, 88 percent of the people adhere to some faith commitments. And yet our culture—business culture, law and government, the academic world, popular entertainment culture—is intensely secular. Only occasionally do we hear references to transcendence, and even these are vague, generic, and void of particularity. If culture is the accumulation of values and the choices made by individuals on the basis of these values, then how is it that American public culture today is so profoundly secular in its character?

A second illustration follows from the first. In American history, one finds the greatest number of religious people and the greatest vitality of religious observance among the traditional adherents. Evangelicals and orthodox Catholics are especially prominent. Even today, they outnumber their liberal counterparts in Protestantism and Catholicism and the vitality of their piety and their institutions is extraordinary. Take charitable giving, for example. The conservative members of these faiths are not wealthier than their more liberal counterparts (quite the opposite, in fact) but they are far and away more generous—the majority giving over 8 percent of their income away every year and almost half giving 10 percent or more every year. It is remarkable.

Yet the history of the conservative faith traditions over the last 175 years has been one of declining influence. These faith traditions have moved from the center of cultural influence to the margins. In some arenas of American life, they are not even in the game and exert no influence at all. If culture is really just hearts and minds and the choices that we make, then the values of the largest group should be the values that prevail. But they are not.

Consider, by contrast, the experience of the Jewish community in America. Except for a brief period in the middle of the twentieth century, Jews have never comprised more than 3 percent of the American population. Yet the contribution of the Jewish community to literature, art, music,

letters, film, and architecture is both brilliant and unrivalled—and this in a context often defined by vicious and relentless anti-Semitism. In short, their influence in the shaping of culture has been quite disproportionate to their size. The debt America owes to this small community is immeasurable.

A similar story of influence can be told of the homosexual community. Probably 3 percent of the American population, their influence has become enormous; again far disproportionate to their size. It is worth pointing out, too, that most of the gains in visibility, legitimacy, and legal rights by the gay rights movement were made during the twelve conservative years of the Reagan and Bush presidencies.

In both of these latter instances, the question is the same: if culture were simply a matter of hearts and minds, then the influence of various minorities—whoever they are and whatever that may be—would be relatively insignificant. But again, in these instances and in many others we can draw from history, we know this is not the case.

But why? Why is the common view of culture and cultural change so flawed?

The error of this perspective derives from at least three sources deep in modern Western thought. The first is “Hegelian idealism,” the view that ideas move history; the second is “Lockean individualism,” the view that the autonomous and rational individual is the key actor in social change; the third is “Christian pietism,” the view that the most important goal in life is having one’s heart right before God. There is significant truth in all three traditions of thought, but they have prejudiced our larger view of culture and cultural change in ways that are fundamentally flawed.

I’ll elaborate a bit later, but for now let me come right to my first point—and here, let me be blunt: if one is serious about changing the world, the first step is to discard this view of culture and how cultures change, for every strategy based upon it will fail—not most strategies, but *all* strategies. This is not to say that the renewal of the hearts and minds of individuals is unimportant. It is just not *decisively* important if the goal is to change the world.

I will return to this point later in my remarks—to try to draw the distinction a bit finer—but for now, let me move to the second part of my talk that will lay out an alternative view of culture and cultural change.



AN ALTERNATIVE VIEW OF CULTURE AND CULTURAL CHANGE

Let me begin with a phrase you have all heard before: “Ideas have consequences.” The phrase comes from a book by this title published in 1948 by the University of Chicago professor of English, Richard Weaver. It has become a mantra to many people who think about the culture today and it has done so because it is so obviously correct.

Even a tough-minded economist like John Maynard Keynes recognized the truth of this insight. In his book, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*, Keynes wrote that

“The ideas of economic and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribblings of a few years back. I’m

sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas.”

Yes, ideas have consequences. Yet the point I want to begin with in the second half of my talk is this: *not all ideas have consequences*, and among those that do, some have greater consequences than others.

How is this? What explains the difference?

