

PROVINCES OF ZION:  
THE LOCAL CHURCH AND ITS LOCALITY

by

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In his book *Ministries of Mercy*, Timothy J. Keller asks why Presbyterians in America did not adopt Thomas Chalmers' holistic parochial approach to ministry. To answer his own question, Keller cites the Presbyterian Church (USA) minutes of 1892: "The government of Scotland wisely assigns the care of the poor to the Church officials; but this arrangement seems impracticable in an American theory of the relations of Church and State, and our present denominational divisions."<sup>1</sup> Keller goes on to report more from that same 1892 general assembly:

In the meantime, our usages have taught the poor that the State and not the Church is their almoner, but it is high time that it be rescued from this neglect, and restored to its proper dignity as the most ancient and one of the most significant of ecclesiastical functions...The municipal overseer can never be a substitute for the deacon...The Church must prove herself to be the friend of the workingman. She can and should answer and conquer the communist by the deacon.<sup>2</sup>

Over a hundred years later, Christians often complain about ineffective social programs, but how often is the source of the problem traced back to the neglect of the church? Even more importantly, how often is the current state understood as a tremendous opportunity for the church?

Before proceeding, a clarification is already in order. Jesus Christ, echoing the Old Testament, summarizes man's responsibility under two great commands, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Timothy J. Keller, *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road* (1989, reprint, Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1997), 92.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

neighbor as yourself,” (Matt. 22:37-39).<sup>3</sup> Christians must be alert. They must always remember that while money or food or medical attention may be immediately necessary and appropriate, *presentation of the gospel is indispensable*. When done in a Christ-like fashion, telling men who are dead in their trespasses and sins that the only God is a loving, gracious, and inflexibly just God, and that He sent His only begotten Son to befriend sinners, yea, to die in their place, *is the highest expression of love*. “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?” (Matt. 16:26). The gospel must impact members of society without becoming an impotent, anti-soteric, social gospel. The spiritual nature of the church must never be neglected. Social engagement must never come at the expense of the spirituality of the church.

It is the belief of the present author that a local church must be consciously burdened for the immediate locality. Without a renewed ecclesiastical emphasis on the particular locality of each particular local church, the ground lost to state-programs and communism will not be regained. Jesus Christ came to seek and to save the lost. Before ascending up into heaven he gave the great imperative, the Great Commission. The book of Acts recounts the strategic spread of the early church. It is the contention of this paper that Scriptures’ emphasis on households, the Great Commission, and the pattern set forth in Acts serve to highlight the biblical and most effective plan for the only effective message.

When the local church insists on ministering locally, care for the sheep, biblical community, and evangelism begin to express themselves concretely and organically instead of programmatically. In a day of planes, trains, and automobiles, in a day in

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<sup>3</sup> All Scripture references, unless otherwise noted, are taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001).

which virtual worlds are rapidly supplanting incarnate communities, *the missing link of so many local churches is a radical local emphasis*. The following treatment sets forth a biblical basis for radical commitment to the church's immediate locality. This commitment is shaped by and executed according to a thoroughly biblical and reformed philosophy of the Christian ministry. Therefore, after setting forth the biblical basis for a determined and definite locality, the present paper will turn to the nature of the Christian life and ministry within that determined locality.

### **The Church's Obligation to Minister to its Locality**

Though the whole earth perished, God preserved Noah *and his family*. They floated atop the deluge in a giant floating house. Years later, God visited Abraham at his house, which was a tent (Gen. 18:1). At that point in redemptive history, Yahweh declared, "For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him," (Gen. 18:19).

The nation Israel is named after Israel the patriarch. Terms like "the house of Jacob," "the children of Israel," and "the house of David" occur throughout the Old Testament to remind readers of God's covenant faithfulness to households. God loves both the corporate gathering and the particular families of His household, "On the holy mount stands the city he founded; *the LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob*," (Psalm 87:1-2).<sup>4</sup> The Old Testament concludes on a most familial note, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the

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<sup>4</sup> Emphasis added.

hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction,” (Mal. 4:5-6).

While on earth, Jesus frequently visited sinners and saints in their houses. When He sent His disciples on their first mission, He commanded, “Whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. *As you enter the house, greet it,*” (Matt. 10:11-12).<sup>5</sup> Certainly the disciples would have thought back to this mission when they heard Christ declare the Great Commission. With Scripture’s relentless emphasis on the family and households, the disciples would have instinctively thought in terms of infiltrating the households of all nations with the gospel.

Luke records that Jesus instructed the disciples to stay in Jerusalem until the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49, Acts 1:4). Acts 1:8 gives Jesus’ purpose for having them wait in Jerusalem: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Dr. Morton Smith notes, “Acts 1:8 together with the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20 not only constitute the regulative principle for the Apostolic age, but also for all ages of the Church.”<sup>6</sup> The witness bearing began in Jerusalem—where Jesus had His core group. The development of this core group took some time, but that development was absolutely essential. Smith notes:

The all-wise God directed that the witnesses, who lived in Jerusalem and Judea begin their witness-bearing in that region. *Any movement from that region would have been cause for delay of the spread of the Gospel.* It was the most efficient use of resources. Thus God provided for the quickest testimony regarding the Gospel, and the earliest acceptance of it by a large force, who in turn could become a mission force to others.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>6</sup> Morton H. Smith, *Systematic Theology* (Greenville: Greenville Seminary Press, 1994), 553. Emphasis added.

