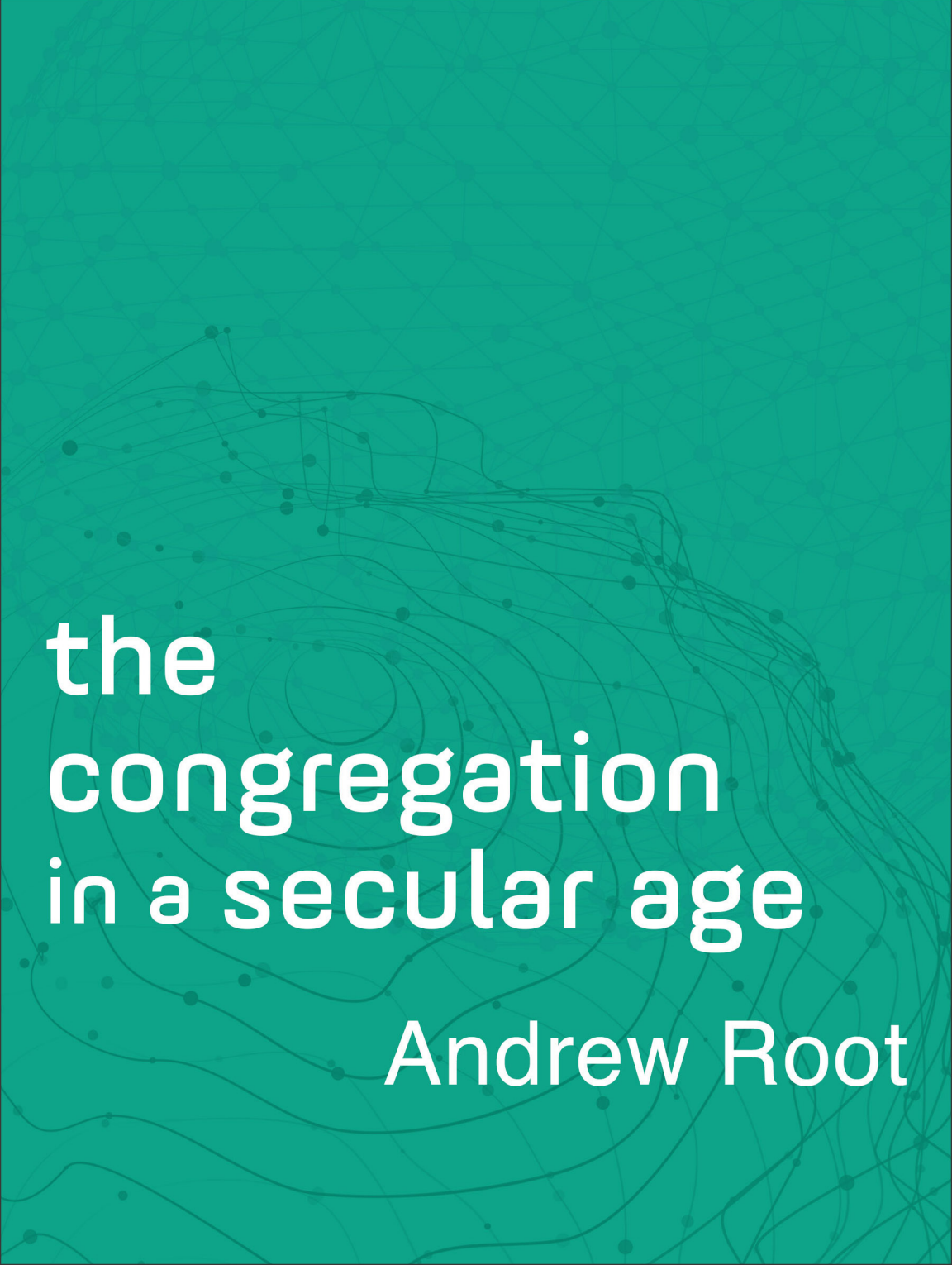


Keeping Sacred Time Against the Speed of Modern Life



the
congregation
in a secular age

Andrew Root

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Keeping Sacred Time against the Speed of Modern Life



MINISTRY IN A SECULAR AGE,
VOLUME THREE

Andrew Root



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preface

While in the middle of writing this book I had a return flight from Amsterdam to Minneapolis. I've taken this Delta flight many times. Usually, around hour six of eight it becomes painfully too long. I just want it to end. Those last two hours are the worst. When this occurs, I'm usually on movie four and my body aches and thirsts to climb out of the metal tube I'm stuck in going 600 miles an hour.

Yet this particular day I decided to do something outside my nature. I decided to pass on TV. I made the choice to format footnotes in this manuscript instead of watching *The Avengers*. As you'll notice from paging through this book, there are a lot of footnotes. Too many—I apologize for that! I'm a little bit addicted to footnotes. But that's not my point. This isn't a call for a footnote intervention. My editor has already initiated those procedures.

