

Tom Galpin
Box #234
5/11/09

Dr. Michael Williams
Biblical Theology

“Seattle, Washington: Sacred but Secular.”

A Demographic Study of Seattle and How the Gospel both Encourages and Challenges
its People and Culture.

“Sacred but secular” best characterizes the spiritual ethos of the Pacific Northwest and Seattle as its cultural and financial head. Seattle has been and continues to be the most unchurched region in America, yet its overt secular history does not preclude it from a strong moral ethic that dominates all aspects of public life in the city. Accordingly, there is a complexity here that shapes Seattle as a unique religious context. When studying the spiritual demographics of Seattle and its underlying spiritual metanarrative, one must seek to address the variety of contexts and variables that function to shape how Seattle operates within this spiritual story.

In an effort to create a picture of what the religious demographics are in Seattle one must first address the religious history of the area and how that has served to create a tradition and an infrastructure of religious involvement. Second to this, one must attend to the type of person who often lives in or comes to live in Seattle. These “Seattleites” interact with the religious milieu in a very unique way, different than any other place in America. Finally, attention will be given to how these two interact with each other. Within this, then, this paper will seek to show how the Gospel specifically meets and challenges the unique needs and people of Seattle.¹

History

In the mid 1850’s indigenous American Indians exclusively populated Seattle. By 1851 the first Euro-Americans established a small settlement on the western edge of Elliot Bay in an

¹ It must be noted that this research paper carries one particular weakness. That is, as a researcher I am an outsider looking in. I am a non-Seattleite who has only visited the city once in my life; thus, I am admittedly looking in on a culture and a religious narrative that is not my own. While I may share many traditions and experiences that Seattle shares, I have a notable lack of ability to interact with the research and observations of others with an intuitive, “inside” knowledge. Because of this, I have relied heavily on the group of essays found in *Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Northwest: The None Zone*, edited by Patricia O’Connell Killen and Mark Silk. This group of essays has proved to be invaluable in creating a picture of what religious life is like in Seattle and the Pacific Northwest. Second to this, the essay by Patricia O’Connell Killen, “The Religious Geography of the Pacific Northwest,” in *Word and World* has served to further draw me into the people and culture of Seattle. Finally, the pastors of Grace Seattle, John Haralson and Michael Subrako, along with classmates from Seattle, and research collaborated by Mars Hill Church in Seattle have served me to help me understand the research, and give me personal experiences to validate the research.

area that is now part of downtown Seattle. At the same time elsewhere in the world, Los Angeles and Honolulu had been incorporated as cities (1850), and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851) were published. In American religious history, when Seattle was first settled Jonathan Edwards had already been dead for over 100 years, and the Second Great Awakening (1790-1840's) had been over for a number of years. Hence, on a national scale Seattle is very much a young city

Surrounded on the western shore by the Puget Sound and on the eastern shore by Lake Washington, Seattle quickly became a port city whereby trade from the north could be brought in. Just past the Puget Sound the Olympic Mountains dominate the western skyline. Similarly, the Cascade Mountains dominate the eastern skyline past Lake Washington. To the south Mount Rainier looms singularly. Because of Seattle's location on the northwestern edge of Washington—with miles of dense forest to the east, south and north, and the Pacific Ocean to the west, along with the two parallel mountain ranges—from its initial American colonization up until today, Seattle has functioned almost exclusively as a destination city. From the beginning, rarely did one “end up” in Seattle.

Seattle has proved again and again its resiliency and ability to adapt quickly to change, disaster and growth. On June 6, 1889 the growing timber town was nearly destroyed by fire. As a result, nearly every building, constructed in the readily available and affordable timber, was destroyed. Subsequently the city was rebuilt, sparking an economic boom that lasted through the August 1896 Klondike gold rush. By 1938, the upstart aircraft manufacturer Boeing had become a world leader in aircraft design and manufacturing. World War II served to create an economic boom that soon came to a disastrous result as nearly 70,000 people lost their jobs when the war

came to an end. What this created, however, was a foundation of technological innovation and manufacturing that has remained a major part of Seattle's economy to this day.

In the 1970's, Boeing and the Seattle economy were hit by the onset of the Oil Crisis. With an increasing amount of highly educated and skilled workforce out of work, Seattle responded by beginning to diversify into upstart technology companies, whereby in 1995 Seattle's homegrown Microsoft had become the world's most profitable company—bringing in billions in revenue and an ever-increasing educated, technologically savvy workforce. In the wake of the growing technological workforce another industry began to steep and mature. Seattle's coffee industry led by the industry leader Starbucks, soon created a worldwide market for higher quality, more expensive caffeinated drinks.²

Demographics

From its inception, Seattle has been a city on the crossroads to nowhere that has thrived in a cathedral of natural beauty and has rewarded technological and entrepreneurial innovation. According to the 2000 U.S. Census Bureau, the city has a total of 142.5 square miles, 83.9 square miles of which is land and 58.7 square miles is water (41.16 percent of the total area).³ From 1990 to 2000 the U.S. Census Bureau recorded a population growth in Seattle of 516,000 to 563,000 people, a 9.2% change of nearly 50,000 people (27,201 of which were 25-34 year olds). According to the Washington State Office of Financial Management, Seattle had a population of 592,800 people as of April 1, 2008, and increase of nearly 75,000 people in the eighteen years since the 1990 U.S. Census figures. Interestingly, in 1960 there were nearly as

² Adapted from Chris Casey, "Seattle History," on <http://www.seattle.com/history/> and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Seattle.

³ "US Gazetteer files: 2000 and 1990". United States Census Bureau. 2005-05-03, <http://www.census.gov/geo/www/gazetteer/gazette.html>.

many people living in Seattle as in 2000; whereas from 1960 up until the mid to late 1980's there was a slow decline in population within the city limits.

