Excluded Neighborhoods

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On the day in 1980 when Baltimore's acclaimed Inner Harbor development opened with speeches and festivities, *The Washington Post* turned west two miles to the neighborhood of Sandtown for urban contrast. The stalwart and locally respected community leader Ella Johnson told the paper that Sandtown "is just an inner city neighborhood...it's buried. A good block is where there are less than five vacant houses."[1] Two decades later, much of Sandtown still looks this way. Such differences in a city can be read like a text, its neighborhoods, streets, and buildings assigned social, economic, and political meaning. But as Augustine reminds us, ultimately the city is the site of a struggle between two competing spiritual visions of urban life, and with it the nature of social arrangements.

Lots of good things are happening in Baltimore. There is a resurgence in neighborhoods such as Canton, Federal Hill and Locust Point, a new emphasis on high tech development in the Inner Harbor area, a strong and expanding non-profit sector, a succession of mayors who are passionate about the city, and of course, a winning football team. It is a unique city that is seeking a new future. But we need to keep perspective.

As David Rusk documents in his study *Baltimore Unbound*, the changes in the city are related to as yet unchanging patterns of flight and abandonment.[2] Since 1950, the population has dropped from nearly one million to around 610,000, the middle and upper classes having packed up and moved to the suburbs. About 1,000 people a month are still leaving the city. By most counts, over 40,000 houses are abandoned, with scores of empty lots being added as demolition crews tear their way across the city's row house fabric. The nineteenth largest U.S. city, in 1999 it had the second highest per capita homicide rate. It made sense that the acclaimed

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1. Saundra Saperstein, "Sandtown Typical of Urban Blight," *The Washington Post*, July 2, 1980: pp. B1,2. Throughout this chapter, I use the shortened name Sandtown rather than its longer official name, Sandtown-Winchester.

[2] David Rusk, *Baltimore Unbound: A Strategy for Regional Renewal* (Baltimore: The Abell Foundation, 1996).

television series Homicide was about Baltimore. Only recently has it tentatively started to decline.[3] A Johns Hopkins researcher found that psychological damage of inner city life on the development of Baltimore's children was worse than that of children in war town Bosnia.[4] Observes the geographer David Harvey, "Baltimore is, for the most part, a mess. Not the kind of enchanting mess that makes cities interesting places to explore, but an awful mess."[5] Harvey is, I say with great regret, substantially right.

Like other cities, there are "two Baltimore's" and they relate to one another in surreal juxtaposition.[6] The Baltimore most people know is filled with shiny office towers, new sports stadiums, luxury condominiums, an Inner Harbor packed with theme restaurants, and a carnival like atmosphere. The "other Baltimore" is off the tourist maps. It is the Baltimore represented by Sandtown, just two miles west of the Inner Harbor. This Baltimore has vacant houses, lots filled with trash, lottery stands, greasy carry-outs, liquor stores, corporate-owned pharmacies, lots of funeral homes, and corner markets where sheets of cloudy bullet proof glass separate customer and merchant.   Its visible economy includes the shopping cart filled with reclaimed cans.   Here it is far easier to buy illegal drugs than it is to purchase fresh produce and reasonably priced groceries, far simpler to rent a substandard row house than obtain a mortgage for a simple and decent one.

Underneath the brick, concrete and steel skin of these two worlds, the trajectories of social and economic inequalities runs even deeper. When it comes to education, health care, employment networks, housing conditions, municipal services, and political influence in Baltimore, Sandtown's distance from the center is far and growing.   Private schools serve the one Baltimore, failing schools the other. World-class hospitals treat one population, a shrinking number of clinics and overworked Emergency Rooms the other. Connection and opportunity abound in the one Baltimore, disconnection and adversity in the other.

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[3] Peter Hermann, "Fewer Than 300 Homicides at Last," *Sun Spot,* (on-line *Baltimore Sun*) January 1, 2001.
[4] Marego Athans, "Psychological Poverty," *The Sun*, Tuesday June 29, 1999, E-1, 7.
[5] David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 133.
[6]   There are limits of course to the helpfulness of the dual-city metaphor, including its complexity reducing nature. Yet it does work in helping to see the urban landscape in moral, economic, political, and spatial terms.

In this chapter, I will seek to examine and understand how Sandtown came into being. I will first do this through a historical analysis.   Following the historical analysis, I will then propose a theological interpretation of the inner city.[7]   I will conclude with a proposal for the revitalization of the inner city that emphasizes the story of salvation and the gracious reign of God.

Sandtown is unique, as is every city and urban community.   Each individual neighborhood has its own history, cultural identity, geographical relationships, internal dynamics, and connections to larger spatial and social forces.   Studies of specific neighborhoods are an important way we learn about cities and urban processes. By drawing on a wider body of literature, however, I hope to show that Sandtown is also emblematic of the changing inner city. Moreover, for all the differences between neighborhoods and cities, there is a merger of suffering and shared patterns of development.[8]

Let me also state a distinct level of reservation in my presentation of Sandtown as an *inner city* neighborhood. Sandtown is much more than a neighborhood on the margins – it is a community that people call home, form loving relationships, create traditions, break bread together, generate memories, and find shared meaning.   It is a community where people share the same aspirations as

7. Nicholas Wolterstorff has stressed the importance of "theologically faithful [ie] economics" rather than a "theology of economics" in "Public Theology or Christian Learning?" in *A Passion for God's Reign: Theology, Christian Learning, and the Christian Self*, Mirolsav Volf ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 76-77. I am in full agreement with this view of Christian learning, and share Wolterstorff's concern about "theologians" stepping in where others should trod. However, too few economists, Christian or otherwise, have taken up the cause of faithful economics in service of the poor. The poor cannot wait for Christian economists to produce work that will adequately serve them.   It is also the case that essential "learning" about the inner city comes only through the experience and the viewpoint of the community. The history of the subject in the social sciences, as Alice O'Connor shows in *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) has more produced more than problematic results.
8. From his twenty year examination of "ghettos" across the nation, Camilo Jose Vergara in *The New American Ghetto* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), pp. 14-19 identifies three contemporary types: "green ghettos," characterized by depopulation, vacant land overgrown by nature, and ruins; "institutional ghettos," publicly financed places of confinement designed mainly for the native born; and the "new immigrant ghettos," deriving their character from an influx of immigrants, mainly Latino and West Indian" (15). Vergara finds all three types to be interconnected, "channeling people and land to one another."(20)

the rest of America – a good job, decent schools, safe streets, and affordable housing. People not only share these aspirations, they work hard to achieve them in individual and collective ways. Sandtown is a place of life and hope, not just suffering and struggle.   It is, as Harold McDougall has pointed out, like other African American neighborhoods in Baltimore, a place where people are tenaciously building community.[9] Drawing attention to institutional forces that have historically caused oppression and harm to Sandtown (or any distressed urban community) does not take away from the humanity of people for whom it is home; it does not reduce the community to the status of victim; it does not minimize agency.   Sandtown is not the "problem," but the site where broader forces are at work constructing exclusion and distance.

How the story of the inner city is seen and told affects everything from a vision for ministry to public policy. For the Hebrew prophets, their vocation began with seeing the city through the eyes of the poor and the ways of justice. From this viewpoint, and its underlying assumptions about God, the prophets followed with analysis and critique. But accompanying the "tearing down" was also the creative and energizing, "building and planting" as we find it in Jeremiah's call (Jer. 1:10).[10] Put another way, there cannot be an appreciation for what God's redemption means for the city without understanding what has gone wrong, nor can the gospel be announced with integrity without the identification and denunciation of social sin and injustice. Nor can we study the inner city without being challenged to engage in the reversal of its condition. This I think is a distinctive of the Christian tradition. Because I take it that an understanding of social arrangements influences the actions of social agents, the aims of reform, and the shape of alternative community *proposals,* I order my reflection this way.