My point is this: for the first time, my experience of flying between Amsterdam and Minneapolis was quick. It felt nothing like eight hours. If asked to guess (and unable to see the moving flight map in front of me), I would've assumed it took us only two or three hours to get home. I would have believed it if the pilot had said over the intercom, "Folks, bad news and good news. The bad first: it appears we slid into a wormhole (we have no idea what this will do to your being long-term). But good news: it just so happens that this wormhole got us to Minneapolis in a scant two hours and forty-five minutes." It was honestly the best international flight of my life (because the wormhole was only in my imagination).

It was *best* because I experienced time in a very different way. The hours seemed to melt away. I even found myself wishing for more time, as I poured myself into this project of creative love. (Okay, I understand that footnote formatting is not the height of creativity, but needing to reread and rewrite

sections as I placed notes met some threshold of creativity for me, at least on this day, impacting my experience of time.)

Ironically or not, the question that has driven all three of these volumes revolves around time. In the preface to volume 1, I started with a story about the change in time through the adoption of the Gregorian Calendar. Each of these volumes has asked, What time are we in?

We've answered, following Charles Taylor, that our time is a secular one. But to call it secular is to say something complicated. I've tried in each of the volumes to turn Taylor's brilliant interpretation loose on particular issues confronting Protestantism—specifically, faith formation and pastoral identity. I've tried to respond to this dialogue with my own theological construction.

In this final volume I'll do the same, but now giving even more attention to time itself. The driving question in this volume will be, *What time are local congregations in?* How is our secular age impacting them? What will be unique about this volume is that I'll explore this time but focus on *time itself*. To assert that we're in a secular age is to assert that time itself has been reimagined. Like on my flight, our cultural experiences impact our feel of time. Then, in this work, I'll continue my conversation with Charles Taylor. But I'll also, as seems appropriate in this final volume, step beyond him. I'll turn to one of his best and most constructive interpreters, German social theorist Hartmut Rosa.

Rosa is no simple commentator on Taylor. He is a world-class scholar, constructively developing his own unique and rich project. Inspired by Taylor's thought and building on parts of it, Rosa has offered a stunning articulation of modernity in and through time. He believes that what it means to be living in a modern age (in modernity) is to have our lives continually and constantly accelerated. This acceleration has the effect of stripping the sacred out of time.

My argument in the pages below is that this accelerating of time has had a huge impact on the congregation. I even assert that congregations are struck with *depression* because they can't keep up with the speed. When we call them to change, we ask them to speed up, and many, as I'll show, simply can't. This leads to burnout and depression. This final volume will provide a full-blown theory of modernity in direct conversation with congregational life. This book will explore the congregation in a secular age, an age of accelerated time, wherein the sacred has been replaced by a drive to innovate and grow. Faithfulness has been replaced with a drive for vitality.

Each of the three volumes of this series has sought to be timely, confronting what I imagine are misguided conceptions of the time we're in. I continue that—very directly—in this volume. In the last handful of years many denominational leaders, consultants, and others have called the congregation

to move into processes of innovation, my own seminary making innovation central to its mission statement. I contend in the pages below that if we're not very careful, this attention to innovation will be detrimental to congregations trying to find their way in a secular age. So following Rosa, and his building off of Taylor, I'll offer a view that names the tensions and possibilities for the congregation inside a robust articulation of modernity itself.

This book seeks to be concrete, inspiring your imagination and encouraging your practical engagement in ministry. But also like the others, it seeks to provide a more cultural and then theological vision than it does direct practice. There will be ample stories and examples, but there is no bullet-point list of what your congregation can do. I only hope to give you a sense of the time we're in and how God can be imagined to act within it, that it might inspire greater and more concrete practices for your own context than I could imagine.

That said, I have written complementary books that flesh out more directly the issues I raise in volumes 1 and 2. For instance, I get much more practical (though still no bullet points) on the implications of *Faith Formation in a Secular Age* and *The Pastor in a Secular Age* in my books *Exploding Stars, Dead Dinosaurs, and Zombies: Youth Ministry in the Age of Science* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2018) and *The End of Youth Ministry? Why Parents Don't Really Care about Youth Groups and What Youth Workers Should Do about It* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020).

This book too will call for something similar. However, what might need to follow is not a more practice-based book but a direct ecclesiology in discourse with Rosa's conception of resonance. What you have in your hands is not a full ecclesiology but an important catalyst for transitioning from a cultural theological dialogue to this needed ecclesiology. So in some sense, like all good projects, this end is only the beginning of a new path to something else. Next up, more than likely, will be a full-blown ecclesiology. This is not that full-blown ecclesiology; this is a cultural and theological discussion of the congregation. My focus is not on the very complicated definition of the church but only on its expression as local congregations.

There have been many people who have supported me on the path of these three volumes. Especially I would like to thank Bob Hosack, Eric Salo, and Mason Slater at Baker Academic. I'm also thankful to Luther Seminary and its board for giving me a sabbatical the school year of 2018–19 to write this final volume. Gratitude to Wes Ellis, Jon Wasson, Blair Bertrand, Alan Padgett, Carla Dahl, and Theresa Latini for reading the whole of this manuscript, giving me very valuable feedback.