The idea of a well-functioning, informed, and capable core-group is biblical, economical, practical, and highly effective. After the group had developed together for a time, the mission activity spread, first to Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth. This was not the vertical growth of a mega-church, but the horizontal expansion of the Great Commission. This expansion did not come *exclusively* through public preaching, and it most certainly did not come through seminars and venues of public entertainment. The promise of the Spirit came upon the disciples as they were gathered in a house (Acts 2:2). Immediately after Peter's sermon on Pentecost, the church formed into a vibrant, growing, children-inclusive, familial and local community (2:39, 41-47). According to God's perfect plan, the church grew in Jerusalem, and then began to spread horizontally, first to Samaria, then unto the ends of the then-known world. Over and over, the apostles entered houses with the gospel (Acts 10:25; 20:20). The New Testament makes clear that households were won to Christ (Acts 10:48; 16:15, 31-32; 1 Cor. 1:14-16). It seems that the synagogue system, which was developed based on Old Testament principles, began to be transformed into a first-century gospel-based parish system. The early church focused on households. The early church focused on the locality.

This is how the early church spread, but what should the church do today? Certainly the house-to-house principle is present in Acts, but is it necessary for the local church to think of and strategically infiltrate the households in its locality today? Are the patterns set forth in Acts normative or were they unique to the Apostolic Age? To answer these questions, the Great Commission along with a particular aspect of decretal election must be considered together. "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 551-52. Emphasis added.

the words of this law,” (Deut. 29:29). Christ’s Great Commission is an imperative. It is a command. It has been revealed to the church that the church might keep it. Who is and who is not decreetally elect remains secret. God alone knows. The names in the Book of Life have not been published. Those names are part of the secret things which belong to the LORD God. *The inference from these truths is that the Great Commission should be executed without any human predetermination of who is and who is not elect.* This approach is faithful to the Great Commission and to the principle of Deut. 29:29.

Perhaps an illustration is in order. Imagine a man in a warehouse. Pallet after pallet, isle after isle—the warehouse is loaded to the ceiling with boxes. This man’s boss is the warehouse manager. The warehouse manager tells the man to diligently search through the boxes as they may contain raw gold. The man’s job is to find and then refine the raw gold. Is there any reason why some boxes may remain unchecked? What sort of reasons would a good and fair boss accept from the box-searching servant? A good and fair boss would accept reasons that were directly and logically related to the assigned task and circumstance. So, for instance, if the man had to spend all his time to thoroughly search through a single isle, the man’s good and fair boss would find his labor acceptable. Likewise, the boss would accept the man’s labor if he had to spent all his time on a single pallet because the gold in those boxes needed so such refinement. But does the man have any reason to arbitrarily ignore particular isles, pallets, or boxes? Which boxes should he open? Where should he begin? *The boss has **not** told him which boxes contain gold.*

The boss is Christ, the man is one of Christ’s ministering servants, the boxes are households, and the raw gold pieces are the elect ones, always in need of refinement while this side of glory. The point of the illustration is that there are legitimate reasons

why a particular minister and a particular church may not infiltrate every house. There are so many houses! The existing body of believers has so many needs! Jesus Christ knows this! He is no taskmaster. He is not looking to smash His servants for their inability to do the impossible! However, is the impossible what keeps local churches from a local and house-to-house approach? Are boxes left unopened for good reasons?

The Scripture's emphasis on the household, the enduring demand of the Great Commission, the strategic church-growth pattern of Acts, and the fact that no human knows which houses contain the elect, direct the churchmen to the biblical parameter of locality. Locality is the biblical remedy to unbiblical arbitrariness. John Wesley defended his rampant itinerancy by claiming, "I look upon all the world as my parish."<sup>8</sup> The statement is misguided. Christ alone is the warehouse owner. The church is to infiltrate the boxes—the households of the nations of the earth. *It is impossible to effectively treat the world as a parish.* Such thinking leads to unbiblical priorities. When itinerancy, demographics, personal convenience, personal bias, or church-size are consciously or unconsciously prioritized before locality, the result will often, if not always, be a program-oriented commuter church striving to be a mega-church. The local church is to be a local church. Locality enables the consistent, logical, relentless, strategic, and comprehensive gospel-infiltration of households. Instead of "the world is my parish," today's pastors and elders should invert Wesley's maxim and begin thinking, "The parish is my world."

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<sup>8</sup> John Wesley, "All the World My Parish," in *The Journal of John Wesley*, (Christian Classics Ethereal Library), <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/journal.vi.iii.v.html>.

## Historical Precedent for Local Church Ministry<sup>9</sup>

When the parish work of Chalmers is brought up today, objections are immediately made. It's the twenty-first century! Everyone commutes everywhere! What is fascinating is that Chalmers himself had to insist on the parish model—and he had to do so while simultaneously maintaining the spirituality of the church. When he arrived at St. John's, Glasgow, he was initially dealing with a commuter church—of sorts. In 1815 Chalmers regarded the situation in Glasgow as most disturbing because the parish system had effectively collapsed. The Tron parish population of over ten thousand was poor and in desperate need of pastoral attention. According to Chalmers, *only one out of every ninety-seven Tron parishioners attended his sermons.*<sup>10</sup> The parish community did not exist upon Chalmers arrival. The church consisted of nineteenth century “commuters” from outside the parish!

To make matters worse, all sorts of civic functions were demanded of Chalmers. “As a result of this burden of civic functions, including meetings on such subjects as drainage ditches or the type of soup served to paupers in the Town Hospital, [Chalmers] believed the Glasgow clergy were relinquishing their status as ministers of God, and being relegated to the role of civic functionaries in the Glasgow government.”<sup>11</sup> On November 15, 1815 Chalmers wrote to his mother, “I am like to be devoured by a

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<sup>9</sup> Pearls of insight would be discovered through studies of Baxter's Kidderminster, Calvin's Geneva, and Bucer's Strasbourg. It is time for those who hold to reformed doctrine to remember the context in which the reformers distilled that doctrine. That Baxter, Calvin, and Bucer operated in parishes must not be ignored!