The Making of an Inner City Neighborhood

The pre-history of the African American inner city is to be traced to America's "original

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[9] Harold A. McDougall, *Black Baltimore: A New Theory of Community* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).
[10.] Brian J. Walsh, *Subversive Christianity: Imaging God in a Dangerous Time* (Bristol: The Regius Press, 1992), p. 36; Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1978)

sin" of slavery and the violent European quest to create a "New World." Often baptized in Christian ideology, this history set in motion subsequent manifestations of anti-Black sentiment, racial injustice, and economic oppression that remains codified in various forms to this day.[11] Marking Sandtown's specific struggle is a history of three distinct yet overlapping periods of development. The first period begins at the start of the century and goes through the Second World War, the second corresponds to the post-war years of de-industrialization, and the third follows the inner city into the present era of globalization. Each period retains continuities with the past, especially that of racial and economic inequality, but does so in changing forms.

Period One: The Segregated Inner City

Sandtown has a shared beginning in "Black belt" partitions that occurred within urban America. With World War I, notable population changes began to take place in the cities. Given the push of southern unemployment and the pull of jobs in northern cities, more than "five million blacks...moved North during the seven decades starting in 1910."[12] For all that the city would mean negatively, it positively provided room and space to be free in a manner that the South had not. The city was viewed as the "promised land,"[13] though it would not turn out to be a city on a hill. However, the migration pattern moving northward heightened the racial animosity and the political machinations of whites. A pattern of residential segregation, albeit somewhat more dispersed, gave way to more hardened and sequestered boundaries in Baltimore.

The Sandtown that we know today has its origins in the public decisions of this era, especially its legacy of residential restrictions. According to the Historian Roderick N. Ryon, whose research on West Baltimore I am indebted to, "Segregationist values, notions that blacks should be separated and subordinate, prevailed throughout the country in these turn-of-the-century

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[11] For a history of the African American experience, see Robin D.G. Kelley and Earl Lewis eds., *To Make our World Anew: A History of African Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).
12. Vergara, *The New American Ghetto*, p. 4.
[13] Milton C. Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land: African American Religion and the Great Migration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

years, and Baltimore whites deemed the emerging black community of Old West Baltimore a tolerable, even useful city neighborhood."[14] This is what guided the construction of Sandtown, in the heart of Old West Baltimore, as an African American community. According to Ryon, Sandtown was first built as a white middle class neighborhood in 1870-1900, and it attracted European immigrants.   As the 19th century turned to the 20th, the city's population growth and the mobility afforded whites by the streetcar led to the first in a series of demographic changes on Baltimore's western side.[15] When whites moved socially upward to outlying communities, the neighborhoods they left behind became designated for the increasing number of southern blacks migrating to the city. By the end of World War II, Sandtown had become nearly exclusively black, Fulton Avenue on the western boundary being perhaps the last major street to undergo a racial transition.

The pattern of residential segregation that created Sandtown was joined to the city's growth and development. With neighborhoods near the industrial jobs in the center of the city reserved for white immigrants only, black Baltimoreans were limited in neighborhood choices, and West Baltimore became a principle place to find housing.[16] This was to the advantage of many white urban affluent in nearby neighborhoods such as Bolton Hill, who then had easy access to low wage black domestic workers.[17] By cordoning off African Americans to one part of the city, they could be, in the words of a historian, "restricted, controlled, watched over,"[18] while still able to contribute to the rise of the privileged and prosperous in other select parts of the city.   Sandtown's families lived in overcrowded and substandard rental housing, sharing flats and apartments, while the new immigrant whites had more available options. At its peak in the 1940s, the population in Sandtown soared to an estimated 35,000 - 40,000 people.

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14. Roderick N. Ryon, "Old West Baltimore," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 77, no. 1 (Spring 1982), p. 55.
15. This theme of the streetcar and urban transportation is important for Ryon's history of West Baltimore.
16. Ryon, "Old West Baltimore," p. 55. On attempts at legal codification, see Garrett Power, "Apartheid Baltimore Style: The Residential Segregation Ordiances of 1910-1913," *Maryland Law Review*, 42, No 2 (1983): pp. 289-328.
17. Ryon, "Old West Baltimore," p. 55.
18. Ryon, Old West Baltimore," p. 55.

While poverty was extensive, employment opportunities, though largely unequal in pay and advancement possibility to that of their white counterparts, were available. "Work, the sheer volume of it, dominated most people's lives."[19] Usually however it took a combination of jobs to make ends meet, and Blacks were still "last hired and first fired" for employment in the low-paying and menial service sector and industrial related jobs. The largest local businesses, the Capitol Cake Co. and Schmidts Bakery in the Laurens Street corridor, would hire African Americans for the most menial clean-up type tasks only.[20] Even with available work, these circumstances usually led to a subsistence existence. However, during the depression, finding a job was considerably more difficult. Even domestic workers found themselves laid off. Predictably, the effects of an economic downturn are magnified among the most vulnerable.

Racial and social oppression never, however, meant surrender and subordination. West Baltimore's durable Black churches were the centerpiece of civic leadership, mutual aid, and political protest.[21] Wide community pressure led to, for example, the construction of a new building for Frederick Douglass High School. From 1925 until 1954, the school was located in the heart of Sandtown, serving as the only "Colored High School" in the city. Among the prominent alumni of old Douglass are Thurgood Marshall and Cab Calloway. In the 1930s, Sandtown residents joined and successfully picketed nearby white businesses in the "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work" campaign, considered a prelude to the Civil Rights movement.[22] Care and concern for one another, virtues of resistance to the dehumanizing pressures of segregation, were forged in suffering and a common struggle.[23]

Period Two: The Post-Industrial Inner City

When Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in 1968, it marked a social and

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19. Ryon, "Old West Balimore," p. 61.
20. Roderick N. Ryon, Telephone Interview, 9-17-93.
21. Ryon, "Old West Baltimore," pp. 57-59.
22. Ryon, "Old West Baltimore," p. 63.
23. For a history, see Karen Olson, "Old West Baltimore: Segregation, African-American Culture, and the Struggle for Equality," in *The Baltimore Book: New Views of Local History* edited by Elizabeth Fee, Linda Shopes and Linda Zeidman (Philadelphia; Temple University Press, 1991), 57-78.

psychological breakpoint for many inner city neighborhoods, and this was certainly true in Sandtown. Until King's death, there had been a heightening sense of optimism in the community and throughout Black America that the nation would achieve a greater level of justice and inclusion. But with King's death, such hopes seemed to die and be buried. The unrest that ensued in cities like Baltimore reflected loss and bitter frustration, a sense that change would be halted. King's death provides a marker for the beginning of the second period of inner city development, a set of circumstances and forces that had been growing since World War II and was to change life in the city profoundly. In this period Sandtown entered a new zone of urban wreckage, and the accelerants were multiple in origin.[24] More than ever, poverty was concentrated and opportunities were constricted.

During the decade that followed King's death, Sandtown lost nearly a quarter of its population, the more resourced heading the trend outward, taking with them social and job networks essential to the health of community. By 1980, nearly one in every six buildings in Sandtown stood vacant.[25] Businesses closed and churches became commuter congregations. The once vibrant and bustling Pennsylvania Avenue, where the great theaters of old like the Royal once proudly stood, became a mix of small businesses, vacant buildings, and empty lots.

By 1990, Sandtown's official population had fallen below 11,000, and the count of vacant row houses hovered near the 1,000 mark, about one in every four houses. At the time, the median

24. Studies that address the interrelated processes that led to this phase of inner city development include Gregory D. Squires, *Capital and Communities in Black and White: The Intersections of Race, Class, and Uneven Development* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), Thomas J. Sugrue, "The Structures of Urban Poverty: The Reorganization of Space and Work in Three Periods of American History," in *The Underclass Debate: Views From History* ed. Michael B. Katz (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 85-117, and more expansively *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996; Michael B. Katz *Improving the Poor: The Welfare State, The "Underclass," and Urban Schools as History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 77-82; Leonard Wallock, "The Myth of the Master Builder: Robert Moses, New York, and the Dynamics of Metropolitan Development Since World War II," *Journal of Urban History* 17, No. 4 (August 1991): pp. 339-362. Perhaps most important has been the work of William Julius Wilson, which I explore below.
25. These statistics come from the report "Sandtown-Winchester," Planning Division: Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development, August 27, 1982.

income was a mere $8,553.[26]   The three Elementary schools were in such chronic failure that a State takeover was a regular rumor.[27]   Both the infant mortality and low birth weight rates were high enough for the federal government to fund an intensive intervention program. Over half the adult population that could work was unemployed, and perhaps only 1 in 5 of the young people between the ages of 18 and 21 had a full time job.   As severe as the problems had been in the 1950s and 1960s, joblessness and struggle in Sandtown seems to have increased by 1990.