I also need to thank the Sir John Templeton Foundation and especially Paul Wason. In the final stages of volume 2, and into this volume, David Wood

and I were awarded a small grant called “Purpose, the Pastor, and Charles Taylor.” The goal of the grant was to become clearer on the challenges and possibilities that pastors and their congregations face. The grant supported a good deal of the research for this volume. Most directly, it made it possible for David and me to meet with both Charles Taylor and Hartmut Rosa. We had a wonderful conversation with Professor Taylor in a café in Montreal, and a very rich discussion with Professor Rosa in his office at the University of Jena in Germany. These conversations were invaluable. I’d like, then, also to thank David Wood for reading the manuscript and the encouragement he’s given me in its pursuits.

Finally, as always, I’d like to thank Rev. Kara Root for reading and editing this manuscript. On each line she kept me honest and made it more readable. I’m blessed to have her mind and heart in my life.

Andrew Root
In Ordinary Time
May 31, 2019



PART 1

depressed congregations

1

the church and the depressing speed of change

In a restaurant in North Dakota, I found myself sitting across from a pastor I had met just hours earlier.

“I don’t know how to explain it,” he said to me. “It’s something more than apathy. It’s not that they don’t care. It’s just that my church, maybe the whole denomination, seems depressed. I know that sounds weird, but that’s how it feels. I’ve battled depression myself for years. I know it from the inside. This feels like church-wide depression. Like we’re stuck in mud or trapped under water, and we just don’t have the energy to face it.”

“Face what?” I asked.

“Anything at all,” he returned quickly. Sighing deeply, he said, “Maybe even the energy to be the church at all.”

This was too big of a statement for me to process. I tried to step back. “What’s the depression over?”

“That’s the thing,” he continued. “It’s like depression usually does: it doesn’t have a clear cause. You don’t know why, but you just can’t find the get-up. The world feels silent and bland. And you don’t know why. There may be something that triggers it, but it’s just a current pulling you to the bottom, making you too tired to fight to get to the surface.”

I’m in his North Dakota town to speak to a large gathering of young Methodist people. I arrived one day early to meet with some local pastors. His church hosted the conversation. He met me at the door, taking me on

a tour of his church building. By any measure, it's beautiful, wearing every mark of vibrancy.

We started in the brand-new wing, opened just months earlier. After peeking into the shiny youth room, we moved across the hall to a warm fireside room with leather couches and a decked-out kitchenette. Then we moved to the gym, lit by the late-October sunshine spilling in from a dozen large windows.

The gym echoed with the laughter of about two dozen four-year-olds. They were slowly placing a large parachute on the ground, finishing their game. As the parachute gently hit the floor, they all rushed past us, beelining for the wall behind us, searching for water bottles covered in cartoon characters to quench their little thirsts. Running past us, as though we were invisible, a little girl said, as much to the universe as to anyone, "Now that was *great!*" We laughed with delight. We stood there a few seconds in silence just absorbing the joy and energy of all the little ones before moving on with our tour.

We passed more classrooms filled with more three and four-year-olds. I was told that the congregation ran the largest preschool in town. The walls of the spacious narthex were filled with posters and information sheets of trips, programs, and outings. We looked through the window into the enormous sanctuary. The pastor told me that their worship attendance was about five hundred a week. At the end of the tour, moving toward the pastor's office, we passed through a narrow hallway filled with office doors. I read the name plaques on the doors: Associate Pastor, Director of Children's Ministry, Youth Director, Minister of Music, and even another Associate Pastor.

Hours later, sitting across from this pastor over lunch, I'm shocked that he would describe this seemingly vibrant church as depressed. There was no deferred maintenance, no budget shortage, no lack of young families or staff. And yet he used the word "depressed."

Here at Cowboy Cal's Steakhouse in North Dakota, there was no mistaking it for Manhattan or any coastal city. The bright orange vests on half the customers and the talk of pheasant hunts signaled quickly that this was flyover country, far from the coasts, in a place red enough to burn, where guns and civic religion are both loved.

Yet this North Dakota congregation, insulated from the supposed liberal ethos that undercuts the civic importance of religion, was as depressed as any declining city church in Philadelphia, according to its pastor.

"But you worship with five hundred people a week?" I said, a little incredulous.

"True, but three years ago, when we started the capital campaign for that new addition, it was over six hundred. We're still raising the last 10 percent of that project."

We paused as our sandwiches arrived.

“But that’s not really the issue,” he continued. “For the most part, people still show up on Sunday morning. But to get them to care or invest in anything else is impossible. We’ve tried everything.”

“Prozac?” I responded, reminding myself to keep my sarcastic sense of humor in check. Luckily he laughed.

“Wow, that would be perfect: congregational Prozac!” he said. “I wonder if they could drip it into our coffeemakers.”

I was now sure we could be good friends.