The statement by Weaver would be truer if it were reworded as: “*Under specific conditions and circumstances* ideas can have consequences.” When these conditions are in place, ideas can inspire greatness, creativity, sacrifice, and human flourishing. But keep in mind, under the very same conditions, other ideas can lead to extraordinary folly or unspeakable destruction.

The question is: What are those conditions and circumstances?

My mentor, the brilliant sociologist Peter L. Berger, hints at the answer to this puzzle when he argued that “ideas don’t succeed in history because of their inherent truthfulness, but rather because of their connection to very powerful institutions and interests.” This is not only provocative, it is suggestive of a different way of thinking about culture and cultural change.



FIVE PROPOSITIONS

Let me take the suggestion and offer five propositions about culture and cultural change, propositions that gain poignancy in contrast to the idea of culture as the values and choices of individuals. Here they are:

Proposition One: Culture is a resource and as such, a form of power.

Think of culture as a form of capital, much like money itself. I am referring to knowledge, technical know-how, credentials, and cultural accomplishments. While it can’t be transferred from one generation to another, or from one individual to another, cultural capital can be accumulated.

And so, a Ph.D. has more cultural capital than a car mechanic; a member of the national academy of sciences has more cultural capital than a high school science teacher; the winner of a Nobel prize in literature has more cultural capital than a romance novelist. These are extreme contrasts, but you get the point.

Like money, accumulated cultural capital translates into a kind of power and influence. But what kind of power? What kind of influence? It starts as credibility, an authority one possesses which puts one in a position to be taken seriously. It ends as the power to define reality itself. It is the power to name things.

And so while many people endured the Gulag, some of whom wrote of their experiences, why is it that Alexander Solzhenitsyn is taken seriously? Certainly his Nobel Prize in literature conferred credibility on him. This cultural capital, in turn, gave him the ability to speak on a wide range of other issues with great authority.

Proposition Two: Culture is produced.

We often speak of the “spirit of the age” or the “spirit of capitalism” or the “prevailing cultural ethos” as though it were ether—you can’t see it but you know it is there because people are inspired by it or infected by it (as the case may be). It is better to think of culture as a thing, a product, if you will, manufactured not by lone individuals but rather by institutions and the elites who lead them.

And this is my real point. Most of us are inclined to what could be called the “great man” (or great person) view of history. It is St. Paul, St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther and John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, William Wilberforce, Charles Darwin, Frederick Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, and the like who stood as switchmen on the train tracks of history; it is their genius and the genius of other heroic individuals that have guided the evolution of civilization this way or that; for better or for worse.

Against this view, I would argue that *the key actor in history is not individual genius but rather the network*, and the new institutions that are created out of those networks. This is where the stuff of culture and cultural change is produced.

Consider, for example, the Protestant Reformation. We naturally think of Martin Luther as *the* heroic figure of the German Reformation. But Luther was surrounded by a network of others similarly committed, not only in his monastic order but all over northern Germany—such as Gregory of Rimini, Joseph von Staupitz (the man Luther attributed the success of the Reformation to), Philip Melancthon, Theodore Beza, Jean Sturm, and Claude Baudel. Melancthon was especially important, not only as the chief Protestant negotiator at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530, but for his leadership at the center of the key religious and intellectual networks of Europe. They, in turn, recreated the German university, and invented a new institution, the “academy” as the heart of social and cultural innovation. These proliferated throughout Protestant Europe.

Similarly, when we think of the European Enlightenment, we think of Voltaire, Rousseau, Condorcet, and the like. And yet the power of the *philosophes* resided in the networks of bold and innovative thinkers sustained by the salon—a new social institution that created an ongoing discussion about a new order for the ages. The salons of Madame Geoffrin, Madame de Staël, and Madame Récamier created such intellectual ferment that Napoleon exiled two of the three women. It is no wonder that historians have called the salon movement the “midwife of the French Revolution.”

When we think of the movement that led to the outlawing of slavery in England, we think of William Wilberforce. While clearly a charismatic figure, it was the Clapham Circle, a powerful network of Christian abolitionists, that carried the day.

