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The World is Our Parish: Struggling with Catholicity in Our Western Context

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**“The World is Our Parish:
Struggling with Catholicity in Our Western Context”**

**Weter Lecture
10 April 2017**

Daniel Castelo

To the administration, staff, faculty, and students of the SPU community as well as esteemed friends and guests, let me say it is my great pleasure to be the 2017 Weter lecturer. I appreciate this award very much in that it emphasizes that a place like this one, a liberal arts university, is one where unique perspectives and contributions can be generated, not simply for the church but really for the whole of academia. Professing Christian scholars have something to say, and I am very grateful for a venue like this one in which some of those things can be presented to a wider whole.

To begin, let me elaborate the title of this lecture. As some of you may have noticed, the title “The World is our Parish” is an allusion to a famous quote of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. Wesley was very quotable in his lifetime, and one of those quotes one may know of is the following claim he made, “The world is my parish.” Now, a little background to this Wesley quote. One finds it in a journal entry by Wesley dated Monday, June 11, 1739. This journal entry has a copy of a letter written to a James Hervey, and in this letter we find the quote in question. For the sake of context, this is roughly one year after Wesley’s famous “Aldersgate experience” in which his heart was strangely warmed and a few months after he began the “scandalous activity” of open-air, field preaching.

The question that Wesley was addressing through the quote is the propriety of his preaching in the context of parishes other than his own. There is a rule about this registered by the Council of Nicea and repeated within the ordinances of the Church of England; basically, the

issue is that this activity was deemed improper, a “stepping on other people’s toes” kind of gesture.¹ Nevertheless, Wesley felt bound by a “higher authority” to heed the call to preach the gospel and felt justified in doing so on “Scriptural grounds.” As he reasoned, “God in Scripture commands me, according to my power, to instruct the ignorant, reform the wicked, confirm the virtuous. Man forbids me to do this in another’s parish.” He continues, “Whom then shall I hear? God or man?” He quotes Paul from 1 Corinthians to the tune of “woe is me if I preach not the gospel.” He quotes other biblical passages and finally adds, “Suffer me now to tell you *my* principles in this matter. *I look upon all the world as my parish*; thus far I mean, that in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty, to declare unto all that are willing to hear the glad tidings of salvation. This is the work which I know God has called me to. And sure I am that his blessing attends it.”²

As you can see, Wesley’s original phrase was a manner of justifying Wesley’s ministry in the light of it being unconventional in a certain way. The appeal is made to Scripture and to divine command no less; after all, how can honoring human custom stand up to heeding God’s call?

But let us press at a deeper level here. Implicit in this Wesley quote is a particular understanding of “world.” Also implicit in this quote is a particular self-understanding by Wesley of his own agency. Put generically, the self is called to make an impact on the world. The world is standing as an open field, in this case figuratively and literally, ready to be influenced by the agency of a single self. I dare say that a similar interplay of self and world could also be at work in the second half of our own institutional motto, namely “changing the world.”

¹ For more on this, see Ted Campbell, “Negotiating Wesleyan Catholicity” in Daniel Castelo, ed., *Embodying Wesley’s Catholic Spirit* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2017).

² Journal Entry, 11 June 1739 in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 19 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 67.

Now let me say from the onset that this understanding of both the self's agency and of the world has generated a number of positive contributions. People like Wesley have throughout Christian history sacrificed immensely for the cause of Christ by stepping into unknown or unpredictable circumstances to profess the gospel. Christianity operates out of a mission-oriented ethos, one that is registered in a number of biblical passages. One of the most prominent, of course, is the end of the gospel of Matthew ("Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you"). Personally, I have benefitted from this kind of approach since my family on my father's side came to faith because of the special call felt and heeded by a woman by the name of Maria Atkinson. The Spirit used Sister Maria powerfully, and I trace part of my Christian lineage back to her. I am grateful for her obedience to the call of God on her life to in a sense look at the world as her parish.