“I only laugh to keep from crying,” he continued. “Personally, Prozac probably saved my life. But I’ve tried the equivalent of congregational Prozac. I’ve tested all sorts of meds on this church. We’ve done the small group discipleship thing, the family thing, the church movement thing—we started a new church across town that we can no longer fund—and even the missional thing. As the political climate changed I even did the prophetic justice thing. I felt like I had to, my conscience called for it. That wasn’t easy in this community. But I couldn’t keep up. I’m not even sure what I was trying to keep up with, but I couldn’t. People in my church feel it too. We talk about falling behind, about needing change—it’s all we discuss at our regional meetings—but no one seems to know what that change needs to be. And worse, I’m convinced no one has the energy. To be honest, I’m not sure if the lack of knowing what to do creates the depression or if the depression creates the inability to do anything.”

He was on a roll now.

“I mean, these should be exciting times. Everyone knows we need change. But instead of creating energy, it creates depression.”

The silence that now fell between the two of us felt much different than it did in the church gym among the joy of the children. That silence in the gym was full and open. This one was dull and confusing.

“All of those approaches were helpful. But in the end we’d just slide back into this depressive state, this inability to be any more than a church that shows up on Sunday morning. This congregation is essentially a country club, and I can’t break that mentality. I don’t think it’s because these are bad or selfish people. They’re lovely. As a church, we’re just depressed.”

Depression’s Backstory

Parisian sociologist Alain Ehrenberg made a provocative argument in his late 1990s book *La fatigue d’être soi: Dépression et société*, which was mostly unknown in the English-speaking world until it was translated and published

in 2016 under the title *The Weariness of the Self: Diagnosing the History of Depression in the Contemporary Age*. In this book, the sociologist argues that depression is an ailment of speed, the feeling of not being able to keep up.

Like Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*, Ehrenberg's project is a genealogy. As we've seen in the first two volumes of this Ministry in a Secular Age series, Taylor's genealogy traces modernity's movement into unbelief. Exploring our cultural history, Taylor shows how it was possible for us to produce a world in which God is assumed to be absent, unbelief is easy, and the transcendent song of existence is deafeningly quiet. Taylor shows us the genes that produce this kind of world.

Ehrenberg is also interested in tracing our cultural history. Particularly, he's interested in how modernity's unfolding has produced distinct forms of mental illness. Ehrenberg wants to show us how these distinct forms tell us something important about modernity itself. Mental illness isn't an oddity in the project of modernity, something completely disconnected and periphery to its pursuits. Mental ailments and the way we diagnose and treat them unveil something central about the pursuits of modernity itself. Mental ailments are the canary in the mineshaft of modernity.

The story Ehrenberg traces is how each of the three stages of modernity—early (broadly the eighteenth century), high (nineteenth century into the first half of the twentieth), and late (the second half of the twentieth century)—has produced its own ailments. We've shifted from madness to hysteria to despondency. In early modernity, our pursuits for reason led to a radical redefinition of the odd. The socially esoteric, those shouting warnings and living under bridges, were no longer demoniacs or secret sages, or even angels or Jesus himself, whom we owe alms. In the medieval era (premodern, pre-1500s), such people had a place in the economy of salvation and the pursuit of virtue. But not in modernity. Rather, the blessed poor were now mad, overtaken by madness, unable to keep pace with reason.

In high modernity this shifted. The mad could still be spotted, but now the hysterical revealed something important about modernity. The need for the duties of politeness, manners, and all things proper was heavy. Even the death of a child, for the elite class, shouldn't upend your proper appearances. The proper was now tied to a speed engine, a modern economy. The need to order a happy private life so one could compete in a public arena of commerce was essential. Trying to hold everything together amid the pain of loss cracked many, leading to episodes of hysteria, frantic crying, screaming, or trancelike muttering. The hysterical person needed direct treatment because that person's breakdown spilled from the private space into the public. The treatment for such bouts was hospitalization—being placed in a private, enclosed institution

away from the rush of public life. The hysterical needed to go away, even away from the private home, to get well. Whether madness or hysteria, it was now assumed to be a sickness. The hope was that you could treat hysteria like you could a broken leg.¹

Psychology as we know it—particularly its Freudian or post-Freudian veins—has its origin in the diagnoses and treatments of mainly “hysterical” women. The nineteenth century, with its sexist disposition, seemed to do something to the human psyche, causing especially women to go into fits of hysteria. In hospitals in Paris, mostly women were admitted for being hysterical. Young Freud, in Paris training to be a doctor, was assigned these patients as part of his rounds. He discovered, to state it simply, that it was often the hidden obsessions that afflicted the hysterical. These obsessions weighed them down, producing a psychosis that kept them from reaching the speed of normal modern life, being able to marry and work, being a proper wife and keeper of the private space. Psychoanalysis had both its birth and its heyday in dealing with how the conditions of high modernity created hysteria. Psychiatry, on the other hand, would have its golden era in our late-modern times.

The Fatigue to Be Me

The pressure that produced hysteria gave way to something else in late modernity. Ehrenberg shows convincingly that while there were antecedents, such as melancholy (something Luther battled), it wasn't until the 1970s that hysteria was replaced by the late-modern mental ailment of depression. In high modernity the anxiety produced by the modern world could crack you, leading to bouts of hysterical crying and screaming. Sometimes it looked like madness. But in late modernity the issue became despondency, a feeling that you just couldn't find the energy to keep pace.