There are innumerable examples—take psychotherapy, for another. We trace the extraordinary triumph of psychotherapy to Sigmund Freud, and yet Freud was just part of a network of innovators called “the Vienna Circle” that included Carl Jung, Alfred Adler, and others.

Even Nietzsche—the original postmodern philosopher—was not just a lonely explorer on the frontiers of thought. Nietzsche would have died in obscurity had it not been for the networks cultivated by his sister, Elizabeth. She was a central part of the literary and political life of Germany from Bismarck to Hitler—so important as the high priestess of the “Nietzsche cult” that her name was proposed to the Swedish Academy for the Nobel Prize in Literature on three occasions (1908, 1913, and 1923). Hitler himself attended her funeral and laid a laurel wreath on her coffin.

I don’t want to underplay the role of individual charisma and genius, but charisma and genius and their cultural consequences do not exist outside of networks of similarly oriented people.

Proposition Three: Cultural production is stratified in a rigid structure of “center” and “periphery.”

Let me put it this way: with economic capital, quantity is paramount. More is almost always better than, and more influential than, less. With cultural capital, it isn't quantity but quality that counts most. It is the *status* of cultural credentials and accomplishment.

In other words, with culture, there is a center and a periphery. The individuals, networks, and institutions *most critically involved* in the production of a culture or civilization operate in the “center,” where prestige is the highest; not on the periphery, where status is low.

And so, one may be able to get as good an education at Colorado State as you would at Harvard, but Harvard, as an institution, is at the center and Colorado State is at the periphery of cultural production. *USA Today* may sell more copies of newspapers than the *New York Times*, but it is the *New York Times* that is the newspaper of record in America (for better or worse) because it is at the center of cultural production, not the periphery. One can sell a hundred thousand copies of a book published by Zondervan or Baker, and only five thousand copies of a book published by Knopf. But it is the book by Knopf that is more likely to be reviewed in the *New York Review of Books* or the *New Republic*, or the *Washington Post Book World* because Knopf is at the center and Zondervan is at the periphery.

I could go on, but you get the picture. The status structure of culture and cultural production is of paramount importance to the topic at hand.

Proposition Four: Cultures change from the top down; rarely if ever from the bottom up.

It is sometimes true that political revolutions and economic revolts occur from the bottom up, but on their own terms they are almost always short-lived.

Long-term cultural change always occurs from the top down. In other words, the work of world-changing is the work of elites, gatekeepers who provide creative direction and management to the leading institutions in a society.

The Renaissance, the Reformation, the Awakenings, the Enlightenment, the triumph of capitalism over mercantilism and feudalism, all of the democratic revolutions in the West, the rise and triumph of science; and in our own day, the triumph of the therapeutic, postmodernism in law, architecture, literature, and popular culture, and now globalization itself, all began among elites and then percolated into the larger society.

Sometimes these world-historical changes take many generations to work their way into the fabric of society. Given the power of technology, we seem to be witnessing a compression in the time between the generation of ideas and their dissemination within the larger society, a fact worth remembering in our later discussions.

EXCURSUS ON *The Sociology of Philosophies*

Before I move on to the fifth proposition, let me pause for a moment to illustrate what I have said thus far. I would like to call your attention to a remarkable work of scholarship by Randall Collins—his book, *The Sociology of Philosophies*, published by Harvard University Press. I won't lead you into the arcane details of this 1,100 page book. But I do want to highlight some things that are illustrative of what I have been talking about thus far. It is just an illustration but it is, perhaps, the most significant illustration I could give.

Collins tells a story of the origins and evolution of civilizations *within* networks of intellectuals engaged in highly abstract theorizing. We speak casually of worldviews and how worldviews become ways of life. Collins shows the social conditions under which the full array of worldviews

originated and how they formed the basis of every world civilization. You can see for yourselves from the tables he provides just how complicated these associations are in such world civilizations as Ancient Greece, the early Christian age, and even the modern age in the West. Collins details these associations in China, India, Japan, Judaism, and Islam.

Why is this important?