And yet this understanding of the self and of the world is not innocuous. In fact, it can be funded by quite a bit of difficult assumptions. **The understanding needs to be chastened by the crucifying and transformative power of the gospel.** That I say this already gives way to a fundamental commitment of mine that I need to spell out from the onset. This fundamental commitment is this: When people come to Christ, when they are converted to the gospel, and also when they are commissioned by the Spirit to do the work of God, they do not start at "ground zero" in terms of culture and identity. This is what is potentially problematic about the first part of our institutional motto "engaging the culture." As it was recently noted publicly by a colleague at an in-service event, originally that part of the motto may have been used so as to show that SPU is not sectarian, and this is a very plausible thesis and makes good sense as to the phrase's early appeal. But there is a fundamental reality at work here that may go unnoticed: All

of us are already engaged by culture before we even begin to think of exercising our agency to engage it. Put more directly, culture preexists our agency; in fact, culture may determine how we see our agency and how we go on to exercise it.

These matters, I believe, ring true of the Christian life more generally: Before we exercise our agency as Christians heeding the call of Christ, we are already conditioned by our wider surroundings in very important ways. Again, take Wesley as an example. Pre-Aldersgate and post-Aldersgate, Wesley was an Englishman. And to understand Wesley well in all facets of his life, including his ministry and theology, one has to account for his English environment – his English accent, so to speak.

And this is the case for each one of us as well. Given that most of us in this room are Westerners, we have to take into account and wrestle with our Western context and culture, including its history and legacies especially as we start to think about both our agency and our understanding and engagement with the world. Why? Because, again, there are features of this environment and conditioning that need chastening by **the crucifying and transformative power of the gospel**. If left unchecked, these tendencies have the potential to put us in very troubling circumstances and maybe these will shape and form us in problematic ways. Perhaps the most troubling outcome of such a situation is the way we may be inclined to make a case for Christ in an un-Christ-like way. But another outcome, one that I wish to stress this evening, is that perhaps this conditioning and shaping make it difficult for us to understand ourselves as somehow part of the global church.

It should not be a secret anymore that Christianity is currently going through a massive growth spurt. Over the last few decades Christianity has flourished tremendously throughout the

world, especially in the continents of Africa and Asia. Some stats from Pew demonstrate as much. We Christians can praise our God for these developments, but we should also be mindful about these dynamics. To be a Christian now and even more so in the future is to be part of a global religion in which the Trans-Atlantic World, that is North America and Europe, is becoming less and less of a visible presence. In other words, most of the world's present and future Christians don't look like most of us in this room, they don't speak like most of us in this room, they don't think like most of us in this room, and quite possibly on a number of levels they may just not believe in the Christian faith like most of us in this room.

With these developments at work in the world today, how are most of us in this room then to engage and be part of these developments given our identity as Westerners? How can we make the claim that "the world is our parish" in such a way that it does two things: first, that it accounts for cultural legacies stemming from our own environment that potentially taint our way of making sense of our agency and of the world, and second, that it stresses in a fundamental way something generative about what it means to be Christ's body, the church?

As a strategy to make headway on these matters, let me elaborate and expand upon two different notions, both of them beginning with the letter "C." The first will aim to account for the cultural legacies that potentially make it difficult for us to claim properly that "the world is our parish." This first theme is "Constantinianism." The last "C" will aim to account for how we as Westerners and those of us who are Christians can be in solidarity with a global reality and a global church. This second theme I will call "Catholicity." My argument this evening is that by exposing and elaborating these two terms we can think anew about what it would mean for those of us who are Westerners and those of us who are Christians to claim "the world as our parish."

And perhaps, it may just alter how we inhabit and understand our institutional claim of “engaging the culture, changing the world.”

“Constantinianism”

So let us move to the first point, this being Constantinianism. What does it mean, and what is its legacy for us today?

Constantinianism has as its reference Emperor Constantine or Constantine the Great, who was in power within the Roman Empire during the years 306-337. There is a lot that could be said about Constantine. Much of his life and legacy are debated significantly, in part because we have competing accounts from antiquity. Questions that continue to plague scholars are: Did he convert to Christianity? If so, where and when? What kind of conversion was it? The most famous account related to these questions is the vision he and his soldiers allegedly had right before the Milvian Bridge in 312, a vision that included light, a cross, and a voice. But differing testimony exists. Other questions include, If he was a Christian, what kind of Christian was he? He certainly was ambitious, and throughout his reign he did some terrible things. And yet, by his own account, he used Christian language. When speaking to bishops he included first person plural language such as “Our Lord,” “Our God,” and so forth. He started using Christian symbols on coins and military and regal equipment. He encouraged bishops to press toward Christian unity, and he was able to articulate quite proficiently the outcomes at the Council of Nicea as these were opposed to Arianism. What we have here is a very, very complex person and legacy.³