According to a 2009 survey by the Pew Research Center, Seattle ranked third among most desirable cities to move to, with 38% of people polled saying that they want to live there, or in its surrounding metropolitan area.⁴ The population of the greater Seattle metro area is roughly 1.7 million people, with an increase of roughly 230,000 people between 1990 and 2000. In King County (the Seattle Metro area) nearly 42,000 immigrants moved into the Seattle area from other nations, yet despite this a total of 50,000 more people left than moved into the metro area. For many of these people a fluctuating economy, expensive cost of living and the promise of a better job in the suburbs has proved to be some of the greatest factors for this move. The picture that this presents, supported by the growth in technology and jobs, is a city in constant transition. Within this system, then, it is understandable that many people within the Seattle metro area move at least every four years, causing neighborhoods to be in flux, with an ever-changing human landscape.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Seattle has less children under the age of five per capita than any city other than San Francisco. Seattle's cohabitation rate is 250% higher than the national average. And the percentage of households with someone under the age of 18 in the Seattle metro area is at a staggering low of 20%. As a 2006 article in the Seattle Times noted, there are 45% more dogs in the Seattle metro area than children.⁵ In a similar article in USA Today, Phillip Longman commented that this trend in a city such as Seattle reflects the image

⁴ Pew Research Center, Paul Taylor Project Director. "For Nearly Half of America, Grass is Greener Somewhere Else," January 29, 2009. <http://pewsocialtrends.org/pubs/722/grass-greener-somewhere-else-top-cities>.

⁵ In an interesting point to note, in comparing the Sorensen article in the Seattle Times and the Longman article in the USA Today, is that Longman addressed this statistic in regards to what this means for the greater and future culture of America. Sorensen, on the other hand, wrote the article primarily on how and why Seattleites love their dogs. Eric Sorensen, "Metro Dog," Seattle Times Pacific Northwest Magazine, May 13, 2006. http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/cgi-bin/PrintStory.pl?document_id=2002974751&zsection_id=2002937859&slug=pacificpdogs14&date=20060513

that “the people least likely to have children are those most likely to hold progressive views of the world.”⁶ According to polling data, Europeans who answered in line with a more “progressive” world and life view⁷ are “far more likely to live alone or be childless,” giving a high correlation between secularism, individualism and low fertility rates. In Seattle, this trend, like in Europe, has become more of the norm than in other parts of the country.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census the median income of a household in the city was \$45,736, and the median income for a family was \$62,195. Yet, in Seattle 11.8 percent of the population and 6.9 percent of families are below the poverty line. In 2005 *Forbes* named Seattle the most overpriced city for the second year in a row.⁸ The median home price in the Seattle metro area in 2000 was \$324,000. According to a 2009 study, *Forbes* put the current median home price at \$386,600, a gain of nearly \$62,600 in nine years. According to the 2000 U.S. Census home ownership is lower than most other cities. Due to this, the average person in the Puget Sound region and the Seattle metro area has lived in three different places in the last ten years.⁹

Despite this continual transition of place and community, Seattleites stay connected to one another through technology. In 2009, *Forbes* ranked Seattle the number one most wired city in America.¹⁰ Technologically savvy and connected, according to 2003 rankings by the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS), Seattle was also ranked the number one most educated city in America, with a staggering 51.6% of the population over the age of 25

⁶ Phillip Longman, “The Liberal Baby Bust,” USA Today, 3/13/2006.

http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/editorials/2006-03-13-babybust_x.htm.

⁷ Questions such as, “Do you distrust the army and other institutions and are you prone to demonstrate against them?” “Do you find soft drugs, homosexuality and euthanasia acceptable?” “Do you seldom, if ever, attend church?”

⁸ Sara Clemence, “Most Overpriced Places in the U.S. 2005,” *Forbes* 7/15/05.

http://www.forbes.com/2005/07/14/overpriced-cities-lifestyle-cx_sc_0715home_ls.html

⁹ Mars Hill research, retrieved through email interaction. April 2009.

¹⁰ “Best Places For Business and Careers; #17 Seattle, WA.”

http://www.forbes.com/lists/2009/1/bizplaces09_Seattle-WA_2396.html

with a bachelor's degree or higher.¹¹ Similarly, in 2006 a Central Connecticut State University survey ranked Seattle the most literate city in the country.¹²

A degree of diversity in belief, culture and ethnicity are also boastful values that reflect the city. According to the 2005-2007 U.S. Census Bureau ACS survey, 74.1% of the Seattle's population was ethnically White, 16.6% Asian, and 10% Black or African American.¹³ In a 2006 study, Seattle ranked only second to San Francisco among all major U.S. cities with 12.9% of the population polled identifying themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual.¹⁴

In 2002 Richard Florida, in *Rise of the Creative Class*, ranked Seattle the fifth "most creative" city in the America. Compiling data from four distinguishing markers within a city, Florida sought to show a high correlation between "the Creative Class share of the workforce; innovation, measured as patents per capita; high tech industry; ...and diversity, measured by the Gay Index, a reasonable proxy for an area's openness."¹⁵ According to Florida, the technological savvy, diversity, and individualistic lifestyles that are often distinctive to the Creative Class indicate a multidimensional, experiential work ethos, communal relationship and belief system. For a city like Seattle that values its education, existential openness, and its ethnic, sexual and spiritual diversity, and, yet is also defined by its transitory and fluid communities, sense of place and identity, Florida's research is a helpful indicator of Seattle's driving metanarrative.

¹¹ "ACS: Ranking Table -- Percent of People 25 Years and Over Who Have Completed a Bachelor's Degree". United States Census Bureau. <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Products/Ranking/2003/R02T160.htm>.