These changes in Sandtown were directly related to wider developments in Baltimore. By the 1970s, the industrial and manufacturing job base of the city, critical to the economic health of neighborhoods such as Sandtown and the city as a whole, was in a freefall. Between 1970 and 1985, manufacturing jobs in Baltimore declined by 45 percent and entry-level positions not requiring a high school diploma by 46 percent; knowledge based jobs requiring at least two years of college increased by 56 percent.[28]   In a thirty-year period, the city lost some 200,000 jobs.   The virtual collapse of Baltimore's industrial base hemorrhaged the jobs that had once provided a foundation, no matter how modest and tenuous, for families in Sandtown.   People in the neighborhood began giving up on the finding formal work, and many left or never entered the formal labor market.

With the enactment of fair and open housing legislation in the 1960s, leaving Sandtown became a viable option. Many parents, aspiring that their children pursue the step they themselves could never have taken, urged them to move out of the neighborhood. It wasn't that the inside of the neighborhood as a community was considered "bad," LaVerne Stokes recalled, but rather staying "seemed to mean missing out on progress."[29]   After all, this was what all citizens of

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26. This is for the census tract where Stricker Street is, and just over $10,000 within the combined 72-square block community." 1990 Community Profiles Baltimore City: Demographic, Housing, Health, Educational, Income, Public Assistance and Crime Data by Census Tracts," Baltimore City Department of Planning, March, 1992.
[27]   This came true in 2000 when one of the schools was taken over by a for-profit education company.
28. Marc E. Levine, "Economic Development to Help the Underclass," *The Sun*, January 10, 1988: pp. E-1,3.
29. On the question of social heterogeneity, it is not clear that Sandtown was all that diverse

America, a dream of basic rights, opportunities and responsibilities. Moreover, while Sandtown was home, it held bitter memories of the indignities and assaults of segregation.

As the neighborhood's population declined, landlords abandoned their properties. Various forms of redlining (insurance, mortgage lending) increased. Simultaneously, "block busting," a real estate practice that artificially induced the fear of Black relocations into white neighborhoods, created panic-selling. The flight of whites opened up adjacent city neighborhoods such as Edmondson Village to the newly mobile black population, quickening the pace of change.[30] Evidence of these population changes can be seen not only in the vacant houses, but also on Sunday morning. For this is when the large houses of worship, once neighborhood churches, are filled with commuter worshipers, the streets packed with their cars.

Along with the economic and demographic changes overtaking Baltimore, Sandtown was significantly impacted by local, regional, and national politics. It is frequently observed that if America had a real urban policy in the postwar years, it was to subsidize the suburbs.[31] Underwritten by government mortgage programs, infrastructure investment, and transportation programs, each wave of suburban sprawl played a heavy role in accelerating the downward turn of conditions in America's cities, Baltimore included. New housing needed roads. So highway construction was undertaken to ease suburban commuting back to the center city for the high-paying jobs. And as the suburbs drained out the urban population, the tax base followed. Political influence and power shifted to the suburbs as well. Following the population patterns, hospitals and businesses closed in the city to reopen in the suburbs.

One does not have to look hard to see serious shortcomings, failures, and even tragedies in government driven "urban renewal" and social programs born in the 1960s.[32] But while social

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economically. Old West Baltimore neighborhoods had their own lines of class. But there is little doubt that the social networks that existed provided stronger connections for work, though not necessarily an entree to middle class jobs.

30. A comprehensive accounting of this is W. Edward Orser, *Blockbusting in Baltimore: The Edmondson Village Story* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994).

31. On this wider history, see Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

32. Fred Siegel makes this argument in *The Future Once Happened Here: New York, D.C., L.A., and the Fate of America's Big Cities* (New York: The Free Press, 1997). For an important account of

policies did not end urban poverty, they hardly caused the crisis facing the inner city, and in many cases they significantly helped people. Head Start is widely regarded as a positive accomplishment, for example. Regardless of what it might have been done, the war in Vietnam distracted attention and resources away from inner cities. Later, when support from Washington for cities began to dry up under the "New Federalism" of the 1980s, cities had almost disappeared from the national agenda.[33] Making matters worse, during the 1980s a crack epidemic joined the list of crises confronting cities.

The broader story of how Sandtown faced new structural obstacles to the flourishing of life has been well and perhaps best told by William Julius Wilson, a sociologist now at Harvard University. Wilson is perhaps the leading theorist on inner city dislocations, and his analysis has carried significant influence on how scholars and policy makers understood neighborhoods of concentrated poverty. In *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987) [34] and *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (1996),[35] Wilson traces the course of major economic and demographic forces that generated the post-industrial inner city, particularly in the rustbelt Northeast and Midwest regions of the country. Because Wilson's analysis helps illuminate the issues facing Sandtown in very significant ways, I will summarize his main arguments.[36]

As the title *When Work Disappears* suggests, the most substantial factor for Wilson in

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the period's dilemmas, see Vincent J. Cannato *The Ungovernable City: John Lindsay and His Struggle to Save New York* (New York: Basic Books).

33. For an overview, see Demetrios Caraley, "Washington Abandons the Cities," *Political Science Quarterly* 107 (Spring 1992), pp. 1-30.

34. William Julius Wilson*, The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), especially chapters 2-4. These themes are also discussed in Loic J. D. Wacquant and William Julius Wilson, "The Cost of Racial and Class Exclusion in the Inner City," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 501 (January 1989), pp. 8-25.

35. William Julius Wilson, *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (New York: Knopf, 1996).

[36] For developments in Wilson's views, see William Julius Wilson, *The Bridge Over the Racial Divide: Rising Inequality and Coalition Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press/ New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999) and Teodros Kiros, "Class, Race and Social Stratification: An Interview with William Julius Wilson," *New Political Science,* 21:3 (September 1999): pp. 405-415.

understanding the inner city is the post-industrial disappearance of work.[37]   Supported by data

from Chicago as well as other cities, Wilson identifies a "new urban poverty." He defines this as

"poor, segregated neighborhoods in which a substantial majority of individuals adults are either

unemployed or have dropped out of the labor force altogether."[38] Due to post-industrial economic

restructuring, factories closed, while many of the remaining manufacturing operations moved

overseas. New jobs were being created in suburban neighborhoods, but the potential inner city

worker had few reliable ways to get to it. Hence, a "mis-match" is formed between the location of

workers and employers.[39]   The jobs which were being created in cities and paid well increasingly

required advanced degrees and training, leaving out the vast majority of inner city residents who had

been limited to failing educational system. Service sector jobs remained, but actual wages were

declining and the work was typically occasional. Perhaps even more importantly, the informal

networks that generate employment leads and placement faded away, creating a downward spiral

of disconnection from the formal labor market.

Why is the absence of work so destructive to a community? Following Pierre Bourdieu,

Wilson concludes that work, "is not simply a way to make a living and support one's family. It

also constitutes a framework for daily behavior and patterns of interaction because it imposes

disciplines and regularities."[40] Employment sets goals and helps give structure to life, family, and

community.[41] Especially in our capitalist society, where identity is measured by economic

success, the absence of work brings shame and discouragement. To feel unable to support a family,

the wider community and civic polity, as it occurs with the structural absence of work in the inner

city, severely constrains the manner in which one thinks, feels and acts with respect to the future.

