



Plausible Hope II: Faithful Witness in an Age of Distrust

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Outline

Social Distrust and the Church

Generating trust once again

Making hope plausible via a living witness

The Decline of Social Trust

Systemic across society
affecting more than just
churches or other
religious institutions

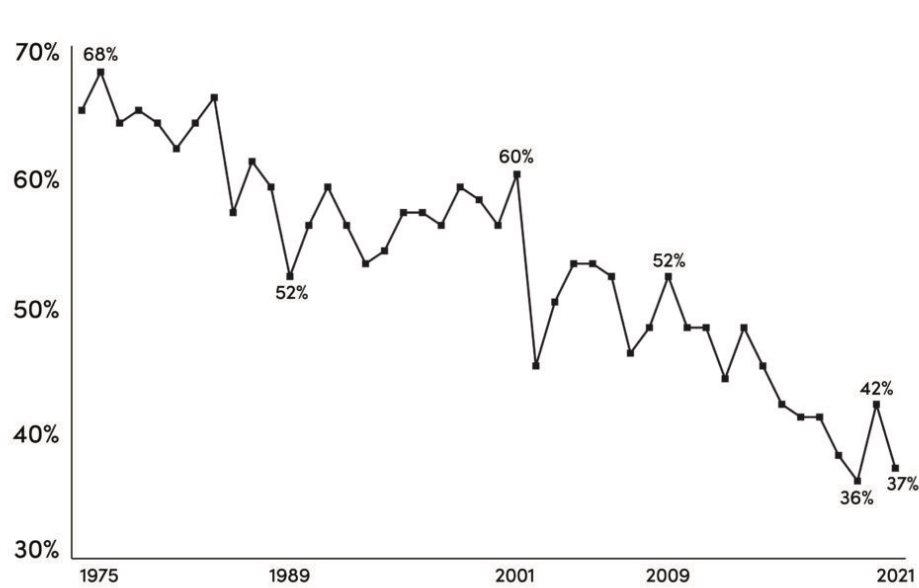
While we're "not alone
here," this phenomenon
is NOT encouraging





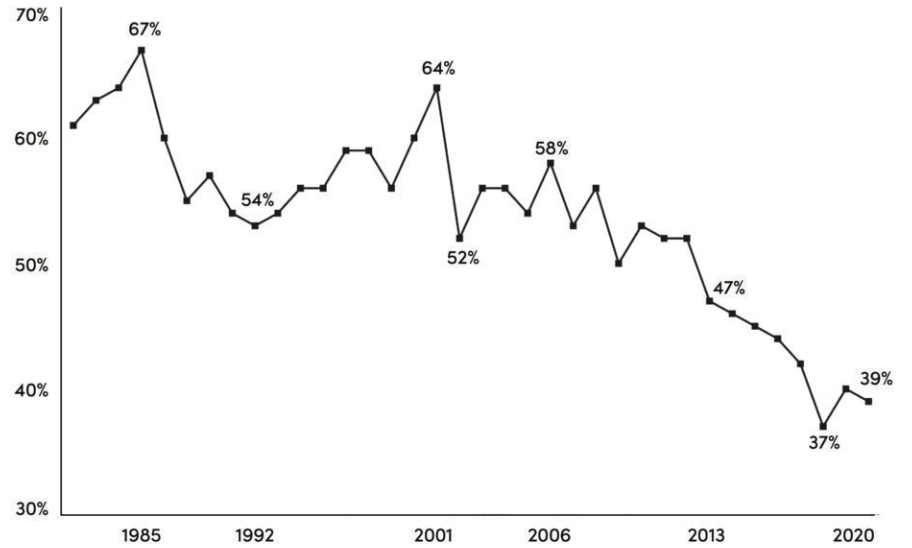
A Trust Deficit

Americans Near Record Low Confidence in Church



Source: Gallup
<https://news.gallup.com/poll/352316/americans-confidence-major-institutions-dips.aspx>

Public trust of clergy remains near all-time low



Source: Gallup <https://news.gallup.com/poll/328136/ethics-ratings-rise-medical-workers-teachers.aspx>

<https://news.gallup.com/poll/352316/americans-confidence-major-institutions-dips.aspx>

Why the Decline in Social Trust?

Post-truth and fake news

The Internet and discernment

The Age of Implausibility (Taylor)

Scandals and Abuse of Power (=church hurt)

Our public witness:

We are in the eyes of the world

who we have been before the eyes of the world





Responding to Implausibility

Trust is crucial.
Relationships are where it's born.



Can they trust us?

In an age of **IMPLAUSIBILITY**,
PERCEPTION and REPUTATION
matter for witness!

Our Public Witness

What has the world seen?