I *do* want to draw a distinction between the man Constantine and the term Constantinianism. Given the complexity of Constantine’s life and legacy and how these are

³ For a detailed study on this score, see Peter J. Leithart, *Defending Constantine* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010).

significantly disputed, our goal tonight is not to enter into all of the details. But I also want to add here that Constantine's life and legacy are not altogether bad. When you compare what was happening to Christians under the reign of Diocletian and how they were treated under Constantine, both within the early 4th century, I think we would all prefer Constantine. Diocletian and others within the Roman Tetrarchy targeted Christians in a terrible, horrific way. Each situation had its problems, and whereas Constantine would probably be preferred to Diocletian in the eyes of most Christians, Constantine is not without his own challenges.

And some of these challenges I am trying to highlight with the word Constantinianism. Constantine for us tonight is a symbol that yields a concept we can term Constantinianism. The symbol and the concept relate to how Western political power and Christian religious power are actively brought together in a mutually supporting relationship. Now, interestingly, the roots of this process go back before Constantine. The Roman Empire, broadly, thought of itself as relying upon religious powers and symbols prior to Constantine. In fact, some say that this arrangement is what significantly led to Christian persecution by the Roman Empire prior to Constantine, for Christians would not perform the mandated sacrifices that many believed were necessary for Roman political power and order to be operative and effective.

But interestingly, with Constantine, it seems that Christianity was brought into this broader arrangement. Now, rather than Jupiter or some other god, the Christian God was brought in. The proof was in the pudding, so to speak: Constantine was quite successful militarily and politically once he made the switch of giving honor to the Christian God at around 312. Maybe that is why Constantine was so worried about Christian unity: He did not want a fractured church because this could incite the wrath of the Christian God, both upon the church *and* upon the Empire. It seems that honoring and fearing the Christian God had political ramifications for

Constantine, and that is why he is symbolic of a new relationship between the Roman Empire and the Western Christian church, a relationship that has shifted, changed, mutated, and one that is still with us today in a certain way.

As such, Constantinianism is a particular problem of Western Christianity, one that has its origins with Emperor Constantine but has evolved significantly over the centuries.

Constantine's arrangement was one thing; the Holy Roman Empire in medieval Europe was another; the German and English Reformations were another; even in our American context in which the separation of church and state is official in some sense is another such case. Each of these examples is unique and has a number of factors to account for on its own terms. And yet there is a running theme in all of these cases, which is that Western political identity and Western Christian religious identity are connected somehow, officially or unofficially. So in one arrangement, it might mean that to be a citizen and to be a Christian are conflated identities in the eyes of a region or country, whether both these identities are actively taken up by each individual in said country or not. In another arrangement, the separation of church and state can be affirmed at the same time that the state is referred to as a Christian nation, as founded on Christian principles, and as political elections are significantly determined based on identified Christian principles or stances on hot-topic issues. Constantinianism, therefore, comes in different shapes and sizes, but it is a legacy marking the Western consciousness.⁴ And if we are Westerners and if we are Christians, its legacy marks our own consciousness as well.

I should also say that Constantinianism is at the background of two other "Cs" that have manifested themselves in Western history. One of these would be the Crusades. When the Crusades began in the latter part of the 11th century, it was very clear that Constantinian

⁴ John Howard Yoder has enumerated at least five different kinds of Constantinianisms; see *The Priestly Kingdom* (reprint; Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 141-143.

frameworks were at play. The call to liberate a foreign land such as Jerusalem through the use of military violence because it was narrated as God's will, the elaboration of such activity as a pilgrimage of sorts to secure some kind of penance, the casting of death on the battlefield as a kind of martyrdom, the preparation of soldiers through the sealing of the cross – these and many more details show a significant and complex interplay between religion and culture, between spiritual and political power. The Crusades offer a devastating example at how the relationship between the self and the world can be cast when religious and cultural factors come together. In many ways the Crusades are but one indicator of just how vast and gripping Constantinianism has been in the Western consciousness.