The absence of meaningful employment in America, where the culture defines identity by

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37.   Wilson, *When Work Disappears*, pp. 3-50.
38. Wilson, *When Work Disappears*, p. 19.
39. For a review of the literature, see John Kain, "The Spatial Mismatch: Three Decades Later,"
Housing Policy Debate 3:2 (1992): 371-460.
40. Wilson, *When Work Disappears*, p. 73.
41. It seems to me that Wilson via Weber is reviving one interpretive strand of the Puritan view of
calling and vocation. At the very least, Wilson does suggest how cultural definitions of work can
become a means of achieving "salvation."

individual success, corrodes a sense of self and by extension, family and community. The effects in Sandtown have been severe.

With the closure of "the opportunity structure," as Wilson calls it came a cascade of social changes to neighborhoods.[42] As the number of men "eligible" to marry, or even view the future in optimistic terms declined, the family structure in the inner city was shattered.   Welfare rolls expanded, poverty increased, and crime rose.   Identifying negative attitudes and behaviors such as drug use in the inner city as "related" but not "specific" to the context, Wilson assigns them to larger cultural practices, yet with more painful consequences in jobless neighborhoods.[43] Social and family breakdown in the inner city, as Wilson points out, "ought not to be analyzed as if it were unrelated to the broader structure of opportunities and constraints that have evolved over time."[44] This does not mean that Wilson grants no place to the role of race.[45] His research in Chicago points to the prevalence of stereotypes in hiring practices, especially related to black males.[46] However, while race played a continuing factor in inner city poverty, Wilson stresses that it is the macro-economic forces that are most significant.

Wilson's views on inner city poverty are not immune from criticism. Difficulties in his position arise from implicit assumptions he made, at least in his earlier work, concerning the role of culture and morality in relationship to poverty and the meaning of human behavior. Another issue of dispute, as Brett Williams has pointed out, is Wilson's choice to center his argumentation on the employment history of men, thus gendering work and family.[47] Additionally, Wilson's focus on

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42. Wilson, *When Work Disappears*, pp. 51-110.
43. Wilson, *When Work Disappears*, p. 56.
44. Wilson, *When Work Disappears*, p. 55.
45. Wilson, *When Work Disappears*, pp. 111-146. It was suggested by some that he was saying this when he published *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions*, 2nd edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). For his response, see Wilson*, The Truly Disadvantaged*.
46. Wilson, *When Work Disappears*, pp. 111-146. See further Joleen Kirschenman and Kathryn M. Neckerman, "We'd Love to Hire Them, But...": The Meaning of Race for Employers" in *The Urban Underclass* edited by Christopher Jencks and Paul E. Peterson (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1991), pp. 203-232; Philip Moss and Chris Tilly, *Stories Employers Tell: Race, Skill, and Hiring in America* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2001).
47. Brett Williams, "Poverty Among African Americans in the Urban United States," *Human Organization* 51, no. 2 (1992), pp. 164-174.

the unemployed may have had the unintended effect of relegating to a minor role the status of the working residents who maintain low paying and tenuous work.[48]

While such criticisms need to be taken seriously and modifications made where needed, Wilson's central narration on the process of post-industrial inner city development is helpful in comprehending the challenges confronting Sandtown in this period.   The post-segregation outflow of resourced residents to less distressed (but no less segregated) urban and suburban neighborhoods, the abandonment of the inner city by all levels of government, and the disappearance of meaningful employment for men and women all combined to send Sandtown into a new spiral of agony. As a result, it produced brokenness in the structure of families, the world of employment, and the fabric of community.

In summary, the inner city in the post-industrial period was not created by the character flaws of the people who live there or by the welfare system, but by the searing dynamics of economy, place and race.[49] The end result was a community in economic depression, isolated and excluded from opportunity. Life in its fullness was more deeply diminished.

Period Three: The Global Inner City

What happens around the world impacts the inner city. Beyond post-industrialism and what Wilson terms "the end of work," Sandtown now has joined every other American inner city and barrio in being drawn into a third phase of development, what can be called the "global inner city."[50] Globalization has come to mean many things. Here I am using it as a description of a

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[48]   See Katherine S. Newman, *No Shame in My Game: The Working Poor in the Inner City* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf and The Russell Sage Foundation, 1999).

49. Wilson's work, especially *The Truly Disadvantaged,* can be understood, in part at least, as a response to Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1984). Murray conjured up a picture of inner city dislocations causally linked to the rise of welfare, a position embraced by then president Ronald Reagan. Historical perspectives on the public fight to end poverty deserve more attention than I can give here.

50. Carl Husemoller Nightingale, "The Global Inner City: Toward a Historical Analysis," in *W.E.B DuBois, Race, and the City: The Philadelphia Negro and Its Legacy* edited by Michael B. Katz and Thomas Sugrue (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), pp. 217-258; Manuel Castells, *End of the Millenium* 2nd ed. The Information Age: Economy, Society, Culture (Oxford:

market economy and cultural forms that moves with incredible power and speed throughout the world. Politics has changed with this, placing the function of the nation-state in new perspective. As a result, the post-industrial world is taking on the shape of new environment dominated by casual labor in the service sector, information-based businesses that control capital, and a homogenized culture that seeks to reproduce itself over and over. On a global scale, this economy produces new winners and losers. You are connected to the wired world or you are not. Globalization does not merely impact cities, but takes place through them, **as** Saskia Sassen persuasively argues.[51] Cities form the **nexus** of the new economy, Sassen contends, the physical site that is essential for the coordination and extension of its activities.

Globalization has produced changes not only in cities, but new differences between cities. Baltimore has not benefited from the global economy as have other cities. As a result, Sandtown's present and future increasingly reflect the social realities of globalization. In Baltimore, like every other city, most good jobs in the new economy require a highly developed set of knowledge-based skills that Sandtown residents have not been trained for. Current public policies and resources do not suggest this will become a priority. So the jobs being created for the poor are low wage in areas such as cleaning, food service, and maintenance sectors. In a cost-benefit analysis, the city needs these jobs to keep higher wage producing sectors operating. A new class division is therefore becoming deeply embedded in the urban landscape. This means a steady stream of low-paying jobs for the "right kind of person" from Sandtown, but usually without health benefits, retirement, job security, or potential for long-term advancement. Mixed in with this is the reality of the end of welfare and decreasing social safety nets. The new economy "demands" this.

Global changes have reinvented the business sector in another way. Major corporations, which had often demanded and received subsidies to stay in the city, have contracted through mergers and consolidation. As a result, Baltimore has lost almost its entire set of corporate headquarters in the past few years. Such corporate consolidations are already adding to the tears in

Blackwell, 2000), pp. 128-152.
51. Saskia Sassaen *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) and *Globalization and Its Discontents: Essays on the New Mobility of People and Money* (New York: The New Press, 1998).

the fabric of neighborhoods. As an example, banking mergers have not only reduced the number of employees in a city, but also the presence of "redundant" branches. And so scores of area neighborhoods have no local banks or access to their financial services. Sandtown shares one tiny branch with four neighborhoods. Climbing transaction fees have left many in the inner city feeling unwanted by the banks anyway.   Fringe banking institutions such check cashing outlets are filling the void, but users face exploitative prices and limited services. More critically, credit for housing development and other capital projects is hard to find, and will be nearly non-existent in a credit crunch. Additionally, corporate giving and civic leadership, no longer tied to the region or city, has declined significantly.