<sup>10</sup> Stewart J. Brown, *Thomas Chalmers and the Godly Commonwealth in Scotland*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 94.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

clamorous demand for attentions from every quarter.”<sup>12</sup> The import here is that Chalmers distaste for civic involvement as a pastor did not keep him from insisting upon and working towards the parish model. Despite these cumbersome civic expectations, “Chalmers had arrived in Glasgow committed to two themes based upon the Kilmany experience—an aggressive Evangelical pastoral ministry and the traditional parish community.”<sup>13</sup> However, upon Chalmers’ arrival, “Glasgow, it seemed, appreciated neither.”<sup>14</sup>

Chalmers set himself to restoring the spirituality of the church and the parish system by dividing the Glasgow parish.<sup>15</sup> He resolved to visit every house in the community. In 1816, six months after arrival in Glasgow,

He conducted his Tron visitation on his Kilmany plan, dividing the parish into *small districts, each of which might be covered in a day. He visited each household, including those of Dissenters and Roman Catholics.* Generally, his household visits were brief, consisting in a few words of introduction, enquiries into Church attendance and the children’s education, and words of encouragement to the sick and aged. As he departed he invited the family to attend, in their workclothes, a special weeknight worship service which he conducted in a neighbouring private schoolroom or workshop for the benefit of the district.<sup>16</sup>

In all that Chalmers did, he followed this same pattern. He figured out a way to be comprehensive and exhaustive. He had his eye on every household in the parish. So much of his effectiveness traces back to common sense blessed by the Holy Spirit. He simply managed the workload by dividing the parish into manageable divisions. Later in 1816,

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> In some ways, today’s church has an advantage on Chalmers. Chalmers had to deal with a parish of ten thousand. That is what he stepped into and inherited. Today, the church can begin much smaller if necessary. This is discussed under “Locality” below.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

Chalmers revived the tradition of dividing the parish into twenty-five districts. He proceeded to assign at least one district to each of his elders. The elders were then overseeing the parish.<sup>17</sup> One cannot help but be impressed with Chalmers organizational abilities and his resolve to maintain the spiritual nature of the church. He involved himself and the church socially, but delegated much to other societies and organizations, thereby keeping the church focused on its mission.

As the ministry developed still further, Chalmers continued to insist that each laborer have a manageable work-load.

Early in December 1816, Chalmers instituted the first parish Sabbath-school society in Glasgow. Unlike the existing societies, which accepted children from throughout the city, his parish society accepted no child from outside the Tron parish. Further, he subdivided the parish into smaller districts, assigning to each a teacher. 'I began', he recalled, 'with four Sabbath school teachers, and told them, I did not want them to operate superficially over the whole 10,000 inhabitants of the parish. [Instead], I assigned to each of them thirty families [who] lived perhaps in one close, or at any rate in close juxtaposition with each other.'<sup>18</sup>

As for the deaconate:

The entire area was divided into 'quarters,' each with a deacon over it. Each deacon's job was to keep the Session (the elders) informed about the economic conditions in his quarter. He was to help the unemployed get work and help uneducated children get schooling. When a family was found in need, he was to seek out resources within the neighborhood. If there were no other options, the family was admitted to the poor rolls of the church.<sup>19</sup>

Chalmers overcame obstacles by division, and God blessed his plans. Abstract plans must be executed through tangible goals, the more comprehensive and thorough the better!

Keller notes the stunning result of Chalmers' parish efforts. St. John's, Glasgow grew to have a population of 11,513 residents. Of them 2,633 were church-members.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>19</sup> Keller, *Ministries of Mercy*, 88.

As noted above, initially, only one out of every ninety-seven residents was a church-member. Initially, Chalmers only had 1% of the parish in the parish-church. After insisting and pushing the parish model, 2,633 of 11,513 parish-residents were attending the parish-church. He had 23% of the parish in church attendance, with an eye on all the rest. The 77% which remained outside the parish church were most aware of the church's activity. That church activity is what Chalmers called "emanation."<sup>21</sup>

### **The Church's Ministry Within its Locality**

#### *Locality*<sup>22</sup>

"The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps," (Prov. 16:9). What a liberating thought! While it is sinful irresponsibility to neglect the duty of planning, the Lord in His mercy has provided this wonderful caveat. It is the Lord who establishes each step. Regardless of the plans of men, the Lord's perfect plan will ensue! How then should church leaders plan and lead the local church? Chalmers' first principle is locality. He declares, "Locality, in truth, is the secret principle wherein our great strength lieth; *and our enemies could not have devised a more effectual means of prevailing against us, in order to bind us and to afflict us, than just to dissever this principle from our establishment.*"<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Discussed at length below.

<sup>22</sup> Chalmers gives three essential principles for effective local church ministry: 1) locality, 2) emanation, and 3) development. These principles and their benefits will be central to the rest of the present paper. These principles are discussed at length in Michael J. Ives, "Parish Evangelism: Rediscovering Focus in Evangelistic & Pastoral Effort," ([http://westportexperiment.files.wordpress.com/2008/09/parish\\_evangelism1.pdf](http://westportexperiment.files.wordpress.com/2008/09/parish_evangelism1.pdf)).

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Ives, "Parish Evangelism," 7. Emphasis added.

One of the ways in which the session of a local church should exercise their ministerial authority is by determining the church's locality.