The other “C” I have in mind that is an offshoot of Constantinianism is colonialism. Now Westerners of course did not invent colonialism, but it is quite startling to note how much of what we understand to be colonialism today is touched by Western activity. To be clear, colonialism can be understood as a kind of twisted relationship between two groups of people in which one group conquers and controls another people's territories and goods for some kind of gain. It is said that by the 1930s, close to 85% of the globe's land surface was touched by some form of colonialism, and this largely represented by Western powers such as the British, the Spanish, the Dutch, the Portuguese, and so on. Our own American context has a long history of colonialism. One significant chapter is the way First Nations and native peoples were displaced, treated, and affected as a result of Westerners settling and expanding into their territories. Another significant chapter is chattel slavery as we understand it on the American scene, which was very much driven by the colonial machine. And there are other chapters, too, including the Mexican-American War, the status of Puerto Rico, the various effects stemming from the Monroe Doctrine, and so on.

How is colonialism tied to Constantinianism? In Western history, the tie is detectable in the way religious leaders and religious authorities oftentimes sanctioned colonizing efforts and tendencies. The matters are quite complex and nuanced, but it should be said that in some cases, the violence and pillage was said to be justifiable when “the other” could be deemed as “heretical,” “barbaric,” “pagan,” “anti-Christian,” or “anti-God.” Again, when cases like these presented themselves, a Constantinian arrangement was at work. “Missionary expansion” and “colonizing efforts” were oftentimes not critically distinguished, and in cases in which political and religious authorities sanctioned violence and oppression, we have but one more manifestation of the Constantinian legacy.

If this is a rough account of what Constantinianism is, what is its legacy for us today? This is a hard topic to broach because a discussion of this kind plays into the polarization that this country emits time and time again, most recently of course with the presidential election. The Constantinian legacy that I wish to expose that has potentially its hold on us today is the subtle ways that being American and being Christian are easily conflated in the eyes of many. And there are plenty of examples for this. Matters oftentimes come up, especially when they have to do with construals of patriotism, that occasion the manifestation of Constantinianism. If you are having difficulties identifying these, how about the following: the wording of the Pledge of Allegiance, the Ten Commandments placed in courthouses, justifications for war, justifications for a particular candidate or political party or particular policy, the way the American flag is considered and displayed, our currency, the way other religions besides Christianity are talked about, and on and on and on.

These many scenarios, with real-life circumstances and cases to back them up, raises an important question: What is the difference between being an American and being a Christian? This may sound like a silly question, but let's just sit in it a bit: What is the difference between being an American and being a Christian? Plenty of forces exist to make that question difficult for some to answer, and that, I would argue, is itself a Constantinian legacy. This legacy assumes that political power and the mandate of God are intertwined. This legacy assumes that Christianity is anything but a minority in the public square. And ultimately, this legacy compromises the church's ability to be critical of the state.

Should there be differences between being an American and being a Christian? I would say absolutely! But given certain arrangements, certain factions, certain constructions of power and identity, the question itself, interestingly enough, can be unsettling and controversial. I would imagine that for those of us in this room who are not Westerners or who are not Christians, such difficulty in answering such an obvious question might simply be mind-boggling to you. But the difficulty is there for many, and at choice moments in our public lives – be it elections, be it policies, be it executive orders, or whatever else – the issue comes up.

Why am I raising this point? In large part I raise it because I don't think that we as Western Christians can truly be Christ's global body without a critical engagement of our Constantinian legacy. Constantinianism funds a kind of exceptionalism that is anti-Christian. Constantinianism blurs national identity and Christian identity in ways that strengthen the former and diminish the latter in unhelpful ways. Back to our main orienting claims, Constantinianism contributes to a conception of our agency and a conception of alterity, of self and world, that raises us up and brings others down. The Constantinian legacy does not help us deal with non-Westerners well. The Constantinian legacy does not help us deal with non-Christians well. The

Constantinian legacy does not help us deal with ourselves well. After all, given the convergence of power at work, how easily does a Constantinian legacy lend itself to the admission of limits and to the confession of sins and to the plea for forgiveness? I would say not well at all.

“Catholicity”

So what are we to do with this legacy? I would hope that the first step would be simply to acknowledge it. Sounds obvious, right? Well, frankly, not so much. I was recently reading something that caused me to reflect on my high school experience. I remember quite vividly spending time in high school reflecting on the Holocaust in my classes. We read about it, we saw *Schindler's List*, and so on. It was a troubling topic to be sure, but it also felt distant and far-off. It makes good sense to study the Holocaust. We need to know about it, of course. But here is another detail you should know. I went to high school in Tennessee, and Tennessee is the birthplace of the Ku Klux Klan, and yet never, and let me repeat, NEVER, did we ever talk about lynching and our state's and region's history with that practice in particular. And to just further add to the irony, the hip-hop group Arrested Development was popular at that time, and they came out with a hit-song in which lynching is referenced. Do you know what the title of that song is? “Tennessee.”