As Baltimore becomes faced with its new future, the city is turning to the expansion of an already important tourist trade for economic security.[52] The city is increasingly commodified as entertainment and leisure fill the public space. Numerous new hotels are underway or planned for construction along the once industrial waterfront.   The Walt Disney Corporation, Barnes and Noble, ESPN, and Planet Hollywood are among the recent players in downtown development. This is not the first time Baltimore has turned in this direction; the city helped pioneer downtown revitalization in the 1980s.[53]   But as with the past spurts of downtown redevelopment, any translation of current projects to living wage employment for neighborhood residents is modest.[54]

William Julius Wilson identifies three key areas of change for the inner city associated with the global economy: employment, training and wages.[55]   The dictum of "last hired and first fired" will be lethal to the community when the global money system convulses, as it did in 1997 and 1998. Low-wage and temporary jobs can just as easily disappear as they have appeared. It is also unlikely that necessary training will take place that brings inner city workers into a higher level of

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52. Dennis R. Judd and Susan S. Fainstein, eds. *The Tourist City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

[53]   For a view of Baltimore's first downtown renewal through the eyes of one of its primary leaders, see C. Fraser Smith, *William Donald Schaefer: A Political Biography* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

54. Marc V. Levine, "Downtown Redevelopment as an Urban Growth Strategy: A Critical Appraisal of the Baltimore Renaissance," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 9: 2 (1987), pp. 103-123.

55. Wilson, *When Work Disappears*, pp. 152-155.

opportunity and occupation. Community institutions that exist outside the individual and market/state, hollowed out during the post-industrial transformation of the 1970s-1990s, face new vulnerability even as their importance has grown under the architectonic forces of global capitalism.

All of this negatively impacts upon family and community stability.

In the end, far too many young men in Sandtown have only found the period of the new economy to be a growth era of incarceration. It is a shattering reality that so many African American men caught up in the criminal justice system. Economic redundancy married to globalization has resulted in social control as the dominant urban policy. When "peace" really means order not public safety, then the global inner city becomes the carceral inner city. This is not the final word on the global inner city, on Baltimore or Sandtown. But it returns the neighborhood to where it started – working hard with a constricted horizon and "restricted, controlled, and watched over."

Theological Reflections on the Creation of Urban Space

What accounts for the high rates of joblessness, concentrated poverty, racial segregation, and discouragement that form the inner city? How is that communities of people considered social "extras" and outsiders are generated? No one should doubt that there is profound brokenness in inner city families, homes and lives. Certainly the gospel addresses this, providing through conversion, discipleship, and social support the means to overcome the effects of exclusion. By the gospel, women, men, children, and families are able, on an everyday basis, to begin again in their relationships and lives. Following Jesus, walking in the Spirit, and being transformed from the inside out, does change people. That such a process is, by the word of the gospel, both progressive in nature and universal in requirement, is typically overlooked. Equally neglected, such change is, on Christian terms, a matter of grace, not moral determination.

But the source of inner city struggle is not due in any way to personal failings, force of nature, a lack of collective activity by the community, the presence of neighborhood pathology, a lifestyle of sin, or any deficiencies in character or moral behavior. A lack of personal responsibility by residents did not build the inner city. Instead, a historically accurate understanding of the inner city requires us to see inner city neighborhoods as created by

institutionalized racism, economic exclusion, and adverse political determinations. A theologically serious approach to the inner city requires us to also draw on the biblical categories of injustice, structural sin, and the powers.[56] This will challenge us to deal with the *city* in terms of its underlying direction.

Structures of Injustice and Sin

Because urban exclusion, poverty and misery are bound up with larger and perverse social, economic and political actions and priorities, a coalition of "institutions and intentions,"[57] one of the requirements of biblical faith is to name such wronging as injustice and take account of its urban character. Iris Marion Young analyzes injustice as "oppression, the institutional constraint on self-development, and domination, the institutional constraint on self determination."[58] At stake is not merely the distribution of goods, but all of life, and in focus is not only the individual, but groups.[59] Injustice is a structural concept in name and dynamic. Oppression, Young develops, reveals itself in five faces: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence.[60] The presence of any of one of these results in oppression, and of course they can exist all at once or in various combination.[61] In Sandtown, and the inner city generally, all five faces of oppression can be seen at work in the racial and economic construction of space and the burdens of existence.

Examining the biblical witness, injustice is not randomly pronounced, but is referenced to the harm that is inflicted upon society's most vulnerable, especially the widow, the orphan, and the stranger (Ex. 3:9; Ps. 94:5-6; 103:6; Prov. 14:31; Mic. 3:1-3). To listen to Amos, but one of the

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[56] Jayakumar Christian, *God of the Empty Handed: Poverty, Power and the Kingdom of God* (Monrovia: Marc, 1999).

[57] Sharon Zukin, "How 'Bad' Is It? Institutions and Intentions in the Study of the American Ghetto," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*," 22:3 (1998): p. 512.

[58] Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 37.

[59] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, pp. 42-48

[60] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, pp. 48-63

[61] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, p. 64.

Hebrew prophets who speaks to the matter, "Hear this word, you cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria, you women who oppress the poor and crush the needy" (4:1). Amos pronounced in the city streets that sin was found in a legal system both as institution and policies that sold "the needy for a pair of sandals" (2:6; cf. 5:12). Injustice as the cause of social sorrow and the restriction of life is a basic biblical category, and is essential for comprehending our urban world.

God's concern with injustice, Nicholas Wolterstorff explains, is bound up with God's love. "God's love for justice is grounded in his love for the victims of injustice. And his love for the victims of injustice belongs to his love for the little ones of the world: for the weak, defenseless ones, the ones at the bottom, the excluded ones, the miscasts, the outcasts, the outsiders...God's love for justice, I suggest, is grounded in his special concern for the hundreth one[62]." For, as Wolterstorff continues, "God's command to do justice is grounded in his suffering love for the little ones of the world and in his longing to have a people which reflects and celebrates his own holiness."[63] Because human persons are created in God's image, God is harmed whenever the poor are denied standing, sustenance, and dignity (Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1-3; 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; Ja. 3:9). Thus the wounding of the poor and vulnerable through oppression is not merely wrong, but as Wolterstorff argues is the position of Calvin, an assault on God (Prov. 14:31; Matt. 25:31-46).[64] On this basis, God and the inner city have a claim on the city and other human beings, a claim for right relationships.

Because injustice is related to the social world, it cannot be reduced to only the actions of individuals. For example, in Amos 2:7, we find that oppressive power existed apart from an individual, though not without it "The structures of our social world are fallen" argues Nicholas Wolterstorff. "They are alienated from the will of God. Instead of providing authentic fulfillment to those of us who live within them, they spread misery and injustice, squelching the realization of

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[62] Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Why Care About Justice?" *The Reformed Journal* 36, no. 8 (August 1986), p. 9.
[63] Wolterstorff, "Why Care About Justice?," p. 12.
[64] Nicholas Wolterstorff, "The Wounds of God: Calvin's Theology of Social Injustice," *The Reformed Journal* 37:6 (June 1987): pp. 14-22

what human life was meant to be."[65]   As people in the neighborhood know, feel and say in different ways, "the system is against us." Instead of bringing forth human flourishing, the city reproduces various forms of racial, gender, cultural, and environmental oppressions.

But does the category of "injustice" enable us to get as far underneath the oppressive conditions of the inner city as we need to go?   A review of some recent definitions of the inner city as "ghetto" pushes us further, and illuminates the seriousness of the situation. The first definition of "ghetto" comes from Camilo Jose Vergara. He writes, "[A]lthough I respect others reservations about the term "ghetto," I use it to highlight the exclusion of so many poor, minority people from mainstream society. I want to describe the size and strength of the barriers we have built to separate citizens…"[66] While I differ with Vergara in that I believe "ghettos" remain *communities*, places people call home and in which they forge a meaningful communal existence, I am in agreement with him that the inner city is exclusionary by design, and as a political and physical construct, does all it can to undermine human dignity, purpose, and community. [67]

For the sociologist Loic Wacquant, "ghetto" it is not "simply a topographical entity or an aggregation of poor families and individuals but an *institutional form*, a historically determinate, spatially-based concatenation of mechanisms of *ethnoracial closure and control.*"[68]   In this dense sentence, Wacqaunt presents a multi-dimensional understanding of the "ghetto" that involves history, race, and social reality. This is not a morally simple <u>assessment.</u> More than a place where many poor people reside, "ghetto" for Wacquant is a racialized structural form that has come about through a punitive history.   For the historian Craig Steven Wilder, an analysis of the construction of the "ghetto" brings to the fore the maldistributions of power.[69]   Any study of the inner city

[65]   Wolterstorff, "Why Care About Justice," p. 23.
[66]   Vergara, *The New American Ghetto*, p. 9.
[67] Vergara, The New American Ghetto, p. 9.   For a view that recognizes the harshness of inner city life and also accounts for the presence of community resilience and building, see Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh *American Project: The Rise and Fall of a Modern Ghetto* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).
[68] Loic J.D. Wacquant, "Three Pernicious Premises in the Study of the American Ghetto," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 21, no. 2 (June 1997): p. 343.
[69] Craig Steven <u>Wilder</u> *A Covenant With Color: Race and Social Power in Brooklyn* (New York:

should also take account of the role of power in the formation of racial and social inequality.