Antagonism:

the world, outsiders, culture, etc.,
are our enemy (protectionism,
battle metaphors, culture “war”
mentality)

Reputation =

Known for what we’re against



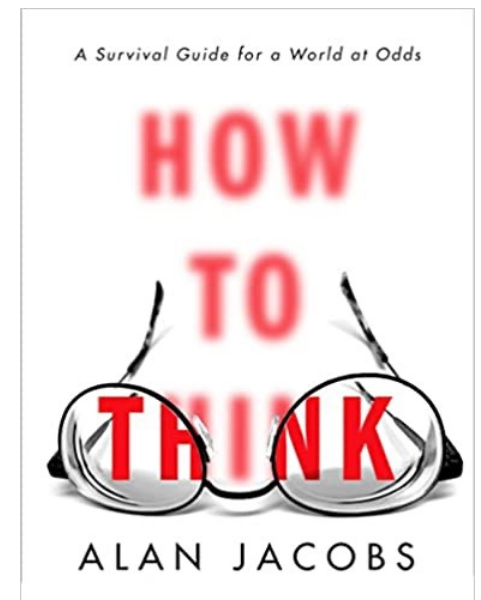
Image credit: https://www.news-journal.com/features/religion/longview-street-preacher-on-mission-to-spread-christian-message/article_a1390098-37d3-5a77-9b5b-298e2bc058f6.html



***Good Manners in Polite Company?**

Repugnant Cultural Others

“This is a profoundly unhealthy situation. It’s unhealthy because it prevents us from recognizing others as our neighbors—even when they are quite literally our neighbors. If I’m consumed by this belief that that person over there is both Other and Repugnant, I may never discover that my favorite television program is also his favorite television program; that we like some of the same books, though not for precisely the same reasons; that we both know what it’s like to nurse a loved one through a long illness. All of which is to say that I may all too easily forget that political and social and religious differences are not the whole of human experience. The cold, divisive logic of the ‘repugnant cultural other’ impoverishes us, all of us, and brings us closer to that primitive state that the political philosopher Thomas Hobbes called ‘the war of all against all.’”



Why the Antagonism?

FEAR!

Of infection, corruption, contamination, temptation toward heresy

Our historical scars = collective PTSD

Justified by Old Testament interdictions

- Deuteronomy 12 & 13
 - Bring down the altars, kill idolators, search out the heretics, don't accept their ways ("doing right in their own eyes")
- Their failure haunts us (Judges)

HOME > FILM > NEWS

Oct 7, 2022 12:52pm PT

Texas Mom Goes Viral for Warning Parents Against 'Hocus Pocus 2': It Will 'Unleash Hell on Your Kids and in Your Home'

By Zack Sharf ▾



How to Increase Social Trust of the Church

Building trust requires:

- Acting with integrity
- Owning mistakes and apologizing
- Being vulnerable
- Establishing deep relationships
- Aim to be known for our LOVE because it's God's LOVE



Image source: <https://leadingwithtrust.com/2019/09/22/25-simple-ways-to-build-trust-at-work/>



A Strategy for Re-building Trust

Christian Hospitality

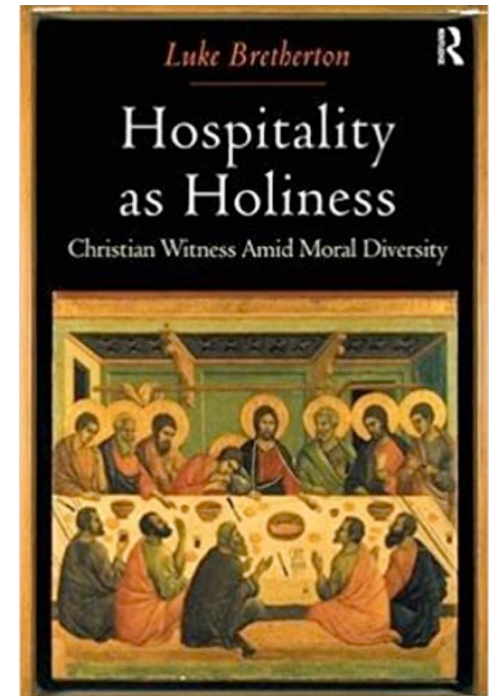
Winsome engagement with and love for enemies and even strangers.

A New Testament model that supplants the interdictions of the Old Testament because Jesus “reconfigures Israel’s purity boundaries.” ... “Hospitality becomes the means for holiness.” (Bretherton)

A Strategy for Re-building Trust

“Jesus does not resolve the tension between hospitality and holiness present in the Old Testament, but he does relate these two imperatives in a particular way. Jesus relates hospitality and holiness by inverting their relations: hospitality becomes the means of holiness. Instead of having to be set apart from or exclude pagans in order to maintain holiness, it is in Jesus' hospitality of pagans, the unclean, and sinners that his own holiness is shown forth. Instead of sin and impurity infecting him, it seems Jesus' purity and righteousness somehow 'infects' the impure, sinners and the Gentiles.”