What then ought a sympathetic, confessionally Reformed eldership do to re-implement the 'parish church' amid the tattered fragments of American Christianity? I would be surprised if Chalmers did not advocate staking out territories, *de novo*. Or, to put it more anachronistically (or quixotically, if you will), let the session draw the borders.<sup>24</sup>

Chalmers preferred quality to quantity. He offers this advice, "The question, it will be understood, is not how small the population of a parish ought to be, but how large it ought *not* to be."<sup>25</sup> Elsewhere Chalmers notes:

A single obscure street, with its few diverging lanes, may form the length and the breadth of his [in this instance, the Christian philanthropist] enterprise; but far better that he, with such means and such associates as are within his reach, should do this thoroughly, than that, merging himself in some wider association, he should vainly attempt in the gross, that which can never be overtaken but in humble and laborious detail.<sup>26</sup>

If the church needs to start with the block of the church and the block adjacent to the church, then let the church start with those two blocks! Parameters can always be extended. The idea is to have a holistic Christian Ministry, and holistic Christian Ministry may mean starting in a very small area.

Reformed churches think differently from other Protestant churches. They hold to strong sets of confessional beliefs, which determine much of the outworking of their ministries. They also see themselves fitting within a long, rich history of the Church, rather than developing something new from scratch. *Their Reformed*

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<sup>24</sup> Ives draws this conclusion from an observation Chalmers made concerning the dissenters: "We have not yet heard of any dissenting minister in towns, who *assumed to himself a locality* for the purpose of its moral and religious cultivation. We think, that it would greatly add to the power of his ministrations, if he did so. But, as the case stands, his pulpit operates on the neighborhood, chiefly as a centre of attraction; and the people move, in the first instance, towards him, instead of him, in the first instance, going forth among the people.... But we do not see, in their system, what the forces are, by which the nation can be recalled from the declension into which it has actually sunk. We do not see, how the torpid, and lethargic, and ever-augmenting mass, can be effectually wrought upon." Quoted in Ives, "Parish Evangelism," 16.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*

*commitments also demand a depth and fullness of ministry that touches all of life.*<sup>27</sup>

Better to begin small and be comprehensive than to immediately spread out and allow various aspects of ministry to slip through the cracks.

By first determining the church's locality, the session has taken a massive and principled step towards effective ministry. After the locality is decided, the demographics *should* be considered. How many households are there? What sorts of people live here? Who are they? How can the church serve them? This information can be derived by Google maps and door-to-door surveys.<sup>28</sup> What is wonderful is that the information is never abstract. Lists of households and lists of needs are prayer lists. The information immediately factors into the local church's prayers and ministry plans. When the elders and pastor can say, "The parish is my world," they will find locality liberating! They will delight in strategizing and praying over infiltration plans—and the execution of those plans—the execution of the Great Commission—leads to what Chalmers termed "emanation."

### *Emanation*

Emanation is not the attraction that so many churches practice. The point is not to attract a great turn-out through whatever means possible. Rather, the idea of emanation is to gather people to Christ's church directly through the Christian ministry.

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<sup>27</sup> *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, 2nd ed. (Willow Grove, PA: The Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2008), 3. Emphasis added.

<sup>28</sup> All too often, the parish concept is equated with door-to-door evangelism. In reading of Chalmers, one cannot help but be impressed with the amount of strategy and organization he poured into his labors. Door-to-door activity should only be done after much prayer, according to a robust, organized, and manageable strategy, and with great tact and winsomeness. While it is not necessary to go to each house in sequence, it is necessary to track which houses have been entered and to track all contacts. This data makes for excellent prayer lists! One excellent way to make contacts is through an unassuming survey in which community members are asked about their church affiliation and about how the church could best serve them.

“Emanation...is the centripetal push of the smaller circle – the believing community – to the furthest boundaries of its vicinity. The parish is a lump with definite boundaries, and the Christian ministry is the leaven.”<sup>29</sup> With the determined locality and with the blessing of the Holy Spirit, church activity itself begins to draw the unchurched. “If the minister begins to focus on a fixed, local region, then his members will in time become those dwelling contiguously with the unchurched in the crosshairs of his evangelistic enterprise.”<sup>30</sup> Instead of programs designed to attract specific sorts of people, the church does what a church is supposed to do in a confined area. Those in that confined area see what the church is doing, and the Holy Spirit uses that to draw them to the church. Ives offers this helpful distillation:

The particular church should be a neighborhood church. Though [Chalmers] did not wish to identify church and parish, yet he wished to place the former concentrically within the latter. The congregation of the faithful, ideally, would live the Christian life among each other throughout the week, and the parish minister would have daily interactions with them. The unchurched who reside in the parish would also come under the regular, ministry-long care of the parish minister, with the goal of ‘recruiting’ them to the household of faith.<sup>31</sup>

Emanation is organic, not programmatic. Emanation is not primarily concerned with drawing the unchurched; it is primarily concerned with the biblical execution of the Christian ministry and the Great Commission. Chalmers recognized that this will, when blessed of God, draw even the unchurched. Simply put, emanation is the church living before a watching world. Locality ensures that the world watches. Emanation is Christian ministry and communal activity within the church’s locality.<sup>32</sup> Whatever belongs to

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<sup>29</sup> Ives, “Parish Ministry,” 10.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

Christian ministry and whatever belongs to Christian community belongs to emanation!  
That is the content of emanation.<sup>33</sup>

Accordingly, the teachings of Martin Bucer and Richard Baxter on visitation and soul-caring, of Jay Adams on counseling, of Tim Keller on ministries of mercy, and of the so-called “New Calvinists” on “missional churches” all find a home under Chalmers’ principle of emanation. After determining the church’s locality, the session can spend time asking “How can the church most effectively emanate?” They can then proceed to the aforementioned authors for biblical answers.