The title of Ehrenberg's book, *La fatigue d'être soi*, translates as “the fatigue of being yourself.” Depression in late modernity is a fatigue with no direct outward cause. It is the feeling, born within yourself, that you just don't have the energy to be yourself. If it gets too heavy, you can become too fatigued to *be* at all. Suicide is no longer an act solely done under the shadow of lost societal esteem. For example, a person's bold action loses people's hard-earned fortunes in a crashing stock market. The failure of this bold action leads to another bold act, convincing that person to leap from a bridge

1. This transition plays its own part in bringing forth the immanent frame (a world presumed to be totally and completely natural as opposed to supernatural). Taylor discusses this transition from sin to sickness in *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007), 618–20.

in the shame of failure. Bold action causes a bold act. In late modernity, what pushes someone into suicidal ideation has largely shifted. Most often it's not the feeling of a failed bold action but rather a sense that none of your actions matter at all, that any action you take is meaningless. It's not about paying for a bold action with a bold action but about a wish to disappear, to end the painful fatigue of feeling the burden, not necessarily the burden of your decision as much as the burden of being your self.²

Psychiatric therapies outstrip psychoanalytic ones in late modernity because often depression has no real narrative source. That's what's so scary about it. It feels like there is no reason for it coming. It arrives like a dark cloud that, painfully, won't lift. For instance, depressed people can have bad childhoods or not, experience abuse or not, feel unaccepted or not, feel guilty for masturbating or not. Depressed churches can have big budgets or not, be in the suburbs or not, have a full-time paid children's minister or not.³

Depression is so haunting because, for some, you can have everything you want, seemingly possessing all the sources to be a happy self, and yet you're sad. But not so much a hysterical sad, crying until daybreak—that would be a relief, those tears at least acknowledging that you feel something. What's worse is just feeling nothing, unable to garner the energy to feel even hysterical. Without analyzable narrative sources, it becomes much easier—even logically presumed—to make it a chemical issue, making pills the best treatment for it. Enter the world of Prozac, which Ehrenberg richly delves into.⁴

But it isn't as though depression completely has no source. Rather, Ehrenberg argues that its source is late modernity's demand to create and continue to curate your own self. This task is taxing and deeply fatiguing. The speed of late modernity, its frantic pace of life imposed on us by the blitzing social and technological change since the 1970s, makes life a raging river. In this raging river you need to not only create your own identity but also reach out into the world to receive recognition for that identity, swimming like hell to keep up in the breakneck currents.⁵ It is your individual job in a constantly mov-

2. Pankaj Mishra discusses something similar in *Age of Anger: A History of the Present* (New York: Picador, 2017), 27–30.

3. Peter L. Steinke uses the concept of depressed congregations in his introduction to *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach*, 2nd ed. (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2006).

4. This is different from Luther's conception of his own melancholy. For Luther, this internal despondency wasn't a sickness or chemical imbalance that a pill could correct but the tempting and haunting of the demonic. See Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), chap. 2.

5. Charles Taylor calls this "the politics of recognition." See Taylor, *Multiculturalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25–75.

ing environment to be a self in the always-increasing pace of late modernity. And you need to be not just some generic, bland self but a happy, successful, recognized self who's not spitting out water but riding the rapids, maybe even with style. Needing to swim yourself to the crest of the current means that the self in late modernity can never rest. To be this kind of self requires constant navigating. This self constantly rushes to keep up.

Ehrenberg believes depression is not necessarily a response to some objective disappointment outside of you but a response to the fatigue of failing to keep up, to over and over and over again create and curate a distinct self.⁶ It is *la fatigue d'être soi*: depression is the fatigue of being yourself.⁷ When this fatigue becomes too much, when we can't find the energy to keep going into the water, creating and curating our self, we feel stuck. We feel sucked back by the current, passed over (a potent nightmare in our late-modern secular age). Everything else is moving so fast, changing and adapting every minute, and we just don't have it in us. Perhaps we even feel something overtaking us that just won't allow us to ever catch up. "I just can't be the parent, employee, spouse, friend I should be. I should try harder, but I just don't have the energy." I have every invitation to change and change again and then change more. But I don't have the energy to meet this demand. If I had the energy, the openness of identity construction would be exciting. But without it, the choice and openness is depressing. According to Ehrenberg, this is the source of my depression.⁸

When Authenticity Leads to Performance

In volume 1 (*Faith Formation in a Secular Age*) we traced the history of the age of authenticity. Charles Taylor told us that the pursuit of authenticity as a high good, as an essential piece—even the foundation—of a good life, was

6. Ehrenberg explains, "Depression presents itself as an illness of responsibility in which the dominant feeling is that of failure. The depressed individual is unable to measure up; he is tired of having to become himself. . . . If neurosis is the tragedy of guilt, depression is the tragedy of inadequacy. It is the familiar shadow of a person without a guide, tired of going forward to achieve the self and tempted to sustain himself through products and behaviours." *The Weariness of the Self: Diagnosing the History of Depression in the Contemporary Age* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016), 4, 11.