Without denying that the use of "ghetto" brings with it potentially negative connotations of the community, it can be a helpful term in naming the inner city as more than a place where a large percentage of people are persistently poor.   Rather, "ghetto" helps us see the inner city as a space where the people who inhabit it are socially consigned and forgotten, the very essence of *exclusion.*[70]   Urban exclusion takes place by the construction of walls or partitions that divide, control, and ultimately injure the urban poor and vulnerable.   Physically, the walls may actually be a street, a river, or a railroad track, but their mortar is the power of exclusion. As Douglass Massey and Nancy Denton have documented, it is appropriate to speak of such residential segregation, with its attendant consequences, as a form of apartheid.[71]

The Powers of Exclusion

Limiting exclusion however to only the racial economic, political or social dimensions of oppression does not fully account for the ferocity and inner workings of racial hatred, economic rejection, and moral indifference that has built and maintains the walls of the inner city. Is not a spiritual dimension of some order required for interpretation? In great measure, this requires breaking free of an Enlightenment conceptualization of the world that brackets out the spiritual dimension of social reality.

In *Exclusion and Embrace*, Miroslav Volf has provided an incisive theological analysis of

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Columbia University Press, 2000), <u>writes</u>, "…the ghetto is not so much a place as it is a relationship - the physical manifestation of a perverse imbalance in social power. The ghetto is not the cause of social pathology, it is its destination. It is not the set of ever-changing, ever-negotiated disparities that dominate it but the financial, physical, and legal coercion that give rise to them. It cannot be defined by the people who occupy it but by the struggles that place them there. It is not social inequality but the attempt to predetermine the burden of social inequality.   Thus, ghettos are different sizes, have different demographics, and suffer different conditions. They have in common only the lack of power that allows their residents to be physically concentrated and socially targeted," p. 234.

[70] Vergara, *The New American Ghetto*, pp. 20-22.
[71] Douglas S. Massey and Nancy Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1993).

"exclusion," reflections intended to come to grips with ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia.[72] I want to build on his proposal, which in part adapts the important work of Walter Wink[73] that finds in exclusion a system with an interior and exterior life. What Volf identifies as an "Exclusion System" and relates it to identity and otherness, I will apply to the identity of the inner city in its spatial and social relationship to the dominant control centers of the city. Distinguished from "differentiation," Volf suggests "Exclusion takes place when the violence of expulsion, assimilation, or subjugation and the indifference of abandonment replace the dynamics of taking in and keeping out as well as the mutuality of giving and receiving."[74] Accordingly, "what is exclusionary are the impenetrable barriers that prevent a creative encounter with the other.   They are the result either of expulsion or indifference"[75] This process operates as a system embedded in structures and institutions, but it also bears a "transpersonal" spiritual identity. Because by biblical definition exclusion is sinful, then we must also say that the construction and reproduction of the inner city is sinful.

The apostle Paul identifies the forces that reproduce exclusion with the work of the "principalities and powers" (Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:20-21; 2:1-2; 6:12; Col. 1:16-20; 2:10).[76] According to Herman Ridderbos, "it is the dominion of these powers that determines Paul's outlook on the present world. It is they who represent the "vanity," the worthlessness and senselessness to which the whole creation, groaning and looking for redemption has been subjected (cf. Rom. 8:19-23 and 8:38, 39)."[77]

If the purpose of the reign of God is to reconcile all things (2 Cor. 5:19; Eph. 1:10; Col.

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[72] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), pp. 57-98.

[73] See Walter Wink *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), and *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

[74] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, p. 67.

[75] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, p.67.

[76] Two very helpful overviews of the issues involved are Thomas McAlpine, *Facing the Powers: What are the Options*? (Monrovia: MARC, 1991) and Andrew T. Lincoln, "Liberation from the Powers: Supernatural Spirits or Societal Structures?" in *The Bible in Human Society* 335-354.

1:20), then the primary objective of the powers is to oppose all that supports, advances and comprises reconciliation. The "rulers of this age" are servitors of injustice, transpersonal expressions of exploitation and oppression. Mortally wounded by the cross, they still try to maw people and communities through the ways of "exclusion" and "domination" (Gal. 4:1-3; 1 Cor. 2:8; Rev. 2:12-13). Exclusionary in aim and intention, the "principalities and powers" can be embedded in political, social and economic institutions, mechanisms and order.

A further biblical resource in accounting for the inner city is its perspective on the "world." In Ephesians 2:2, the values of the sin dominated social world ("the ways of this world-age") and the hostile supernatural powers (the ruler of the realm of the air") are drawn together (cf. 1 Cor. 1:13). Here the "world" is not the created order, which is to be deemed good a total of seven times in the Genesis 1 account of creation (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31), but the fallen order (Gen. 3) that expresses itself in institutions, practices, and historical narratives.[78] "World" used in this manner is parallel to, but not identical with the powers.

William Stringfellow, a lawyer and theologian who devoted significant attention to the powers, came to emphasize their role while living and working in East Harlem during the 1960s. He saw little way to understand the injustice and struggles of Harlem apart from talking about the powers. Stringfellow "demythologized" the powers into three primary categories: ideologies, institutions, and images.[79] Without denying my general agreement with Stringfellow, I think he creates a dichotomy between creation and redemption. Stringfellow seems to assume that all is fallen to such depths that substantial redemption is impossible. The price of this can be a spiritualized disengagement, and no inner city community can afford such a cost. Institutions are created by God for good, but are also fallen. Because they are not only fallen, their redemption is possible. Having made this criticism, Stringfellow's writing demands continued attention as a resource for understanding and engaging the inner city.

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[77] Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 92.
[78] Luke T. Johnson, "Friendship with the World/Friendship with God: A Study of Discipleship in James," in Fernando F. Segovia, *Discipleship in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), pp. 166-183.
[79] For Stringfellow's writings on the powers and the city, see Bill Wylie Kellermann, *A Keeper of the Word: Selected Writings of William Stringfellow* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 192-222

How are we to name the work of the powers in the inner city? We need a contextual approach, one that does not over rate their abilities nor deny the reality of a spiritual dimension to exclusion. There is a macro and a micro level at which the powers can be discerned. The interconnected array of systemic racism, economic abandonment, gun marketers and dealers who saturate cities with their wares, a legal system that never seems to uphold the cause of the poor, and incarceration policies may be thought of as macro ways of exclusion.   I think also the ideology of the underclass, so prominent in the past two decades, fits this category. "Underclass" is a label of moral deficiency rooted in a discourse of Otherness. In short, "underclass" means lazy and immoral, the sorrows of extreme poverty self-inflicted. It means the poor are poor in the inner city because of social pathology.[80] By the ideology of the underclass, women, especially single mothers are demonized, and men are criminalized.   Our study of Sandtown's development finds more than sufficient reason to reject this,[81] and great reason to be concerned when it is used to develop public policy or shape public opinion.[82]   Moreover, the ethics of the kingdom shifts the issues of what counts as right living rather dramatically.[83]

At the local level, the presence of the powers can also be seen in the micro context through check cashing centers, proliferate liquor stores and their corporate suppliers, slum housing "investors" who deal properties like playing cards, and a lottery which drains precious resources