Church officers should be familiar with Bucer’s five categories of people. Bucer extracts these categories from Ezekiel 34:16, in which he finds the five all-encompassing main tasks of the soul-caring pastor. These tasks revolve around the five categories of people. The pastor is to (1) seek the lost, (2) retrieve the strayed, (3) bind up the injured, (4) strengthen the weak, and (5) justly watch and shepherd the sleek and strong. The pastor must labor to lead the lost to communion with Christ. Effort must be made to bring those who are currently estranged from Christ back into His fellowship. The pastor must labor for the reformation of those church members who are ensconced in sin and the

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<sup>32</sup> As noted on page 9, these are the two principles Chalmers was committed to when he moved to St. John’s Glasgow: “aggressive Evangelical pastoral ministry and the traditional parish community,” Brown, *Thomas Chalmers*, 95.

<sup>33</sup> It is fascinating that some of the “New Calvinists” describe something similar to “emanation.” Ed Stetzer writes, “As I speak to church planters, I hear more and more of them embracing church planting as a way of life rather than a strategy. They are asking, ‘Who is Jesus? What has he called us to do—our mission on earth—and how do we follow him and his example?’ *Then, through relationship and ministry, church is emerging.*” (161). Emphasis added. Stetzer goes on to quote Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, “The missional church is *incarnational*, not *attractual*, in its ecclesiology. By *incarnational* we mean it does not create sanctified spaces into which unbelievers must come to encounter the gospel. Rather, the missional church disassembles itself and seeps into the cracks and crevices of a society in order to be Christ to those who don’t yet know him,” (162). While some broad-evangelical and independent-baptistic thinking undergird these statements, it is fascinating that the “New Calvinists” are endorsing a version of emanation within a locality instead of the “attraction” of entertainment and programs. These quotes are from Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2006), 161-162.

pleasures of this world. Often, the pastor will have to invest time in strengthening those who are feeble and sickly—those sheep that are not rebellious, but have been debilitated to some degree by doubt and fear. Finally, the sleek and strong are to be fastidiously watched, guarded, and encouraged.<sup>34</sup> Every locality will consist of people from one of Bucer’s categories. With these tasks and categories of people always in mind, pastors and elders are better equipped for ministering to the households within the church’s locality.

It is here that Baxter’s emphasis is most helpful. Baxter remarks, “I find that we never before took the most effectual method to demolish the kingdom of darkness,” (xiii). Much of *The Reformed Pastor* explains what Baxter believes to be the most effectual method: house-to-house parish ministry with intense catechizing and discipline. He writes, “You are not likely to see a general reformation until you secure family reformation. Some little obscure religion may be in this one or that one, but it is not likely to prosper nor promise much for future increase unless it spreads out into the family.”<sup>35</sup> He knew, he worked regularly with eight hundred families in Kidderminster! His method is biblical, tried, and proven. Baxter’s ideal was a certain level of intimacy with the families of the congregation:

You will become familiar with all of your people once you have had the opportunity to converse with them privately and individually. The lack of this in many churches is the greatest impediment to the success of our labors. Being distant from your people, being unacquainted with them personally, you may give slanderers and deceivers the opportunity to mislead themselves and other about you. This in turn will prejudice your hearers against your teaching. Strangeness between ministers and their people foment an abundance of mistakes. Besides, familiarity itself tends to arouse those affections which open the ears of the people to further teaching. When we know them better, they are

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<sup>34</sup> Martin Bucer, *Concerning the True Care of Souls*, Trans. Peter Beale (1538, reprint, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 70.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (1656, reprint, Grand Rapids: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1971), 19.

more encouraged to reveal their doubts to us, to seek resolution of them, and to deal freely with us in every way.<sup>36</sup>

While there are advocates of Baxter's method, the intense locality in which Baxter operated (Kidderminster) seems to be often forgotten. "Visitation" would have been a well-known concept throughout Kidderminster. Is there a town in the USA where visitation in the Baxterian sense is a well-known concept? Surely some church members know what it is—but is there a neighborhood where it is so prevalent that everyone knows about it? Is any church in the USA emanating through their visitation? If Baxter's method of visitation is practiced in a commuter church, so much of its impact is lost! It is still better than no visitation, but the emanation aspect is all but non-existent. Locality is essential to emanation. Visitation should be a part of emanation. When a church is working within a manageable locality, three houses could be visited in two hours, especially since the three houses maybe right next to each other, even on the same block! Instead of evangelistic programs trying to reach the community, the community has elders walking through it—intimate with it—visiting the community members, observing them, teaching them, and lovingly tending to their needs. The economy must not be missed. Through visitation, the elders are doing what they should be doing, laboring for the holiness of the families. In doing so, others in the community cannot help but observe the care with which the church acts towards its own. Visitation will stand out to the community, especially in the increasingly individualistic and narcissistic context of the twenty-first century. When it's not spread too thinly over too broad of a geography, care stands out.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 69.

In addition to the valuable insights and guiding principles of Bucer and Baxter<sup>37</sup>, today's local session is equipped with the biblical and contemporary observations and advice of Jay Adams.<sup>38</sup> In *Competent to Counsel*, Adams' thesis is, "that qualified Christian counselors properly trained in the Scriptures are competent to counsel—more competent than psychiatrists or anyone else."<sup>39</sup> This is because the fundamental problem with man is not sickness but sin.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, the pastors and elders who have studied God's Word, operate out of a realization of man's fallen state, and maintain a sure hope in Christ as Savior and Lord. They will make the best counselors. In *The Christian Counselor's Manual* Adam's simple message is that since man's root problem is sin, and since Jesus Christ has conquered sin and death at Calvary, and since Jesus Christ is Savior and Lord, there is hope for man. There is hope for the members of the locality. It is this message of biblical hope, grounded in the person of Christ that undergirds and equips today's session for emanation within their locality. Christ is the answer. The church must supply the answer to all of men's needs. To know the needs, the church must begin with the existing body of believers and the defined locality. To tactfully and carefully apply Christ and the gospel to those needs, today's session has Bucer, Baxter, Adams,<sup>41</sup> and many others for guidance. Scripture is sufficient!