Luke Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness: Christian Witness Amid Moral Diversity*



New Testament Examples

The Hemorrhaging Woman – Mark 5

The holiness of Jesus is contagious; uncleanness does not “infect” him

“whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these” (John 14.12)



New Testament Examples

Luke 14 – The Great Banquet

- The usual guests—the elite—prove unworthy
 - They reject the banquet and thus the host
 - Every rejection of Christ is expressing preference for an alternative
- The untypical guests – the lame, poor, crippled, blind – are proven worthy by means of the invitation (Gentile expansion foreshadowed)
 - They are honored
 - Humility is exalted, not pride
- The socially normative virtues are turned upside down by Kingdom ones

New Testament Examples

Acts 10 – Peter and Cornelius

The Church as Journeying guest/host

- Cornelius encounters the Spirit (reveals God already at work in the drawing all things to himself)
- The Spirit gives Peter a vision of “unclean” food that is revealed to be clean, signaling the Spirit’s work of making all things new
 - In Christ the Law is fulfilled, creation renewed. No longer necessary at purity rituals for the sake of distinction (holiness)
- Thus, Peter’s contact with Cornelius will not “infect” him
- Rather, through Peter’s contact, Cornelius new identity is revealed

New Testament Examples

Acts 10 – Peter and Cornelius

The Church as Journeying guest/host

- Peter instructed to go—like Jonah—to where he didn't want to go
- Peter arrives as the guest of Cornelius, to whom he has been sent
- Peter becomes host, however, in interpreting Cornelius' encounter with the Spirit
- The Spirit is thus revealed to be working outside the (Jewish) church and subsequently is “poured out” on the Gentiles
- The incident follows with a debate about the mission to the Gentiles concerning circumcision (in the world but not of it)

New Testament Examples

Acts 10 – Peter and Cornelius

The Church as Journeying guest/host

“The book of Acts proposes that by going out to the world, and actively participating in it, Peter was able to enjoy greater communion with God. For a central dynamic of the church's neighbor relations, as articulated in this encounter, is that going out is the way of coming home. It is not just that Christians are to seek the welfare of the city, even though that city be Babylon (Jer. 27:9), but it is in the very act of going out to seek Babylon's welfare that they enjoy table fellowship with God: that is, holiness or purity is defined by communion with God (and not by separation from sinners and pagans) and communion is enjoyed by seeking the welfare of the poor, the impure and pagans.”

Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness*

The Power of the Kingdom

*The *Power* of Powerlessness

Christ won everything for us by giving up everything, from his divine privilege to his very life (Phil. 2.5-11)

Christ came as a stranger to hosts who didn't know him (John 1). He journeyed as a stranger until he became the host (Luke 24).

He never let issues prevent relationships (John 4; Luke 19)

He loved the unlovable, his enemies (Romans 5)



The Power of the Kingdom

The Power of Powerlessness *in the Spirit*

“whenever one would expect an exercise of power from a classical hero, Jesus displays the stunning power of powerlessness— of nonviolence, nonresistance, forgiveness, mercy, compassion, generosity. The divinity that shows through Jesus consists not in a demonstration of might but in a complete reversal of our expectations culminating in the most stunning reversal of all. It is the centerpiece of all this madness, the one that makes as little sense as possible from the point of view of worldly common sense, the most divine madness of all: love your enemies. The key to the kingdom is to love those who do not love you, who hate you, and whom you, by worldly standards, should also hate...Loving the lovable is entirely possible, but loving the unlovable, those who are impossible to love, that is when the kingdom reigns.”

John D. Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct? The Good News of Postmodernism for the Church*



The Power of the Kingdom

The Power of Powerlessness *in the Spirit*

We are empowered to do the same -- we are gathered together (worship's centripetal force) and fed, formed and empowered as we are then "sent out" (worship's centrifugal force) to make the Kingdom known.

"to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you."

Luke 6.27-31



The High Calling of Hospitality

“hospitality toward strangers constitutes part of the church’s witness to the Christ-event and the hospitality that weak and sinful humans have received from God. We who bring nothing to our relationship with God echo this in our reception of others. Thus, within the Christian tradition there is a consistent and special concern for the weakest and most vulnerable...Moreover, the focus on the vulnerable stranger will, on occasion, mean that the church finds itself actively opposed by those who would be, by Christian criteria of evaluation, inhospitable to the vulnerable stranger. Thus, the Christian practice of hospitality is often, because of its priorities, deeply prophetic, calling into question the prevailing political hegemony.”

Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness*



Hospitality as Living Witness

Christian hospitality is a concrete form of making the Kingdom known when the stranger is welcomed as the other-in-me. Consuming Christ in the Supper is the sacramental form of Christ coming as a guest to those who do not recognize him, a stranger who is disgusting, reprehensible, and easily rejected. The very act of consumption of the broken body and blood become the consuming and proleptically consummating act that reveals Christ no longer as stranger, but as host. Having consumed Christ's body and blood, the guests at the table then are no longer strangers but reconstituted as Christ in the world. As Bonhoeffer would put it famously in his *Ethics*, "The church is nothing but the part of humanity in which Christ has really taken form." As Christ then, we become the living host to the strangers of the world, calling them to the Great Banquet.



Renewed Trust as Plausible Hope

Hope becomes plausible (and we become trustworthy) when it is lived, visible, public.