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[80] An extended historical interpretation of inner city poverty that strongly connects it with "underclass" behavior is Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How it Changed America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), especially pp. 281-291.
[81] Important critiques of this view are Adolph L. Reed, Jr., *Stirrings in the Jug: Black Politics in the Post-Segregation Era* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), pp. 179-196 and Herbert J. Gans, "Deconstructing the Underclass Thesis: The Term's Danger as a Planning Concept," *APA Journal* 56, no. 3 (Summer 1990): pp. 271-277.   Their targets are found in both "liberal" and "conservative" schools of thought. Theologically, a critique of underclass ideology has at least three strands of argumentation: the universality of sin (Rom. 3:23; Acts 10:34-35), Jesus rejection of elitist moral reasoning (Matt. 23:23-27; 19:23-24), and Jesus' identification with and honoring of the "underclass"/outcast of his day (Matt. 5:3,5). Moreover, one can hardly hold that "violence" and "self-destructive behavior," traits attributed to the whole of the inner city as "underclass," are not equally suburban and wholly part of American culture.
[82] Herbert J. Gans, *The War Against the Poor: The Underclass and Antipoverty Policy* (New York: Basic Books, 1995
[83] N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortess, 1996), pp. 274-297.

from those who have the least in the false hope of instant redemption.[84] In the grasp of the powers, people and communities can turn against themselves, bringing hurt and even destruction to their world. Stemming from the divisiveness of the powers, a community can be caught up in multiple cycles of violence. We can thus speak of the work of the powers in the inner city by naming all that excludes children, adults and families from enjoying the wholeness that God intends for all of creation. The powers are not "out there" as much as they are at work in the here and now, creating from the top down barriers and walls to wholeness. They falsely claim sovereignty that belongs to God.[85]

The Corner and the Story of Salvation

Following Vergara and Wacquant among others, I have argued that a main theme of the inner city that require our attention is its status as a community excluded on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, and social status.   As a result of such exclusion, there has been a disintegration of normative community institutions and the ability to meet the basic needs of life.   The line to this point came through, as Wilson and others argued, profound changes in the macro economy and world where people live. Expanding on this presentation, I also concluded that the biblical witness requires that injustice, structural sin, and the powers be factored into how we understand the complex of ways in which the post-industrial and now global inner city operates.   In this final section, I want to look at the spiritual point to which the inner city has arrived, presenting a response in light of the redemptive mission of God in Christ.

The Closure of Horizons

We have come in the story of the inner city to the end of narrative and the arrival of disenchantment, a time when the horizons of the future have been closed. In his highly discussed

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[84] Liaila Beukema, "The Powers and Urban Land Use," The Gospel and Our Culture 11:4 (December, 1999): 5-6,8.
[85] Bill Wylie-Kellermann,

essay "Nihilism in Black America," the philosopher Cornel West wrote that to comprehend the inner city, one must also account for the presence of meaninglessness and nihilism:

> Nihilism is to be understood here not as a philosophic doctrine that there are no rational grounds for legitimate standards or authority; it is, far more, the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most important) lovelessness. This usually results in a numbing detachment from others and a self-destructive disposition toward the world. Life without meaning, hope, and love breeds a coldhearted, mean-spirited outlook that destroys both the individual and others.[86]

What is interesting about West's conclusion is that it joins the changes in social, economic and political forces to the status of functional community life. In his view, "The recent market-driven shattering of black civil society - black families, neighborhoods, schools, churches, mosques - leave more and more black people vulnerable to daily lives endured with little sense of self and fragile existential moorings"[87]

Put in philosophical terms, the Enlightenment or modern project no longer provides coherent meaning or can honestly promise inclusion. In African American communities, the historic protection afforded by a sacred cosmos, a belief system that gave meaning and sustenance to life in a racist world, is now nearly eviscerated.[88] Ecclesiastes describes a similar condition of frustration due an appreciation of the absurdity of life and daily confrontation the loss of meaning. Ecclesiastes tells the story of how reality feels when the future horizon is closed (3:16, 5:8).[89] This certainly describes a central facet of the dilemma that confronts neighborhoods such as Sandtown.

It is on Sandtown's corners where the clearest evidence of the nihilistic option is to be found. Here you will find many young men trying to establish identity and meaning through

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86. Cornel West, *Race Matters* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), pp.14-15
87. West, *Race Matters*, p. 16.
88. On the sacred cosmos, see C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Expereince* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), pp. 3-7.
89. See the reading of Elsa Tamez, *When the Horizons Close: Rereading Ecclesiastes* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000).

slinging drugs, one of the few job markets dependably open and hiring.[90]   Yet there is not even

much money for an entry-level worker in the corner drug trade.   "Do or die" is the motto on the

corner in Sandtown. This means that a person will do whatever it takes to get what one want,

whether they survive. Take a life or be taken, "do or die." For these young and gifted me are well

aware that in today's new urban economy, they are superfluous, and this may be where they work

for life, however few those years add up to be. It is a world that offers no breaks, only drug

sweeps, incarceration, and likely early death.   The horizons of the corner are closed.

The Opening of the Future

        A mark of a Christian response to the inner city must be its direct and meaningful response

to the closure not only of opportunities, but to the possibility of future horizons. This involves

understanding the story of God's saving work in the world, a feature built into the conclusion of

Ecclesiastes.[91] Luke-Acts is a particularly important way of telling the story of salvation for our

work in the inner city.[92] As was indicated in the Introduction, the third Gospel has its organizing

theme the good news of Jesus for the excluded and redemption for the fallen urban order (Lk. 4:16-

21).   Throughout the story, the gospel overcomes political and religious obstacles, and delivers on

its promise of being good news.[93] As part of the fuller story of Luke-Acts, it invites readers to

enter into a drama of following Jesus (Acts 7:2-53).[94]

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[90]   David Simon and Edward Burns, *The Corner: A Year in the Life of an Inner City Neighborhood* (New York: Broadway Books, 1997); Elijah Anderson, *Code of the Streets: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999

[91]   See Tremper Longman III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes* NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) for his genre argument of a frame narrator that provides an alternative worldview.
[92]   I am adapting a proposal for the postmodern context made by William J. Larkin, Jr. "The Recovery of Luke-Acts as "Grand Narrative" For the Church's Evangelistic and Edification Tasks in a Postmodern Era," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:3 (September 2000), pp. 405-415. For an approach that takes similar questions seriously, see J. Richard Middleton and Brian J., *Truth is Stranger Than it Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995),
[93] William J. Larkin, Jr. "The Recovery of Luke-Acts as "Grand Narrative" For the Church's Evangelistic and Edification Tasks in a Postmodern Era," p. 410.
[94] Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self*, p. 147.

Joel Green has explored the place of the overall plot in Luke, drawing attention to themes that speak to the need for an alternative story to the corner. "The Gospel of Luke narrates the long-awaited intervention and determined activity of God to accomplish his historical purpose"[95] The challenge Luke presents is an invitation that all will respond to God's saving aims, taking up the cross as the way of discipleship.[96] Hearers of Jesus' redemptive message were invited to join in with God's saving purpose.[97] The invitation remains open.

Another important place for our project where the story of God's saving purposes for the world is told is the letter to the Ephesians, where its overarching theme can be summarized as reconciliation. Paul writes in Ephesians 1:10, a passage that can be taken as a key to the letter, that the purpose of Christ is "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ." Reconciliation is making all things right, the putting back together the pieces of a broken humanity and world. "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph. 2:14). The death of Christ, David Ford asserts, has resulted in the "transformation of boundaries."[98] Specifically in Ephesians, Christ has come to break down barriers and walls between Jews and Gentiles, a category inclusive of all ethnic and cultural differences.