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<sup>37</sup> In addition to *The Reformed Pastor*, cf. Baxter's *Christian Directory* which Tim Keller calls, "...the greatest manual on Biblical counseling ever produced..."

<sup>38</sup> In the wake of Adams, many different biblical counseling resources have become available, many of which are valuable.

<sup>39</sup> Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1970), 18. cf. Rom. 15:14.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>41</sup> Another of Adams works is *Shepherding God's Flock*, "an attempt to provide a clearly written textbook that will cover various areas of practical theology...in an exegetically and theologically sound

Before moving on to other areas in which the church may minister locally, Bucer's insights into church discipline are worthy of touching upon. Jesus Christ began the Great Commission by saying, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations," (Matt. 28:19). The Great Commission should undergird the church's conception of discipline. Discipline is disciple-making, disciple-keeping, and disciple-developing. Over one quarter of Bucer's *Concerning the True Care of Souls* deals with what Bucer calls "penance"—or church discipline designed to bring about repentance.<sup>42</sup> Today's state of church discipline is horrific. Where it occurs, it is all too often equated with excommunication—the cutting off from the body of Christ. Penance is Bucer's prescription for effectively intervening well before excommunication. A good parent does not neglect spanking and then, as the first act of discipline, throw his child out of the home when the child is older and visibly rebellious. The church must administer spankings (penance) as often as necessary, thereby preventing excommunication—and simultaneously emphasizing its terror and gravity.

On an encouraging note, this conception of church discipline may be on the rebound.

Mark Dever and Paul Alexander write:

If we were to compare discipline in the body of Christ to discipline in the physical body, then formative discipline would be like eating right and exercising, whereas corrective discipline would be like surgery. Formative discipline is how the church gets in shape, stays in shape, and *grows*....Corrective discipline is like surgery—it corrects something that's gone wrong in the body so that more serious injury doesn't result. Rebuke, admonition, and excommunication...are all examples of corrective discipline.<sup>43</sup>

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manner," from the "Preface" in Jay E Adams, *Shepherding God's Flock* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1981).

<sup>42</sup> Bucer, *True Care of Souls*, 105-62.

<sup>43</sup> Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberative Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005), 67. Emphasis added.

Using “the body” as an illustration is beautiful. Corrective discipline is necessary for the individual in need of discipline as well as for the corporate body of Christ. As Paul said to the Corinthian church, “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed...Purge the evil person from among you,” (1Cor. 5:6-7, 13).

This broad conception of church discipline is essential.<sup>44</sup> The execution of formative-preventive church discipline is as necessary as the execution of corrective church discipline. When a father wakes his children up at 7:00 a.m. each day, so that the children have time to prepare themselves and get to school on time, the father is disciplining his children. This formative-preventive discipline is the best way to avoid future corrective discipline. By disciplining the children to avoid indulgent slothful behavior, the father has taken a substantial step towards avoiding the future corrective discipline of evicting his own children from the house for slothful laziness. Such a pattern should be present in church life. More formative-preventative discipline sooner will mean less corrective discipline later. Accordingly, a comprehensive strategic visitation and discipling (discipline) plan must be settled and followed through upon.

Along with robust visitation, discipling venues should be creative and geared towards the particular demographics of the local church. Neither the oldest saint nor the youngest infant may be ignored—as Christ claims both as part of His church. The specifics of these groups and activities will, to some extent, depend on the locality of the church. These venues must be considered as part of the church’s formative and preventive church-discipline plan.

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<sup>44</sup> With this broad conception of church discipline, it may be more appropriate to treat “counseling” as a species of discipline. Counseling is formative discipline. When formative discipline proves inadequate, the session should move immediately to some measure of corrective discipline.

Discipling is formative-preventative discipline. When the gap between formative and corrective discipline is closed, church members will not have such a hard time understanding the need for church discipline. Bucer's broad conception of discipline is part of the Christian ministry. When executed locally and faithfully, it contributes to the church's emanation. At points, even worldlings note and appreciate the loving discipline of a Christian father. Loving formative and corrective discipline is yet another way in which the church emanates and stands out before the watching world.

In addition to discipline, emanation involves understanding people according to Bucer's biblical categories, the catechizing visitation method of Baxter, and the biblical counseling of Adams, but Church Ministry doesn't stop there! There are so many ways to minister. Peter Adams points out that evangelizing unbelievers, training and equipping the saints, counseling, and the public reading of Scripture are, *along with preaching*, aspects of the Christian ministry.<sup>45</sup> By viewing these expressions of ministry as church emanation, the church is able to effectively execute these activities. Preaching need not occur only on Sundays—only in church buildings. By becoming intimate with the locality, other preaching venues may arise (nursing homes, public parks, etc.). All ministries of mercy and counseling would take on a highly specialized nature—specialized according to the specific needs of the locality. These and many other biblical possibilities come to the fore when the session begins thinking, “The parish is my world.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Peter Adam, *Speaking God's Words: A Practical Theology of Preaching* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Regent College Publishing, 1996), 60.