¹² John C. Miller, "America's Most Literate Cities, 2006," Central Connecticut State University, 2006. <http://www.ccsu.edu/AMLC06/default2.htm>.

¹³ "Seattle city, Washington; ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates: 2005-2007." http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ADPTable?_bm=y&-context=adp&-qr_name=ACS_2007_3YR_G00_DP3YR5&-ds_name=ACS_2007_3YR_G00_&-tree_id=3307&-redoLog=true&-caller=geoselect&-geo_id=16000US5363000&-format=&-_lang=en.

¹⁴ The Williams Institute on Sexual Orientation Law and Public Policy (October 2006). "Same-sex Couples and the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Population: New Estimates from the American Community Survey." UCLA School of Law. <http://www.law.ucla.edu/williamsinstitute/publications/SameSexCouplesandGLBpopACS.pdf>.

¹⁵ Richard Florida, *Rise of the Creative Class*, 2002; pgs. 244-247.

What does all of this mean? What does the typical Seattleite look like? How do they behave? If, as Tim Keller says “There is no absolute way to define the city”¹⁶ is true, how would one generally describe the guiding principle and metanarrative of the unique culture and population of Seattle? In general, Seattle is a city that creates, keeps and attracts educated people that often come for work, or stay for work, in a tech savvy environment. With Microsoft, Amazon, Costco, and Starbucks being some of the major employers, Seattle also generates and attracts a creative, freedom seeking person.

Despite the beauty of the city, however, it is far too expensive for most to be able to afford to live there. Rental property dominates the housing landscape, with most people cohabitating with at least one other person, for at the very least financial reasons. This also means that there is a general displacement of neighborhoods every three to four years. Because of this, place, while important to the Seattleite, is a fluid construct. Much to the same degree, so is identity.

The geography, grandeur and beauty of the surrounding country dictate Seattle as a place of destination. Very few “end up” in Seattle, but rather most move there with a specific intent. Because of this, much like Seattle’s history, the people who move there, from immigrants to U.S. transplants, often times see the city on the edge of the Americas as an opportunity to shed their former lives, beliefs and identities, and therefore adopt and create a new one. For many U.S. transplants, Seattle is seen as a place of new beginnings. It is a place and opportunity to shed the perceived confines of a former life in search of something better—a deeper, greater story. For many the hope of a fulfilling job is attractive, yet for others, particularly the younger generation,

¹⁶ Tim Keller, “A Biblical Theology of the City,” *Evangelicals Now*, July 2002. <http://www.e-n.org.uk/p-1869-A-biblical-theology-of-the-city.htm>.

the creative ethos of the city is the driving attraction. Unlike many other major U.S. cities, Seattle is a city where people tend to stay. It is a destination, not a stop.

Seattleites pride themselves in their personal autonomy and freedom. Without a doubt, personal freedom underlies the general ethic and metanarrative of the city. Along with this is love and protection of the environment. Hence, with the surrounding mountains keeping watch over the hustle and bustle of the city, it is impossible not to feel mankind as dwarfed by the vastness of nature.

Christianity and Spirituality

What does this mean, then, for the spiritual life of Seattle? That is, if “most people still adopt the religious style of the region to which they move,”¹⁷ then how does the unique culture of Seattle affect how its residents think and speak of God? Moreover, how does this affect how churches grow and reach the surrounding demographic?

The first thing to notice is that Seattle is “unchurched” and always has been since the earliest Euro-American settlements. According to Killen, in 1970 the Pacific Northwest’s religious adherence rate reached the nation’s 1890 rate of 34.4%. In 2000 the Northwest’s adherence rate was 37.2%, while the nation stood at 59.4%.¹⁸ According to a the American Religious Identification Survey 2001 (ARIS) the majority of Northwesterners, some 62.8%, do not and have not participated in a church, synagogue, mosque or temple. Killen notes that in this unchurched majority, two groups are represented: the “nones” and “identifiers.” The “nones” group are comprised of “adults who, when asked in a phone interview, ‘What is your religion, if

¹⁷ Patricia O’Connell Killen, “The Religious Geography of the Pacific Northwest,” pg. 270.

¹⁸ Ibid, pg. 271.

any?’ answered, ‘None.’” In the Pacific Northwest the “nones” comprise 25% of the region’s adult population, the highest of any region in the nation.¹⁹

In the Northwest and Seattle, “nones” are mostly white, male, married, over forty, employed full-time, own their own home, and have grown children. Meaning, they represent the conventional educated and employed majority. What is unique about “nones,” however, is that although they lack any true religious ties or particular religious practices, “nones” are not irreligious or unspiritual. Fewer than 2% of them are atheist or agnostic. When asked whether God exists and if God intervenes in their lives, most “nones” answered positively. Interestingly, what “nones” in the Pacific Northwest (and Seattle as its cultural and financial leader) represent is the fastest national population for whom their religious construction and identification is created completely beyond religious institutions and beyond an identification with an historic religious faith.

The second largest group among the unchurched are the “identifiers.” “Identifiers” are adults who name a particular religious community or tradition, but do not belong to a congregation of any religion. That is, they identify with an historic faith but do not participate in the representative community or institution.