Because every civilization is theorized *before* it comes into being in an enormous output of product that includes sacred texts, expository texts, and oral tradition. Second, this work is *not* done by isolated geniuses but by networks of intellectual elites. It is the networks that are the key actors here; it is the networks that, as Collins puts it, “write the plot of this story.” Third, these networks operate around what Collins calls “peaks”; what I have called the “center” of social life.

It is also important to note that size of a population is relatively unimportant—it doesn’t take a large number of elites operating in strategic ways to make world-historical changes in the direction of a civilization. Indeed, according to Collins, the total number of philosophers who are significant in world history is approximately 135 to 500 persons; the small number if we take only the major figures in each world civilization; the intermediate one if we add secondary figures. Even if we add the minor figures in all of the networks, in all of the civilizations, the total is 2,700.

In sum, between 150 and 3,000 people (a tiny fraction of the roughly 23 billion people living between 600 B.C. and 1900 A.D.) framed the major contours of all world civilizations. Clearly, the transformations here were top-down.

Let me return to the propositions and move to the last of these.

Proposition Five: World-changing is most intense when the networks of elites and the institutions they lead overlap.

Implied here is the overlapping of the different forms of capital—cultural capital overlapping with economic capital and/or political capital.

Again, one can cite dozens of examples. Consider first the Reformation. The role of the nobility in the German provinces was crucial to the success of the Reformation. Their economic and political capital made the difference. Indeed, Luther would likely have been executed (as Savanarola a generation before) if Frederick of Wise had not removed him to safe refuge at Wartburg Castle after the Edict of Worms.

The story of Wilberforce and the Clapham Circle is also the story of overlapping elites and institutions. Wilberforce may have had the moral charisma and political capital, but it was Hannah More (well known in literary circles) who had a great deal of cultural capital and used it to start a very successful school for the poor, Henry Thornton (a merchant banker) who had the necessary financial capital, and Granville Sharp and Zachary Macaulay, both of whom had intellectual capital and extensive social networks in the reform movements of the day.

The same can be said of the success of literary modernism in the early twentieth century.

Consider the role of Harriet Shaw Weaver. This wealthy British patron gave James Joyce over \$1 million between 1917 and 1941 (roughly \$3 million in today’s dollars); she supported Ezra Pound and D. H. Lawrence financially as well. In a similar way, Scofield Thayer and James Sibly Watson, another affluent Briton, provided the financial capital to fund *The Dial*, the literary organ of literary modernism (together they provided the 2002 equivalent of \$800,000 per year to sustain the publication). Though its circulation was only 10,000, it was critically important to sustaining this literary movement. It was here, for example, that T. S. Eliot’s *The Wasteland* and other seminal works of literature were published.

The coming together of financial and intellectual capital in common purpose also accounts for the astonishing success of humanistic Marxism in the middle to late twentieth century. Its home was the Institute for Social Research based in Frankfurt, Germany. It was made possible by the funding of Hermann Weil, the owner of an international grain and food company, who agreed to finance the building and its equipment entirely, and to give a yearly grant of 120,000 marks. Though only started in 1924, by 1928, the Institute's library consisted of 37,000 volumes, 340 scholarly journals, and thirty-seven German and foreign newspapers and it was used by five thousand people annually. There were eighteen offices for academic staff and a few more for secretarial staff and doctoral students, many of whom were supported by Institute grants.

Even Nietzsche's posthumous influence is directly tied to the political capital his work enjoyed among the Nazis and the financial capital provided by the German Count Kessler and the wealthy banker Ernest Thiel (who loved Nietzsche because his writings had "released him" from the taboos of Swedish society). Thiel not only translated many of Nietzsche's books into Swedish, but in 1908 he granted a huge endowment to the Nietzsche archives which allowed Nietzsche's sister Elizabeth to disseminate his writings on a massive scale.

In the world of art, there is no question that contemporary art would not be what it is without the vast resources of Peggy Guggenheim. Alfred Stieglitz provides another example as a patron, host, and art critic in the early twentieth century who almost single-handedly facilitated the rise of the avant-garde in America. He became the first patron to vigorously promote Matisse, Cezanne, Picasso, and Rodin in America, and then his efforts brought fame to his coterie of prominent American avant-garde painters.