Unmasking or unearthing difficult topics, as obvious as they are to some, is very difficult for those closest to the situation. And I think something analogous is at work potentially with unmasking or unearthing Constantinianism.

So as an exercise to move us toward this, let us recall the title of this lecture, “The World is Our Parish” Wesley, interestingly, had quite a bit of problems with the changes that took place as signified by Constantine's reign, and yet his conception of the self and of the world in the

quote, “The World is My Parish”, which casts the self as having a kind of agency via divine mandate to reach into and shape the world, is, like I said, not innocuous. Left unchecked, such a posture could operate out of and invite Constantinian dynamics. Is there another way to think of this phrase? I think there is. Here is an alternative.

First, notice how I have changed in my title for this lecture the personal possessive pronoun at work. I shifted from “my” to “our.” That is an intentional shift so as to allow for a sense of collective identity. The world is not simply *my* parish, the world is *our* parish. I am hoping through this shift to operationalize some sense of the way the self is itself constituted and shaped by wider communal forces. Which leads me to a second point. To claim that the world is our parish can be understood in a sense to be precisely that, a kind of claiming. What I am pushing for here is **NOT** so much a self on one hand and the world on another. What I am aiming for is the sense that these, self and world, can be understood to be overlapping realities. Do you see the difference? Not self over and against the world, but the self very much mixed in the world. The self finding itself in and recognizing its home as the world.

I think it is quite important to say in a context with Constantinian legacies that “we are world.”
 “We are world.”

Now I know Christians may be hung up a little bit with the language of “world” because some, including myself in terms of how I was raised, have associated the “world” with “worldliness,” that which is opposed to the church. Sometimes this is called the “church/world” dichotomy. I am not speaking of “world” in such a way. Rather, I am speaking of “world” in the sense of our earthly, creaturely, global reality. The claim “we are world” involves a recognition

that we are conditioned before we condition, we are shaped before we shape, we come out of the passive voice before engaging in the active voice.

When we go on to add the notion of “parish,” now we have an explicitly theological dynamic to account for as well. Now, aggregated to the claim “we are world” we who are Christians can say, and “this world is our parish.” Western Christians claiming “we are world, and the world is our parish” is a pretty significant move in the sense I am trying to describe. In saying this, Western Christians are essentially confessing, “Our context in which we worship, the sense of belonging we have to a faith community has worldly dimensions, we are called to be in solidarity with a global reality, we are a global parish.” Is the phrase starting to sound different now? Same phrase, “The world is our parish,” but I am anticipating that for some of you the phrase is starting to ring in a different way. At least, I am hoping some lightbulbs are coming on for some of you. For others, hang in there. Stay with me.

It is not that we alter the world, it is that we are part of the world; it is not that we say something like “let’s change or preach to the world,” as much as say, the world is the place where we are changed and where we hear the Word preached; *it is where we start from*; it is not to say that world involves people other than us; no, in this sense, the world is us, our people; we are world. To move in ecclesial terms, it is not to say the church in Africa or the church in Asia or the church in America; the move is to say, our church, the church to which we belong. We.

What I am striving after in this back and forth recalibration of the phrase “the world is our parish” is what can be termed Catholicity. People have a number of different connotations when they hear the word “Catholic,” which is more popular than the term “Catholicity.” Oftentimes when people use the word “Catholic,” what is being referenced is a particular ecclesial formation, namely the Roman Catholic Church. That definition is not what I have in

mind with the use of “Catholicity.” A lesser available use of the word “Catholic” is at work when it is used synonymously with the word “Universal.” So, for instance, in my church when we recite the Apostles’ Creed, we say we believe in “the holy, catholic church,” and the word “catholic” has a note on the PowerPoint slide to clarify that what is meant is the word “universal.” Others may say that the term has as its reference “the one true church.” The word in its Greek roots means “according to the whole.” Therefore, these connotations are on the table for us: “universal,” “one true church,” and “according to the whole.” When we as Western Christians confess that we are part of the “catholic church,” we are making an anti-Constantinian confession.