Of the minority population of Seattle and the Pacific Northwest, 37.2%, for whom there is a specific religious adherence and practice, there is not a dominate group. Unlike many areas of the country, such as the Baptist South or the Lutheran Midwest, Seattle’s religious landscape is much more pluralistic. Catholics and Pentecostals/Charismatics make up the two dominate religious adherent groups in the Northwest, however their numbers are strikingly low in compared to the rest of the country. Nationally, 50% of people go to a church, mosque or synagogue. In the South, nearly 50% of the population attends a church service within the

¹⁹ Ibid, pg. 271.

historic Christian tradition, whereas in a study done by David T. Olson and “The American Church,” an estimated 13.9% of the population is in attendance at a church on a given Sunday in Seattle.²⁰ 2% of these adherents attend a mainline Protestant church, 4% attend a Catholic church, and 8% attend an Evangelical church of some kind. At the time of writing, there are currently only three PCA churches in the city of Seattle. Of these three, Green Lake Presbyterian Church and Hillcrest Presbyterian Church were planted in 1939 and 1940 respectively, whereas Grace Church Seattle Mission was planted in 1998. In the state of Washington as whole, including Vancouver, there are currently only sixteen PCA churches, with an additional seven churches either dissolved or withdrawn since their inception.²¹

In Seattle, with only 8% of the population in attendance at an historically Evangelical church, and 4% in attendance at a Catholic church, and 2% at a mainline Protestant church, some 86% of the population either does not attend any religious institution or they are split between attendance at a Islamic mosque, Jewish synagogue, Buddhist temple, or some other religious institution. Within the conservative, Evangelical Reformed Presbyterian tradition of the PCA, currently only three churches are reaching a population of 563,662.²² To put this into perspective, the state of Alabama currently has 104 PCA churches with an additional twelve churches either dissolved or withdrawn since their inception; and with a population of nearly 230,000 people in Birmingham, there are currently 13 PCA churches.²³ In Seattle, the 8% of the

²⁰ David T. Olson, “The State of the Church in the Seattle Metro Area, 1990-2000,” www.TheAmericanChurch.org, 2004.

²¹ PCA Historical Center, “PCA Congregations in Washington.”

<http://www.pcahistory.org/churches/washington.html>. Retrieved on May 7, 2009.

²² It should be noted, that the Washington Church Planting Network of the PCA is currently working to plant another church in West Seattle; and Green Lake Presbyterian Church is currently seeking to move to a multi-site model, with one current site already functioning and two others in their infancy.

²³ Of note, it is not my intent to denigrate the growth of the PCA neither in the South nor in Alabama and Birmingham. One cannot look at the growth of the PCA without giving the Lord His due credit and praise for how He has used this small denomination to bring the Gospel to people, families, communities, towns, states, and our

population that attends any Evangelical church is about 45,000 people. In Birmingham, the 104 people in the PCA alone reaches an average of 2,211 people per church. Of these churches, Briarwood Presbyterian Church, by far the largest in Birmingham, boasts a membership of around 4,100 people.

What this trend shows, is that like the rest of Seattle's history, churches and denominations have been slow to pour resources and efforts into the city. Reasons for this are historical, cultural and ethical. For most evangelical churches, growth has been slow, difficult and expensive. As Killen notes, "Successive waves of immigration as in other parts of the West, coupled with factors such as high intraregional mobility, have militated against the growth of a significant religious establishment."²⁴ Seattle's overt secularism and the difficulty of establishing a church within a region that is and has always been unchurched, have made this city a notably difficult place to plant a church with the same results and vision of a church in American South, for example.

To say, however, that Seattle is an unspiritual city would be a misnomer. For Seattle, the majority of religious adherence and religious participation are expressed outside religious institutions and traditions. In the Pacific Northwest and Seattle it is perhaps best to understand them as expressed and experienced differently than in other areas of the country and in other religious traditions. As Mark A. Shibley notes in his essay "Secular but Spiritual in the Pacific Northwest," what is possibly needed is a "new interpretative framework" to "better illuminate the core values, ritual practices, types of transcendent experiences, and forms of community that

nation. PCA Historical Center, "PCA Congregations in Alabama."
<http://www.pcahistory.org/churches/alabama.html>. Retrieved on May 7, 2009.

²⁴ Killen, "The Religious Geography of the Pacific Northwest," pg. 273.

engage non-church-going Northwesterners.”²⁵ Thus, an evaluation of what the Northwesterner and the Seattleite counts as sacred and how they engage in this “experience of the divine” is necessary.

Shibley identifies two “clusters of alternative spirituality” that are pertinent to Seattle and an understanding of the dominant religious life of the city. The first, he identifies as a religious search of the self.²⁶ Here, clearly individualism plays a particularly strong point in one’s perception of religious fulfillment and experience. The leaders and religious elite tend to be experiential, “New Age” authors that function as mystic existentialists for the masses. Within this broader “New Age” spiritualism and search for the self, Shibley identifies three general dimensions to its world view: A fundamental truth statement that “Your lives do not work” because you are living in a belief system provided by the dominant culture rather than living based on experience; a normative explanation that “You are Gods and Goddess in exile,” and this is the truth about who you are and what you must strive for; and, a prescriptive ethic of “Let go” to allow salvation to come through an exorcism of the hold of the socialized mode of being. “In short,” as Shibley notes, “the world is a mess because individuals are not in touch with their true self, which is obscured by culture. In principle, therefore, the primary work... is a process of empowering individuals over dominant cultural institutions and ideologies.”²⁷ What this highly individualized religious expression and experience means for the public life of Seattle is fourfold: first, the search for self as a religious experience borrows at will from the public sphere and the pluralism of ideas; secondly, it contributes to the culture through an emphasis on openness, experience and existentialism; thirdly, its “leaders” and sources of authority are

²⁵ Mark A. Shibley, “Secular but Spiritual in the Pacific Northwest,” *Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Northwest: the None Zone*, pg. 139.

²⁶ Ibid, pgs. 142-150.

²⁷ Ibid, pg. 146.

authors and others who have experienced a degree of spiritual freedom and sense of the divine; and fourthly, it overtly distrusts religious establishments as a source of authority and a “residence” of the divine.