7. Christopher Bollas, in *Meaning and Melancholia: Life in the Age of Bewilderment* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 59–61, discusses how depression and speed are connected.

8. This form of depressive despondency is also connected to the rise of anxiety. Anxiety is a legitimate response to the need to speed up one's identity curating. Hartmut Rosa discusses this in *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World* (Medford, MA: Polity, 2019), chap. 4, sec. 1.

only a minority report back in early and high modernity.⁹ It was only small enclaves in Paris, Berlin, London, and New York that sought to be authentic. For most, duty was king. Duty delivered a good life. Duty as a high good—for instance, being proper and put together, always in control in public and orderly in private—made hysteria the core mental ailment of high modernity. To connect Taylor with Ehrenberg, what modernity considers to be a mental ailment is always connected to its ethic, to its assertion of what is good. In high modernity, the weight of duty was disproportionately shared, often leaving women with fewer release valves for the pressure, making them more susceptible to hysteria. When duty's weight acutely pressed in on the psyche, women had few places to go for release.¹⁰

The age of authenticity ended the strict days of duty by shifting the imagination of what makes a life good. For a handful of reasons, duty was perceived as oppressive, in no small part because its burdens were not mutually shared by all. Women bore much more of the weight, or at least were restricted from blowing off the steam that would keep hysteria from rearing its head.¹¹

A new ethic was needed to usher in a new age. The age of authenticity dawned through a new ethic and a new sense of what made for a good life (and what is good).¹² This is the ethic of authenticity that Taylor has famously and lucidly described.¹³ This ethic asserts that every human being

9. Taylor does not use the terms “early modernity” and “high modernity.” He does use “late modernity” often. However, I’m imposing these categories on him as a way of leaning back into critical theory. In earlier books like *The Promise of Despair* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2010), I entered directly into critical and social theory, particularly in conversation with mainly sociologists such as Anthony Giddens, Zygmunt Bauman, Ulrich Beck, and others. I’ve since turned more directly to philosophy, particularly the cultural philosophies of Taylor and others. This project signals a return to social theory, but now in full conversation with a cultural philosophy. The work of Hartmut Rosa serves as a link for these two fields of conversation. Rosa is a sociologist but wrote his dissertation on Taylor. Following Rosa, I’m bringing the early and high modernity language to my reading of Taylor.

10. Men had forms of sexual expression and adventure—like in war, gambling, etc.—to release the pressure of duty, even spaces like the golf course, casinos, bars, etc. These were often perceived as no place for women.

11. A tracing of feminism is beyond my abilities, but it clearly has its moment here. The women’s movement sought liberation from the 1950s suburbs and the cage of private/proper life that seemed to be strangling women. Some wanted access to opportunities, seeking a good life outside the orbit of babies and picket fences. Others, particularly the young, wanted freedom from social mores, wanting the right to blow off steam like men could.

12. Taylor’s point, which I affirm and explore more fully in *The End of Youth Ministry?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), is that all human action is based in some sense of the good life. People are moved by the good, even ranking goods. See Taylor’s discussion of hypergood in *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 10–40.

13. See Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

has the right to define for *himself* or *herself* what it means for him or her to be human.

The conforming pressure of duty was now completely upended, conformity itself now the enemy. The rampant rash of hysteria cases subsided. High modernity was over; its ethic of duty, which created the conditions for hysteria, was finished. The age of authenticity gives freedom but only in the logic of late modernity itself—only within acceleration. Duty is discarded in major part because it's too slow. For a few years—like maybe one—we could live in the warm glow of the Age of Aquarius, in the utopia of free love. But, again connecting Taylor and Ehrenberg, by the 1970s, even this new ethic of authenticity, this newly sought good, had created its own mental ailment.

Depression is the shadow side of authenticity. The ethic of authenticity frees you to be whomever you want to be. We should embrace, even celebrate, this, but not without recognizing its shadow side. In the field cleared by authenticity, there stands only you. This is exciting but daunting. All other sources that in earlier times, for good or ill, imposed on you and shaped your identity were over. Now you, and supposedly you alone, get to create and freely articulate your own self.

In the West, the sources of religion, family, clan, and even country could no longer tell you who you are. You decide. But once you decide, to truly have chosen, you can't just sit on your hands, resting quietly in the glow of your chosen identity. That's not how this "freedom" works. This "freedom" calls for constant motion. And this need for constant motion, amped by the new ethic of authenticity, opens the door wide to despondency as the new mental ailment, broadly speaking.

The necessity to perform your identity is plagued with unease. Inside this freely chosen identity, you implicitly or explicitly know that you could be performing another identity. With a quick but intense stab of nausea, you wonder if your performance is the right one. Is this really you? Are you really being authentic?