Ephesians chapter 2:16 is also a key passage in the epistle, for it explains how Christ creates this new community. A reconciled community takes place "in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross." The extent of this work is one body which witnesses before the powers all that is Christ's reconciling rule and age (Eph. 3:10-11). Reconciliation is intrinsic to God's central purpose for the world, not just the church (1:9-10). God is creating a world where the walls and barriers to wholeness, symbolic and real, are taken down. A new humanity, a restored community, and redeemed world, Paul's Christology announces, are replacing

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[95] Joel B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 22.
[96] Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, pp. 35-37, 102-121.
[97] Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, p. 35.
[98] David F. Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 118.

present divisions. A world divided between gated communities and excluded neighborhoods is contradicted by the gospel of reconciliation. The future of the inner city is open to new levels of identity and meaning because of Christ crucified, risen, and ascended.

Justification and Justice

For the apostle Paul, the basis of a new community is not established by achievement, status, efficiency or might, but by grace through the death of Christ. This is made clear in Ephesians 2:8-9, where we read "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works so that no one can boast" (cf. 2:10, 2:5; Phil. 3:9; cf. Rom. 1:17; Gal. 2:16). While the message of the world is that all who dwell in the inner city are unworthy, unclean, and unneeded, the gospel is a message of acceptance based not on "works of law," social status, or position, but divine mercy and love.   In profoundly redemptive ways, the grace of the cross is deconstructive of a world based on such markers. The gospel counter reads the inner city, for as Romans 1:17 explains. "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." Grace deconstructs the hierarchies of status and position that have destroyed not only self worth and identity, but also community.

Life by the righteousness of God comes as good news to the inner city, because all concepts of salvation derived from race, status, ethnicity, or success are rejected, even turned over. Translated into classical theological terminology, this is the message of justification by grace alone, and it bears great importance of the "ghetto." Unconditional love, forgiveness, and acceptance are the traits of God's saving grace, and their announcement and enactment are a major subversion of the dominant order. "Justified by sheer grace, it seeks to "justify" by grace those who are made "unjust" by society's implacable law of achievement"[99] Miroslav Volf writes.

Conversion and spiritual rebirth are central to the transformation of the inner city, not

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[99] Miroslav Volf, "Shopkeepers Gold," *Christian Century*, November 12, 1997, p. 1045.

because the sins of the poor caused the sorrows of the inner city (which they have not), but because it establishes all who have been "captive" to freedom for participation in God's liberating order.[100] A change of heart is necessary because it is the way to enter the kingdom which Jesus proclaimed and through which is changing the world (Mk. 1:14-15). Nor without discipleship in line with God's new order through faith in Christ will liberation be enough to stay free of every form of oppression (Lk. 11:14-28; cf. Gal. 5:1, 13).   Christ crucified brings personal and social healing and release from the powers, facets of God's pardon from and grace in the midst of the twisted structures of sin and death.

God's justification by grace through the death of Christ calls attention to the neglected but vital link in scripture between God's justice and the doing of justice, freedom and empowerment.[101] By identification with the reign of God, one joins in the triune God's project of transforming the world.   God's saving grace generates agency for serving the purposes of the new creation. According to Ephesians 5:8-9, a consequence of grace is the call to do justice and live righteously. "Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what please the Lord." Doing justice is part of the holistic vocation of Christ's followers in the world (Eph. 6:1, 14). Here we should recall the strong Old Testament imperatives to do justice (Ps. 74:1-4; 112:5; Amos 5:24; Micah 6:8) which have their standing in the God who "with justice will give decisions for the poor of the earth" (Isa. 11:4). To be liberated from the definitions of the powers and law (race, class, and status) frees one up to participate in a new community of love and grace that serves God's peace and righteousness in the world. Framed rightly, justification enables the recovery of true humanity, community and service to God.   It can be a liberating and world changing doctrine.

One finds a close relationship between grace and justice in the epistle of James. After

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[100] The following discussion is indebted to Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, pp. 111-119
[101] Elsa Tamez, *The Amnesty of Grace: Justification by Faith From a Latin American Perspective* translated by Sharon H Ringe (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993); James D.G. Dunn, "The Justice of God: A Renewed Perspective on Justification by Faith*," Journal of Theological Studies*, NS, 43, Pt 1 (April 1992), pp. 18-2; Jurgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 19992), pp. 123-143

reciting the importance of meeting the basic human needs of shelter and sustenance (Ja. 2:14-17; cf 1:27), James concludes, "You see that is a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone" (Ja. 2:24). If God's truth is truly known, then it is concretely practiced (Ja. 1:22). 1 John uses different language to also say that knowing God's saving love requires evidence in right social relationships (1 Jn. 2:29, 3:7, 3:10; 4:7-8). By Christ's mercy, the oppressed are set free to work for a community of love based on justice for all who have been left out. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be filled" (Mt. 5:6), Jesus pronounced upon those who follow in his steps. Is this not because the deeds of justice serve to bring the world and its structures more into line with God's reign?[102] God in Christ, Paul said, gave himself "so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21).

Based on our analysis of the inner city and the biblical writers, Christian commitment to community development, organizing, and holistic ministry in the American inner city should be animated by the biblical demands to do justice, not the rhetoric of charity or compassion (Deut. 10:18-19; Deut. 15; Isa. 61:8; Amos 5:7, 24; Mic. 6:8; 2 Cor. 9:9-10).[103] For doing justice in scripture is not the abstract balancing of "rights," but the "restoration of that community as originally established by the justice of God; it is a community of equality and freedom from oppression."[104] As Christopher J. H. Wright's work in Old Testament ethics and Israelite society has shown with insight for our subject, God has a great interest in stronger families and communities.[105] Urban realities challenge the church to creatively pursue this today in very practical ways and at multiple levels.

An active commitment to right relationships in the inner city comes from our confession of

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[102] Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, pp. 138-142.
[103] For the importance of justice for Israel and the church, see Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), pp. 188-190, 460-467, 737-738.
[104] Stephen Charles Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 67.
[105] Christopher J.H. Wright, *An Eye for and Eye: The Place of Old Testament Ethics Today* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1983) and *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

the triune God, because God's love draws out a love set on God and neighbor in which every need is rightly satisfied.[106] To work for justice and against exclusion does not lock us into a polarity of oppressed and oppressor, rich and the poor, for we follow the Christ who looked at the Rich Young Ruler "and loved him" (Mark 10:21). The Christian witness to the reign of God must include an invitation to rich and powerful to accept and share in God's saving way. Ultimately, justice is pursued by way of the cross and under the assumption of God's will for the meeting of love and embrace.[107] Reconciliation is our goal.

And where does this movement of grace and love and righteousness begin? Can it really alter the dynamics of the city when the ledger is so set against the poor? In a prophetic presentation of the gospel, Orlando Costas asserts that

> If evangelization starts on the periphery of society, if it works from the bottom up, the good news of God's kingdom is visibly demonstrated and credibly announced as a message of liberating love, justice, and peace. When the gospel makes "somebody" out of the "nobodies" of society, when it restores the self-worth of the marginalized, when it enables the oppressed to have reason for hope, when it empowers the poor to struggle and suffer for justice and peace, then it is truly good news of a new order of life – the saving power of God (Rom. 1:16).[108]

For Costas, this requires evangelizing communities of faith, born of the Spirit and from among the "marginalized and rejected, the sick and uneducated, little children and alienated women, publicans and sinners, who will be transformed by the saving power of the gospel into a prophetic witnessing

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[106] Rowan Williams writes, "Ultimately, all that can be said by the Christian about justice rests on the doctrine of God, not simply as the God whose truthful love is directed towards us, but as the God whose very life is 'justice,' in the sense that Father, Son and Holy Spirit reflect back to each other perfectly and fully the reality that each one is, 'give glory' to each other…" Rowan Williams *Open to Judgement* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1994), 245-246, quoted in Stanley Hauerwas, Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), p. 36.

[107] Volf, Exclusion and Embrace, pp. 224-225. I agree with Volf that reconciliation must precede justice, for this is the fabric of redemption, though I think that justice has more than one interest or concern in scripture.

[108] Orlando E. Costas, *Liberating News: A Theology of Contextual Evangelization* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 62

movement."[109] We speak of a community of believers whose very existence is a confrontation with the powers (Eph. 3:10-11). To a description of this community, the church, we now turn.

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[109] Costas, *Liberating News*, p. 63.