<sup>46</sup> This is another area where Chalmers' view of emanation coincides with insights from the “New Calvinist” camp. Mark Dever and Paul Alexander observe that the local church should be cross-cultural and cross-generational: “The local church is for everyone. That's why it is difficult to defend the practice of targeting a church to a particular demographic... Targeted churches can have the unintended effect of

At this point, it is essential to consider the biblical division of labor. *Pastors, elders, deacons, and the laity are all absolutely essential to healthy emanation.* The primary role of pastors is to pray and preach. The pastor rules and leads the church (1 Tim. 5:17, 3:4-5, Mark 13:34), but he is never alone in doing so. Ultimately all rule belongs to Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:18). During the current administration of His kingdom, He has delegated authority to the church as a whole and to its special offices (Matt. 18:15-17, 28:19-20, 1 Cor. 5:4-5). Commenting on the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (WCF) 30.1, T. E. Peck explains:

The life of the church is one; officers are but the organs through which it is manifested, in acts of jurisdiction and instruction; and the acts of all officers, in consequence of this organic relation, are the acts of the church...The power resides in her; it is exercised by them. Ministers are her mouth as elders are her hands. Both equally represent her, and both are nothing, except as they represent her. All lawful acts of all lawful officers, are acts of the church, and they who hear the preacher or the presbytery, hear the church.<sup>47</sup>

Of particular note here is the explicit and implicit understanding of a plurality of elders. WCF 30.1 declares, “The Lord Jesus, as King and Head of his church, hath therein appointed a government, in the hand of church officers...”<sup>48</sup> Therefore, the pastor is to operate and rule amongst a plurality of elders. The pastor is no lone-ranger. He must exercise mutual submission as he himself is accountable to the authority of Christ—and that authority of

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obscuring the transcultural, unifying power of the Gospel. When the Gospel enables us to live in love, even though we may have nothing else in common save Christ, it is a testimony to its power to transform a group of sinful, self-centered people into a loving community united by a common relationship with Jesus Christ...The local church is a family. It’s place where children and adults of all ages can and should be relating to one another for mutual encouragement and edification. Older Christian men often have much to teach younger men about life and leadership, and there are countless ways that younger men can serve and help the elderly. Older Christian women often have much to teach younger women about serving in the home and church, and younger women can often serve older women in countless ways, whether it be social, spiritual, or physical.” Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 111-12.

<sup>47</sup> T. E. Peck, *Notes on Ecclesiology* (1892, reprint, Greenville, SC: GPTS Press 1994), 162-3.

<sup>48</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Willow Grove: Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2005), 30.1. Emphasis added.

Christ is expressed and executed through the rule of the pastor's fellow ruling elders. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church's *Form of Government* puts it well:

Ruling elders, individually and jointly *with the pastor in the session*, are to lead the church in the service of Christ. *They are to watch diligently over the people committed to their charge* to prevent corruption of doctrine or morals. Evils which they cannot correct by private admonition they should bring to the notice of the session. *They should visit the people*, especially the sick, instruct the ignorant, comfort the mourning, and nourish and guard the children of the covenant. They should pray with and for the people. *They should have particular concern for the doctrine and conduct of the minister of the Word and help him in his labors.*<sup>49</sup>

“Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety,” (Prov. 11:14) and “by wise guidance you can wage your war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory,” (Prov. 24:6). The wisdom of God is, of course, present in Christ's wise design of church government! This is made explicitly clear in 1 Pet. 5:1-4. Peter, after the foundation of the apostles has been laid (Eph. 2:20), attributes to himself the title of “elder” in his exhortation to all ruling elders:

So I exhort *the elders among you, as a fellow elder* and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: *shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight*, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1Pet. 5:1-4)<sup>50</sup>

Ideally, *every* house within the locality would be on an Elder's oversight-shepherding list. These lists would even include unbelieving hostile houses. They should be prayed for since God moves mountains: hostiles may be converted; they may move out of the locality, they may face an awakening tragedy; or they may die. Any of those events would provide the church with a golden opportunity to minister the gospel—if not

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<sup>49</sup> *The Form of Government in The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Willow Grove, PA: Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2011), 10.3. Emphasis Added.

<sup>50</sup> Emphasis added.

to the hostiles, then to those who newly move into the formerly hostile house! By keeping an eye on all households, opportunities like these will not be missed. By this house to house approach, God-ordained church officers who are apt-to-teach would be conducting the regular visits to all. Furthermore, with such an approach, the community's homeless, widows, and orphans would not slip through the cracks. They too would be receiving regular visits.

The elders, knowing the needs of the people, would be free to bring those needs to the attention of the deacons. Ideally, the deacons would already be aware of most the needs. The deaconate would organize the works of mercy. The church is to mercifully do good first to the house of faith, and then to the members of the community. Every member of the community is a potential Christian, a not-yet-Christian (man doesn't know which boxes contain the gold!). The deacons should make great use of the laity. The lay people would be the agents executing most of the works of mercy. While the lay people would be free to "gossip the gospel," they would not be excessively burdened with evangelism as all the people they interact with would be receiving regular visitation from the apt-to-teach elders. The comprehensive elder-visitation is essential as it will keep ministries of mercy from slipping into an impotent social gospel. "The work of church planting is from first to last a spiritual undertaking."<sup>51</sup> As the Confession states, it is to the church that "Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life to the end of the world..."<sup>52</sup> Bearing

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<sup>51</sup> *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, 5.

<sup>52</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith in The Confession of Faith and Catechisms of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Willow Grove, PA: Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2005), 25.3.

this in mind, elders should regularly make use of and encourage the formation of Christian associations, but without engrossing themselves in those associations. Such activity is perfectly consistent with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church's *Form of Government*, which states: "members of the church may therefore associate together for specific purposes in exercise of their common calling. Such organizations, however, under ordinary circumstances, shall not assume the prerogatives or exercise the functions of the special officers of the church."<sup>53</sup> The churches focus on the parish must never come at the expense of the church's spiritual mission. Knowledgeable, pious, apt-to-teach ruling elders must labor to preserve the spirituality of the church.