The only way to know for sure is to perform it, not to correlate it with other sources—like a sacred text or family tradition. Through this performance, you're trying to accomplish what all performances seek: recognition. There are no outside sources for your identity, only your choice. Nevertheless, because this is a performance, you need an audience. You have no identity without some kind of audience to recognize the identity you're performing. Of course, this performance has to feel right to you (it must not violate the ethic of authenticity), but you can only really feel it as you perform it, and you can only really perform it in front of others who recognize it.

As high modernity gives way to late modernity, the high-modern ethic of duty cannot contain the new acceleration of technology, social change, and the pace of life. The speed increase from high to late modernity throws off duty like a loosely worn baseball cap on a roller coaster. You're now free to have whatever identity you wish, but you can't sit idly on it, because that's not how late modernity and its ethic of authenticity work. To have this "free" identity, you must correlate, not with a tradition or sacred text, but with speed itself, by embracing the logic of acceleration. The vehicle for identity to meet the speed of late modernity is performance. You're free to have whatever identity feels most authentic to you, but to really possess that identity, you must meet the speed of modernity, not be free of it. Not coincidentally, those who seem the most authentic are those moving fastest, those with the most Instagram followers, those who most directly perform their identities to win recognition.

In this cleared field of self-chosen identity, wherein you no longer need to measure up to family, religion, clan, or country, you nevertheless must perform, again and again, your "freely" chosen identity. The more you perform it, the better you perform it, the more authentic you appear. You quickly discover (maybe seventh or eighth grade, if not earlier) that you only truly have this identity *as* you perform it. You can be, for the most part, whomever you wish, but you only really have this identity if others recognize and respond to it. Therefore, to secure this identity you must shape this identity for speed. You must perform it in such a way that it can be broadcast.

The pull to perform your identity never ceases, even if you're confident that this is indeed your right identity. You're always aware in this cleared field of authenticity that you could be performing this identity better. You're exposed to so many exemplars on Instagram who seem to be performing their chosen identities better than you are, with so much more authenticity. They're in better shape, reading better books, watching better movies, and better understanding current events. The fatigue to be yourself is real.

Back to Depressed Churches¹⁴

As I drove the streets of that North Dakota town, passing strip malls and pickup trucks, I couldn't shake my lunchtime conversation with that pastor.

14. This pastor, as well as a number of other characters, will show up throughout the rest of the book. The reasons for this are both stylistic and substantive to the argument. In volumes 1 and 2, I embedded my argument in narrative. For instance, in volume 2, I shared stories of paradigmatic pastors through the ages. Following both Taylor's narrative focus and my commitments to personalism, I have made story central here. These stories are not historical, as they were in volume 2, but experiential. I've reworked them, but these are encounters I've had

Was Ehrenberg's genealogy applicable to the church? Had the church, more broadly, moved from madness to hysteria to despondency? At the dawn of modernity, Luther contended that the church and its pope had gone mad. For the next 450 years after the Reformation, episodes of hysteria seemed to spring up over and over again, right in the middle of Protestantism's production of order, manners, and politeness. Societies built on the Protestant legacy of mutual regard and peace nevertheless produced fierce and ugly divides in churches and denominations. But now, at least in Protestantism, it appears the church has shifted into despondency.

Heretic hunters and church splits can still be found. But it appears that local congregations like this one in North Dakota are mostly depressed. They're lacking energy right when it's needed, unable to garner vigor when the opportunity for change is most ripe.

Without the help of Ehrenberg, I might have thought this was just bad timing. Right when congregations need to change, many are too depressed to grasp firmly with both hands their destiny. What a shame! It's like finding yourself with a terrible flu on the very day you hold front-row tickets to see your favorite band. It's so disappointing, such a lost opportunity, but the concert's arrival and the ailment are unrelated. Therefore, you can only chalk it up to bad luck, or blame yourself for not taking better care of yourself. But you would never think to blame the concert for the flu.

Yet this is exactly Ehrenberg's point. The conditions for change are what push us into depression. Depression is *la fatigue d'être soi*; it's the fatigue to be yourself. It's the openness, the broad horizon stretched before us, that demands we create and curate our own self, which then boomerangs on us. Depression breeds within the freedom to change and then change again and again, but this freedom never delivers on the promise that this change will produce the good life we seek and the meaning we need. Depression is us facing this horizon and realizing that we don't have the energy or time to reach it. It's the need for change itself, the openness to be and do anything (which is supposed to be exciting), that turns on the congregation, giving us *la fatigue d'être eglise*, the fatigue of being the church. This is exactly what this pastor told me over sandwiches.

The Great Change Challenge

Being too fatigued to be the church is a challenge. Its most popular solution is change. Perhaps change is needed, but the pursuit of change, the need to

with concrete persons engaging congregations. Stylistically, I hope these stories illustrate for the reader how these ideas connect with real life.

recast an identity, runs the ever-present risk of producing depression. If we fail to keep up, finding ourselves falling behind, depression will meet us. This fashions in us the very opposite disposition than what is needed to meet the challenges brought by changes in our culture.