The second cluster of religious experience and identification among the unchurched in Seattle is a near pervasive “Nature Religion.”²⁸ As mentioned earlier, the beauty and grandeur of nature dwarfs the human here. Pastors and Christian leaders have bemoaned the difficulty of convincing Christians that corporate public worship on Sunday morning is of greater importance than “worshipping” the Lord in the cathedral of Seattle’s natural surroundings. For the secular Seattleite, this “experience of the divine” on a hike, kayak trip, or ski slope has reached near institutionally religious proportions. Clearly nature and the natural environment are held and treated as sacred. Two ethical expressions, then, dominate Seattleite culture and its “Nature Religion”: environmental activism and organizations, and environmental leisure. From organizations that spread a gospel of “saving the forests” to outdoor leisure providers R.E.I., Seattle, just a short 45 minute drive to the base of immense and beautiful mountains, is a city that prides itself in its overt sense and care of nature, such that for many the best way to experience the divine and find one’s self is in the context of worship of the sacred elements of nature.

Within these two broad categories of spiritualism in the Seattle—an openness to individualized mysticism and spiritualism, and a care for the sacredness of the nature—truly, a sacred but secular ethos dominates. For these unchurched Seattleites the things that are counted as holy in people’s lives reflect and fit well within the metanarrative of the city itself. Thus, the geography functions to inculcate an experience of the divine in the beauty and grandeur of the natural environment. Because Seattle tends to be a “destination city,” whereby people often see it as an opportunity to shed previous identities and the perceived holds of dominate religious

²⁸ Ibid, pgs. 155-164.

cultures, Seattleites often feel the freedom (and even relish the freedom) to experience life on their own terms, outside religious traditions and experiences. Moreover, because Seattle is a highly educated urban center, where rapid social change is the norm and home affordability is only available for the wealthy, Seattleites often note that looking for the sacred and holy in old organizational structures, institutions and traditions is not illuminating. As Shibley notes,

While the sacred has escaped the vessels that once contained it, there is no reason to suspect that people are less likely to seek or find transcendence. Nor should it be surprising that in this region, the most profound experience comes from encounters with nature and that the deepest meanings are drawn from and forged in mythical narratives about wilderness and the last frontier.²⁹

In an informal study by a potential church planter in Seattle, Christians polled stated the following: The basic needs of Seattleites tend to focus on satisfying work and the money necessary to provide for personal desires, community and relationships of substance and fulfillment, and a pursuit of meaning and purpose through they do. This is then fleshed out through some of the following interests and activities: creative endeavors such as film, art, fashion and music; outdoors activities; social concern and activism; technology and technological engagement; engagement with spirituality and philosophy; and controlled hedonistic pleasures such as drinking or sexual engagement. And when asked about Seattle's hopes and fears, six categories arose: individualized and self-actualized meaning and purpose vs. institutional identity and chaos; acceptance and belonging vs. loneliness and isolation; success vs. failure; environmental stewardship vs. capitalistic selfishness; and autonomy vs. dependence.

From this brief study the image created of the conventional Seattleite, the dominate metanarrative of the city and its unchurched majority, is one in which autonomy is idolized to the extent that ethics are primarily seen in the context of whether or not one challenges another's

²⁹ Ibid, pg. 166.

autonomy. Freedom is heralded as a sacred right to the Seattleite such that financial security and religious openness are understood within this framework. Here, identity is a fluid construct determined nearly exclusively by the self. Existential longing dominates. And finally, an overt dualism undergirds everything, whereby the mystical and ethereal defines and dictates the morally good and sacred whereas the tangible and intrusive is seen as evil and destructive.

The Gospel Speaking to Seattle³⁰

The final questions to answer are: What part or parts of the Gospel engage, encourage and challenge the culture and people of Seattle? That is, how does God's truth found in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament both engage the unchurched of Seattle and properly shepherd the faithful? This is an important question especially because for many people, myself included, knowledge of "how to do church" and how to reach those who are unchurched is and has historically been dictated by a cultural value and expectation of those who to some degree understand and know what it might mean to be a contributing member of a local church.³¹

I have attempted to paint a picture of what the people, cultural values and life is like in an unchurched city such as Seattle. Because of their underlying metanarrative there are clear things within their lives by which the Lord is already speaking to them and revealing aspects of His truth. Some of these are the prevalence and output of the Creative Class, care for others, and the overt care for nature and the natural environment. People in Seattle not only count some of these things as important but they truly love them and take joy in knowing that this is core to their identity and ethic. On the other hand, however, there are clearly points central to the Seattleite's

³⁰ Although neither specifically mentioned nor referenced, my guiding "conversation partners" for much of the study that follows are N.T. Wright's *Simply Christian*, and *Evil and the Justice of God*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Life Together*, Miroslav Volf's *The End of Memory*, and to a lesser extent Ed Stetzer's *Lost and Found*.

³¹ The wonderful growth of the PCA in the South, I believe, is evident of this historical and cultural trend among American evangelicals.

identity by which they turn from the Lord and are hindered to turn to Him in repentance and faith.