*Development: The Benefits of Emanation*

Developments and Synergies will arise after the local church has practiced local house-to-house ministry for a time. This is Chalmers' third principle, the principle of development. Perhaps the paper should have begun with this third principle, as it is the contemplation of this third principle that provides the encouragement to proceed with such a radically local approach to the Christian Ministry! Development, "is the visionary element in Chalmers' paradigm. Chalmers was a long term thinker."<sup>54</sup> Most, if not all, Orthodox Presbyterian churches are commuter churches. They are local churches in the sense that they meet together in a locality, but they are not local in the sense that the church is composed of local members. How then ought commuter churches to become more locally minded? Why should they? In addition to the biblical reasons outline above, church leaders must consider the long term benefits. They must begin thinking of

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<sup>53</sup> *Form of Government* 30.1.

<sup>54</sup> Ives, "Parish Ministry," 10.

the development that becomes possible with local-mindedness, but remains impossible on the commuter model.

Robust community becomes very difficult on the commuter model. When church members live miles away from one another, their day to day interactions will be minimal. Things as simple as meals and occasional babysitting will not happen as frequently as they would in a localized setting. Furthermore, if the church consists of those from the immediate locality, everyone's circles of influence begin to collapse into greater effectiveness. People worship in the same general area where they eat out, do their banking, shop, and go to the doctor. The same people begin seeing the same people throughout the week. Neighbors are brothers, brothers are friends, friends get together for Barbeques and picnics—and all this occurs before the watching world, even inviting the watching world to participate. When miles don't separate its members from one another, the church will act as an organism, as a well-functioning and organically connected body.

Furthermore, the local model provides an extensive *horizontal* growth strategy. When a church (church A) is full and busied to capacity with and in its defined locality, it is then time to plant a church in a neighboring locality. In an urban area, this second church (church B) could be less than ten blocks away! Imagine the potential for pooled resources between churches A and B! Imagine the interactions between the neighboring communities! This horizontal growth strategy is in full accord with the Great Commission and the pattern described in Acts. The best part is that no house is left unvisited—no person is off the gospel-radar. With the Lord's blessing, there would be multiple parishes within a town, presbyteries would be at the town level, and synods

would be re-introduced for the regions or counties. Imagine the effectiveness of a presbytery consisting exclusively of presbyters from within a particular town!

The local model provides a biblical alternative to the para-church and to the mega-church. Para-churches are founded to address particular needs. The Campus Crusade for Christ vision statement is, “Helping to build spiritual movements everywhere so everyone knows someone who truly follows Jesus Christ.”<sup>55</sup> The Gideons International website opens to a map of the world. The first paragraph in the “About Us” section explains, “We have placed or distributed more than 1.6 billion Bibles and New Testaments around the world...and counting.”<sup>56</sup> Notice how these groups have a singular mission in mind, and seek to accomplish that mission across the entire globe. The world is their parish. Their success must be calculated according to how well they accomplish their singular mission. The point is that with a predetermined locality, a local church can do a far better job than the para-church. When a local church begins to view the parish as its world, it can provide all the Bibles necessary and can ensure that everyone within that parish knows someone who truly follows Jesus.

Another interesting case-study is the homeless. What can a single church do to help the homeless people of the world? Not much. If the world is the parish, then the para-churches are better organized to deal with the homeless. Here’s a slightly different question. What can a single church do to help the homeless people in its predetermined locality—especially if that locality is manageable? A lot! More than any para-church! Examples could be multiplied, but the point is that confining the church’s activity to a

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<sup>55</sup> Campus Crusade for Christ International, “Campus Crusade for Christ International at a Glance: Vision Statement.” (<http://www.ccci.org/about-us/index.htm>).

<sup>56</sup> The Gideons International, “About Us: Worldwide Impact,” (<http://www.gideons.org/AboutUs/WorldwideImpact.aspx>).

specific and manageable area enables the church to feature a highly specialized and effective breadth of ministries—which is something para-churches cannot do.

Why are there mega-churches? Why is there vertical expansion instead of the horizontal expansion called for in Christ's Great Commission and demonstrated in Acts? Perhaps the reason can be summed up in a single sentence: People love their interests enough to travel and get them. If churches are commuter churches anyway, why not go to a church where the preacher and the preaching strikes your fancy? Perhaps it's not the personality, but instead the casual contemporary setting which attracts. Perhaps it's the music. People are commuting no matter what. Whatever the situation is, people generally worship on Sunday outside of their neighborhoods. The parish church model counters this phenomenon. The predominant reason why members would go to a particular church would no longer be for its personalities, preaching, music, or setting. Rather, there would be two simple reasons: it's faithful and it's local. With a vibrant local community all around, why would anyone want to travel outside of it? Consider the eventual positive impact this would have on today's oft practiced church-hopping! Consider also the oft repeated case of a family deciding to go to church and not knowing where to go. If they happened to be in a vibrant parish, they would instinctively try the parish church first.

Ives began his essay with this Arnold Toynbee quote, "Apathy can only be overcome by enthusiasm, and enthusiasm can only be aroused by two things: first, an ideal which takes the imagination by storm, and second, a definite intelligible plan for carrying that ideal into practice."<sup>57</sup> The ideal that possesses the imagination is the gracious gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Not only is there forgiveness of sins and new life in Jesus Christ, but the church is commissioned to go to every nation on earth and

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<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Ives, "Parish Ministry," 2.

present that gospel message. There's an ideal and a command to pursue the ideal! Keeping the local church local by returning to Chalmers' too-long neglected principles of locality and emanation is the definite intelligible plan for carrying the ideal into practice. When the local church begins to strategies towards infiltrating and permeating its locality one house at a time, apathy will dissolve as the strategic plan of the session becomes the prayer list of the entire church. May God be pleased to transform neighborhoods into provinces of Zion, one household at a time!

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