And in a final, but very different case, take the evangelist, Billy Graham—an unknown itinerant preacher whose urban crusades had repeatedly fizzled until William Randolph Hearst ordered his media network to "puff Graham" during the Los Angeles crusade of 1949.

Within two months of this order, Graham was preaching to crowds of 350,000. No one who has studied the issue disagrees that without the economic and cultural leverage provided by Hearst, we would likely not ever have heard of Graham.

Again and again we see that the impetus, energy, and direction for changing the world were found where cultural, economic, and often political resources overlapped; where networks of elites, who generated these various resources, come together in common purpose.

... *in common purpose*—something we should never forget.

IN SUM

At this point, it will not be difficult to work through the practical implications of these five propositions: overlapping networks of leaders and overlapping resources, all operating in the center or peak institutions—in common purpose. These are the practical dynamics of world changing. These are the conditions under which ideas finally have consequences.

While it may be pedantic to make this point, let me also emphasize the fact that we have ended up with a very different understanding of culture than the one commonly accepted today.

Earlier I spoke of the influences of intellectual traditions deep in Western thought that prejudice our views of culture and cultural change. To draw the distinction, let me return to these briefly. Against Hegelian idealism, the view that ideas move history, we now see ideas inexorably grounded in social conditions and circumstances. Against Lockean individualism, which influences us to view the autonomous and rational individual—even if a genius—as the key actor in social change, we now see the power of networks and the new institutions that they create that make the difference. Finally, against Christian pietism, which biases us to see the individual's "heart

and mind” as the primary source and repository of culture, we now see that hearts and minds are only tangentially related to the movements of culture, that culture is much more complicated and has a life independent of individual will; indeed, that it is not individual hearts and minds that move cultures but cultures that ultimately shape and direct the lives of individuals.



CONCLUSION

It is tempting to think that the problems of our day trace back to the problems in our hearts and in our minds; that somehow, we just lost track of what was really important and now have just lost our way.

Please don't get me wrong. I believe that in our hearts and minds, we as individuals and as a society have too often lost track of what really is important and that we have, in many respects, lost our way. In this light, the renewal of our hearts and minds is not only important, it is essential—indeed, a precondition for a truly just and humane society. But by itself, it will not accomplish the objectives and ideals we hope for.

To change the world is, at some point, to take power seriously. I recognize that power is an uncomfortable subject for people of faith and all people of good will who quite rightly celebrate service in the cause of the needy, the estranged, and the common good.

But the power we need to take seriously is not power in a conventional sense. Politics will never be a solution to the challenges we face. The work of the political Left and the political Right—even, if not especially, the Religious Right—often makes matters worse. So I say again, the power we need to take seriously is not power in a conventional sense.

Rather, it is the power to define reality in ways that sustain benevolence and justice. What is at stake? When cultures are good, they give life and foster human flourishing; and when they are decadent and corrupt, they constrict human flourishing and even deprive life itself. In the world we live in, the outcome is far from certain. There is everything to play for here and now.

In any case, articulating a reality that sustains benevolence and justice and exemplifying its meaning in time and space is the burden of leaders. In this respect, we do well to remember as a corrective and a caution that Jesus reserved his harshest criticism for the ruling elites of his day, not least Sadducees, Pharisees, and scribes—cultural elites whose power was not used well.

Yet even Jesus created a network of disciples (who, over time, became spiritual and cultural leaders). Though they originated on the periphery of the social world of that age, they moved to the provincial center of Jerusalem, and then, within a generation, to *the* center of the ancient world—Rome. They too created new institutions that not only articulated but embodied an alternative to the reigning ways of life of that time.

We too have the joy and privilege of doing the same in our own generation in humble and faithful obedience to the call God has placed on our lives.

The task is long term and certainly arduous, and the outcome is finally not in our hands. Still, the potential consequences for faithfulness to this task for the common good in this time of uncertainty may be far more than we can ask or even imagine.