For a city like Seattle the place to begin is not with an outright condemnation of who they are, what they believe and how they act. Accordingly, rather than beginning with Genesis 3, it is best to begin with Genesis 1-2. Seattleites consider institutional religion as suspect of authority, untrustworthy. Moreover, a core part of Seattle's story and ethic is an overt individualism that judges speaking too directly into another's life as immoral. Consequently, a distinct way to meet these unchurched, suspicious folks is to create a vision of what life could and should be like under the Lordship of Jesus as the Christ. That is, begin with Genesis 1-2 not chapter 3. By doing so, Genesis 1-2 creates a beautiful vision of what life was like before the intrusion and brokenness of sin, and it highlights the longings and "creational echoes" evident in the hearts and minds of humanity. Thus, creating a vision of what life could and should be like without sin and its accompanying destruction, both morally and structurally, would serve to ground the heart in a desire to see and experience such blessing, beauty, care and love. The following visions of creation and "creational echoes" presented in Genesis 1-2 then apply:

Power & Perspective—First, the Lord is the Creator of all things—from the movement of the ocean to the grandeur of the mountains. As divine Creator there is a clear aspect of perspective and comparison. That is, the creation account puts into severe perspective the difference between the created and the Creator. As a consequence, if nature dwarfs the human, the Lord dwarfs nature even more. The Lord created it, holds it, and has power over it.

Order & Structure—A second aspect is the order presented in the creation account. In a culture in which constant social and moral change is part and parcel to a way of life, along side a lack of stability in community, which all in turn function to create a fluid sense of identity and place, the

order presented in creation speaks well. In creating all things, under heaven and on earth, the Lord's ordered account gives a vision of the way things were meant to be. From the structure and progression of the given days, to the distinction among creation, an ordered, structured creation account stands to give a vision of this.

Goodness & Beauty—Thirdly, the goodness and beauty of all things is overtly emphasized in the creation account of Gen. 1-2. For the Seattleite, there is an aspect of their life and values to which they already acknowledge portions of this. A view toward the grandeur of the natural puts them into a semblance of worship, seeing both its ferocity and its undeniable beauty and goodness. Second to this, an appreciation of the uniqueness of personhood exemplifies this point. Here the cultural ethos of acceptance and openness of another, no matter the sexual identity or perversion, seeks to see another for their humanity and inherit goodness therein. The near ubiquitous acceptance of a homosexual lifestyle is evidence of this.

Five times in Genesis 1 the Lord pronounces the creation of each day as “good.” One additional time the pronouncement of “very good” is given after the completion of all creation. By mere repetition within the structure the inherent “goodness” is integrally wrapped up in all things. טוֹב, “good,” in Hebrew can also carry a connotation of “pleasant,” as in Gen. 2:9 (“the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is *pleasant* to the sight” [ESV]). Gen. 2:9 itself makes this connection such that טוֹב is repeated three times: the tree was טוֹב to the sight, and טוֹב for food. Other places where the adjectival sense of טוֹב are similarly used are: the grain of Pharaoh's dream (41:5, 36) was “good” for eating; the טוֹב of Joseph's enslavement (50:20) included the practical benefits as food and national survival; Gen. 6:2, from where the desirability and beauty of the “daughters of men” are described; Rebekah's beauty in Gen. 24:16; and Bathsheba's beauty in 2 Sam. 11:2. Also in Gen. 2:9, טוֹב is contrasted to רָע, “evil.” From

this, a general definition and connotation of טוב is given as an experiential, sometimes sensual connotation that is in contrast to evil.

For the unchurched, pluralistic Seattleite this is clearly a point of connection. Personal experience of all things, from the natural to the “divine,” is heralded as one of the primary positions of worship. While hedonistic perversion can be indistinguishable for many, the experiential, existential meaning of what is “good” and “bad,” or morally and ethically right or wrong, connects well to the Biblical account. The Lord pronounces creation as טוב, not just because He can, but because it is truly experienced this way. It is טוב—good and pleasant, and even beautiful.

Relationships, Worship & Work—A fourth aspect seen in the creation account is that man and woman were meant to be in intimate communion with one another, with the Lord Himself, and even with creation. In a culture that is disjointed, where community dynamics are often distinct and controlled, the vision set by the creation account is that there is so much more beauty and grandeur of what true communion could and should be like. Under the Lord’s good and perfect design man and woman were meant to work together in perfect union, without shame and guilt, mutually encouraging and shaping one another for good. The first time in the Genesis that something is said to be לא־טוב, “not good,” is Gen. 2:18 where “the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone.’” Contrasting the experiential “goodness” of all of creation, the Lord pronounces a negative definition of the lack of meaningful, experienced relationship for the man. Being alone is truly לא־טוב.

In a similar way, the “experience of the divine” set in Genesis 1-2 gives a portrait of how the first man and woman walked with the Lord and communicated with Him, all in a beautiful picture of a peaceful garden. In Gen. 3:8 after the intrusion of the sinful act, where the Lord God

“walked in the cool of the day,” communion with Him, the divine Creator, has been severed. From the severing of this greatest of relationships and communions, all relationships—with nature, one another, one’s children, one’s labor, etc...—have been forever broken.

These “creational echoes” and longings for unmitigated, free relationships with one another, with the natural environment and with the Lord Himself run throughout the ethos of Seattle. For many, it drives all that they do and think, whether through hope or fear. The story of Genesis rooted here in the first few chapters provides a beautiful vision of what life should and could be like without the brokenness and destructive power of sin. Whether it is the perfect relationships that create beautiful community, the wonder of pure, experiential worship of the Lord, or the freedom of proper service to created order, the Scriptures and all of life are rooted in these same echoes and longings—to see and experience things as they ought.

A Greater Story & Creational Memory—A final functional aspect, a “creation echo,” that is inculcated through the creation account is a foundational grounding of mankind and the Lord’s people within the true metanarrative. In a pluralistic, open, unchurched culture like Seattle where identity is fluid and constructed (often times recreated and adapted), and competing, divergent narratives contend for obedience and commitment, the rooting of all stories within the beginning of all things (both beautiful and broken) serves to put a true stability and meaning to identity. The promise of redemption in Gen. 3:15, fleshed out through the rest of Genesis, described in 50:20 (“As for you, you meant *evil* against me, but God meant it for *good*”³² [ESV]), blossomed in each covenant, can broadly be described as the Lord’s means to care for creation through the proper imaging of all of mankind. It is an act and process of redemption—of making what was once evil, now good.