At its most basic level, Catholicity is an enemy of Constantinianism. I wish to argue that you cannot have one without complication and tension with the other. A “Constantinian church,” as we have defined the term, cannot be a “Catholic church,” as I am working to define that term now. What I am trying to offer here is an account of catholicity that can relate to the reality where the term is used in the NT, in Acts 9:31; here we have an aside by the author after making some reports on Paul (then Saul); the verse says, “Meanwhile the church throughout [or ‘according to the whole of’] Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was built up. Living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.” Now think about the tensions in Scripture in reference to Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. Think about Nathanael’s question, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46) and remember that Nazareth is in Galilee. Or think of the conversation that Jesus had with the Samaritan woman at the well and we get another aside, this one with the words, “Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans” (John 4:9). The claim in the book of Acts, that the church

“according to the whole” of Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was built up, is in strong contrast to the rivalries hinted at in other parts of Scripture.

For Western Christians to claim “the world as our parish” in a non-Constantinian way involves, at least in part, the self-understanding that the claim is one of identification and solidarity rather than of difference or exceptionality. There is a Christological riff that can be applied and drawn out here. The Incarnation is an act of identification and solidarity that all too often is neglected by Western Christians in light of their fixation on the cross and its Constantinian domestication. But once again, Christ made this world his own. As Christians baptized into the life of Christ, we are called to make this world our own as well, not in the sense of possessing but in the sense of locating and understanding ourselves.

But here we have another dynamic of Catholicity that I wish to press, and it too can have a Christological riff, and that would be of divestment. Catholicity not only involves identification and solidarity but it also includes some sense of “giving up” or “renunciation.” To confess “the world is our parish” in the manner that I am describing here may mean that we give up or divest ourselves of any number of things. When theologians think of such a notion Christologically, they often appeal to Philippians 2 and the language of “kenosis,” which can be understood as “emptying.” The passage runs, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking on the form of a slave, being born in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross” (vv. 5-8).

Now the difficulty here is this might sound strictly as a renunciation of power, which stresses an active form of agency once more. To a Constantinian sensibility, the language of kenosis, of emptying or divestment, may sound like charity or pro bono work that we may do for

any number of reasons, including maybe even self-serving ones. But with this passage, I want to stress the interconnectivity between emptying and death. The emptying or divestment is but one feature toward death. And if we press through, as Paul does, to a kind of transformation after death.

I said earlier that we have to worry about assumptions **that are not necessarily chastened by the crucifying and transformative power of the gospel itself**. Of course, I mean more than “worry.” The subtitle of this lecture involves the language of “struggle” – “struggling with Catholicity.” The power secured by Constantinianism is not the power available with Catholicity. We are back to the great Pauline language of the “foolishness of the cross”: “the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor 1:18). If we had to generalize quite broadly, the temptation of Constantinianism that is capitulated to time and time again, the reason why it changes and alters and mutates over the centuries yet is still alive today, is because it is the temptation to secure a certain kind of power that Westerners simply cannot resist when it is presented to them.

And so, here is the sum of the matter: To be global Christians, to be able to claim “the world as our parish” in a non-Constantinian way, we have to be disposed to the possibility of being (note the passive sense) disempowered and destabilized. And this, I believe, is the only true path to transformation, to being Christ-like. It is actually a lesson I have learned more and more from Reformed and Presbyterian friends and voices in my own life (among others). The path toward transformation, the path toward being de-Constantinianized is the path of humility, the path of confession, the path of seeking forgiveness, the path of remembrance, the path of repair, the path of admitting ignorance, the path of recognizing motives AND impact, the path of

acknowledging pain, the path of listening, the path of patience, the path of longsuffering, in short, the path of the cross.

I don't care for apocalyptic prognoses of the state of Christianity in the West, even though I hinted at that myself earlier this evening. I don't think the Christian Church in the West will die, but it certainly is being pressured in varying ways, and some of these ways not altogether bad.

But my aim this evening is that when you hear a claim like "the world is our parish" or "engaging the culture, changing the world" that the modality out of which you engage such phrases is not so much a Constantinian one but a Catholic one, so that we Western Christians can truly confess and actively participate in the universal, worldly, catholic church.

Thank you.