³² וְאַתֶּם חֲשַׁבְתֶּם עָלַי רָעָה אֱלֹהִים חֲשַׁבָה לְטוֹבָה

Within Israel's life and worship there were countless reminders instituted by the Lord to keep them grounded in the true metanarrative of the Lord's redeeming work begun in Gen. 3:15. Looming like a mountain within Israel's memory was to be their memory of the Exodus. Here, the Lord called Israel to keep the Passover as a vivid reminder of their deliverance from bondage in Egypt. For example, the bitter herbs that they ate (Ex. 12:8) were to be a tactile reminder within the Passover of their bitter lives in Egypt (Ex. 1:14). The Lord wanted Israel to remember bitter things about the past in order to grasp how great his deliverance was; that is, memory of the bitter past served to make God's mercy and deliverance all that much more sweet. Through this one begins to see how memory functions in the Old Testament, and particularly how the Lord plays a significant role in establishing Israel's memory. The Lord wanted Israel rooted in a "redemptive memory" begun at the end of creation. He did not want them to forget. He wanted daily reminders to ground Israel in the true metanarrative of His redeeming work. And He did not want them to "go after other gods" and their competing, divergent narratives of reality.

The Passover feast was set as a memorial, established by God, to remind Israel what the Lord had done for them through their deliverance from Egypt.³³ The question then is, why so much detail in recollecting the past? Why did the Lord want Israel to be grounded in His story of redemption? It is because He knows that His people have a tendency to forget, and because Israel's memory was directly related to their commitment to the Lord and their covenantal identity with the Lord.³⁴ Deut. 8 exemplifies this throughout the whole chapter. Again and again, the Lord reminds Israel to remember the Lord and his work and to not forget him (e.g. Dt. 8:11). The Lord's memory helps to underscore his memory as a defining function of his covenantal identity and relationship with his people. Israel's memory, likewise was to be a

³³ John Bettler, "Counseling and the Problem of the Past." *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Volume XII, Number 2 (Winter 1994): pg. 12.

³⁴ Bettler, pg. 12.

corporate memory tied the Lord's promises, character and work. Thus, through the Old Testament one begins to see that memory functions centrally to Israel's identity, practice, faithfulness and relationship to the Lord.

Here a "creational memory," imaged by the בָּרָא of man and creation (experienced through "creational echoes"), calls mankind through faint whispers back to the divine Creator. Directly connected to this is a "redemptive memory," imaged by the כִּפְּרוּ of the Lord's covenantal people that calls all mankind to the true identity-giving metanarrative of the Lord's acts of redemption and worship of the triune God.

The Church today acts to exemplify this true metanarrative and true identity. Through our life, relationships, words and worship, the Lord calls all mankind to their true selves and their true anthropology. In a culture such as Seattle where identity is fluid, constructed at will by individuals and communities, the Church functions to tell a deeper story, a truer story, a more meaningful story, and a more beautiful story of the Lord's creational intent and His works of redemption.

Visions of Heaven—The theological anchors of Genesis 1-3 are presented as a vision of what life could and should be like. It calls all of mankind, no matter tribe, tongue or nation to an identity grounded in the true metanarrative of the divine Creator. The "creational echoes" work to engender a desire to see this truth experienced and seen. In this way, the imaginative aspect of Genesis 1-3 functions to create a heartfelt desire to see these things be their proper place in proper "working order." Similarly, it puts sin and brokenness into stark perspective. That is, as beauty and goodness are seen and experienced, sin and brokenness on an existential level are seen and experienced as corruptions and intrusions into life—things are not the way it is supposed to be.

The Book of Revelation does much the same for us today. It functions to give us a vision and a hope of the way things are to be, and could be.³⁵ It grounds identity in a future hope and vision of the finished redeeming work of the Lord. Inaugurated in the person and work of Jesus as the Christ, the Lord's work of redeeming all things—of making things the way they are supposed to be and fulfilling the “creational echoes”—has begun its “endgame.” In a city like Seattle—unchurched, spiritually open and existentially searching—the Church today has an opportunity to embody, in both word and deed, the truths of the Lord's work of redemption. A future hope where the power of sin and death has been broken and defeated is imaged today under the rule and Lordship of Jesus, through person and work of Jesus as the Christ. Here, there is only one “city,” one community, where sin and death has been broken and defeated. Here, there is only one community that truly embodies the fulfillment of the “creational echoes” felt, seen and heard by all.

Revelation 5:9-14 and 7:9-11 exemplifies the finished work of Jesus through a vision of every tribe, tongue and nation worshipping the triune God together, in unity and harmony. It is a vision of the community of mankind worshipping together, under the perfectly seen and experienced Lordship of the triune God. For the Church today, this means setting a tangible vision of the Church as “the catalyst and continual agent in the transformation” of the city, bringing together all peoples of every tribe and background, as one, through the transforming work of Jesus as the Christ.

Revelation 21:1-5, 22-7 provides a radical image of the presence of God among mankind, and a radical “experience of the divine,” as a renewing, redeeming work whereby all of life is life and culture. Here, the finished work of Jesus as the Christ brings the dwelling of God

³⁵ The following three points are adapted from John Haralson and Michael Subrako, “How is Grace Seattle Ministering in this Mission Field?” Grace Seattle, http://graceseattle.org/about_vision.html.

perfectly in union with man. The result is an all-encompassing work of redemption and renewal. In a culture that longs for the experience of the divine, yet through very personal, individualized means and results, Revelation offers a better picture whereby tears are dried, pain is no more, death is beaten, the poor are taken care of, the voiceless are heard and healed, and a city is created whereby the doors have been opened and a new culture, a better society, is created. In a culture that longs for this, embodying the gospel then means to bring this vision to a watching world. It means to proclaim, both in word and deed, these truths and to invite others to experience this culture changing, all-encompassing renewal and redemption.

A third vision of heaven relevant to the needs of the unchurched culture of Seattle is found in Revelation 22:1-5. Here the curse is pronounced finally lifted, and sin and death are broken and beaten. In this new hope, this new city, where God is seen and experienced, where sin and death are no more, where there was once hatred and disunity, where there was once fear and trembling, where there was once loneliness and disunity, now there is no longer a curse, and tree of life—the healing powers mentioned in Genesis 1-2—are made open and accessible through the finished work of Jesus as the reigning and ruling Christ. Worship, in all of life is presented here as a beautiful thing. For the Church today, in an unchurched city like Seattle, there is a great opportunity to present a unified community, in mutual care and love for one another, for whom the curse has been, and is being lifted. Thus, work is not a means to an end, a toil and frustration; rather it is a place where humanity is truly experienced. It is a place where service for one another and for nature is now done for the perfect benefit of each. It is a place where one's work is fulfilling because the greatest work has been fulfilled. It is a place where the grandeur and beauty of the mountains is dwarfed by the majesty of the reigning Lord.

Bibliography

- Bettler, John. "Counseling and the Problem of the Past." *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Volume XII, Number 2 (Winter 1994): 5-23.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Pub.: 1954.
- Casey, Chris. "Seattle History," on <http://www.seattle.com/history/>. Retrieved May, 2009.
- Clemence, Sara "Most Overpriced Places in the U.S. 2005," *Forbes* 7/15/05.
http://www.forbes.com/2005/07/14/overpriced-cities-lifestyle-cx_sc_0715home_ls.html
- Florida, Richard. *Rise of the Creative Class, And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2002.
- Forbes Magazine, 2009. "Best Places For Business and Careers; #17 Seattle, WA."
http://www.forbes.com/lists/2009/1/bizplaces09_Seattle-WA_2396.html
- Haralson, John, and Michael Subrako. "How is Grace Seattle Ministering in this Mission Field?" http://graceseattle.org/about_vision.html. Grace Seattle, 2009.
- Keller, Tim. "A Biblical Theology of the City," *Evangelicals Now*, July 2002.
<http://www.e-n.org.uk/p-1869-A-biblical-theology-of-the-city.htm>.
- Killen, Patricia O'Connell, and Mark Silk, ed. *Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Northwest: The None Zone*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004.
- Killen, Patricia O'Connell. "The Religious Geography of the Pacific Northwest," *Word and World*
- Longman, Phillip. "The Liberal Baby Bust," *USA Today*, 3/13/2006.
http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/editorials/2006-03-13-babybust_x.htm.
- Mars Hill research, retrieved through email interaction. April 2009.
- Miller, John C.. "America's Most Literate Cities, 2006," Central Connecticut State University, 2006. <http://www.ccsu.edu/AMLC06/default2.htm>.
- Olson, David T.. "The State of the Church in the Seattle Metro Area, 1990-2000," www.TheAmericanChurch.org, 2004.
- PCA Historical Center, "PCA Congregations in Washington."
<http://www.pcahistory.org/churches/washington.html>. Retrieved on May 7, 2009.
- PCA Historical Center, "PCA Congregations in Alabama."
<http://www.pcahistory.org/churches/alabama.html>. Retrieved on May 7, 2009.

- Shibley, Mark A. "Secular but Spiritual in the Pacific Northwest," *Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Northwest: the None Zone*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004.
- Sorenen, Eric. "Metro Dog," Seattle Times Pacific Northwest Magazine, May 13, 2006.
http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/cgi-bin/PrintStory.pl?document_id=2002974751&zsecti on_id=2002937859&slug=pacificpdogs14&date=20060513
- Stetzer, Ed, Richie Stanley, and Jason Hayes. *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches that Reach Them*. Nashville, TN: B & H Pub., 2009.
- Taylor, Paul, Project Director. Pew Research Center. "For Nearly Half of America, Grass is Greener Somewhere Else," January 29, 2009.
<http://pewsocialtrends.org/pubs/722/grass-greener-somewhere-else-top-cities>.
- UCLA School of Law. The Williams Institute on Sexual Orientation Law and Public Policy (October 2006). "Same-sex Couples and the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Population: New Estimates from the American Community Survey."
<http://www.law.ucla.edu/williamsinstitute/publications/SameSexCouplesandGLBpopACS.pdf>.
- United States Census Bureau. "ACS: Ranking Table -- Percent of People 25 Years and Over Who Have Completed a Bachelor's Degree".
<http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Products/Ranking/2003/R02T160.htm>.
- United States Census Bureau. "Seattle city, Washington; ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates: 2005-2007." http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ADPTable?_bm=y&-context=adp&-qr_name=ACS_2007_3YR_G00_DP3YR5&-ds_name=ACS_2007_3YR_G00_&-tree_id=3307&-redoLog=true&-_caller=geoselect&-geo_id=16000US5363000&-format=&-_lang=en.
- United States Census Bureau. "US Gazetteer files: 2000 and 1990". 2005-05-03,
<http://www.census.gov/geo/www/gazetteer/gazette.html>.
- Volf, Miroslav. *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006.
- Wright, N.T.. *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense*. New York, NY: Harper One Pub., 2006.
- Wright, N.T.. *Evil and the Justice of God*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006.