For church consultants and denominational leaders to call congregations to change is to risk something significant. It opens them to communal depression, producing the opposite of what they need to meet their challenge: despondency. Church consultants risk moving the congregation into a vicious cycle that is too often misunderstood as a straight line. The consultant is often called in when a congregation either has fallen behind or is too obdurate to meet the challenges of a changing world. The consultant leads the congregation in a process of speeding up, offering new models to speed them up to meet change. And then leaves, moving on to another congregation needing change. That feels like a straight line.

Point A: the church is stuck

Point B: give it the strategies to get unstuck

Point C: so that it can meet the speed of change

Point D: move on (and return periodically to tweak the strategies, asking the congregation to speed up further, then move on again)

But once the congregation is up to speed, it needs to forever maintain that speed, but also continually increase the speed year after year.

Modernity is the constant process of speeding things up. Modernity demands that things increase speed. If we're not careful, to diagnose the church's issue as the need for change is to cover it in the core commitments of late modernity itself. If the consultant raises the church to a new speed, this yokes the congregation to always be speeding up to meet the never-ending change that will *always* remain on the horizon, a carrot forever out of reach. Speed is the supposed gift of late modernity that can quickly turn into a depressive curse.

Change is almost always considered to be some kind of growth, and in late modernity that which grows must continually grow. Modernity is about change because it is about growth. It takes a lot of work, and a whole different imagination, to disconnect change from growth. Untying the two leads to something completely different: transformation in the Spirit. Being the church is about *transformation*, not *change*. Though on first blush these seem synonymous, transformation and change are quite different.

Transformation, in the Christian tradition, comes from outside the self, relating to the self with an energy beyond the self. Because transformation

comes from an energy outside the self, it invites the self into the new as a gift, as grace. It demands no increase for continuation, no energy investment to receive it. Transformation is the invitation into grace; it comes with an arriving word, “Peace be with you” (John 20:19). Transformation is not the necessity to speed up but the need to open up and receive. Change, on the other hand, comes from within the self. Change makes the self into something new, using the power and the effort of the self: it is produced by the energy of the self.

Transformation and change have significantly different relationships to time. Change seeks to catch up to and possess time. Transformation is an experience of encountering the fullness of time. It is to feel a resonance, not speeding up to change but remaining open to transcendence. Transformation feels something like the full moment of the four-year-old saying to no one in particular, but instead as a proclamation of her existence, “That was *great!*” That felt full, it was good, I felt connected and moved, and yet at rest. She wasn’t racing to catch up to change but instead fully relating to the world as a gift.

When we push for change, if we’re not careful, we impose modernity’s pursuit of growth, which risks congregational depression by thrusting it into a vicious cycle we don’t often recognize. The vicious cycle is endemic to modernity itself. Modernity, at its core, asserts that all pursuits must be primed, mathematically speaking. The equation is always something like $M + C = M^2$, money plus commodity equals money prime, meaning money increased. You don’t invest money to lose it; the point is to get more. This is how late modernity is structured. The same equation works with the modern research university, where knowledge plus research equals knowledge grown ($K + R = K^2$).¹⁵ The point of learning, in late modernity, is not to encounter a mysterious world unveiled by that learning. Rather, the point is to prime knowledge. It’s to create more and therefore to advance. Those who publish fastest win.

If modernity were a computer, the code driving the system would be the algorithm $X + Y = X^2$. Everything must be primed, and as quickly as possible so that it can be primed again (it’s little coincidence that Amazon Prime has mastered the market by mastering speed). Our models of exemplary congregations fit the equation. They are exemplars because we see them through the lens of late modernity. They are the few congregations that have mastered prime. Megachurches like Saddleback, Eagle Brook, and North Point function

15. I’m taking this equation and therefore the overall point from Rosa, “Two Versions of the Good Life and Two Forms of Fear: Dynamic Stabilization and the Resonance Conception of the Good Life,” paper presented at the Yale Center for Faith and Culture conference on Joy, Security, and Fear, New Haven, CT, November 8–9, 2017.

with an equation of $M + P = M^2$, members plus programs equals members prime. Here's an example quote from one church consultant: "The leadership summit answers two questions. . . . *Were we successful last year? What will it take to be more successful next year?*"¹⁶ If, like Apple or Amazon, you can return back again through the equation, you can prime your objective again and again. But every time you prime—to be able to prime at all—you must speed up the enterprise, find a way not to become friends of time but to possess and master time.¹⁷ Tim Suttle shares the story of a megachurch that raised \$5 million to fund a new overpass to the freeway so that the departure time from their large parking lot could be cut to less than twenty minutes.¹⁸ They knew that in order to prime the M (members), they would need to control the time. The faster you prime, and prime again, the faster you win, increase, and grow.

Modernity promises that if you can get to the speed of change, you'll find purpose and significance. But this purpose and significance won't deliver the goods of contentment, peace, or rest; instead, they only open new horizons inviting more change upon the change you've just met. Speeding up to meet change, late modernity pushes us inevitably to reach for another gear, to speed up further. Speeding up to meet change after new change only promises to create the necessity for more change. This *may be* good for corporations, like Apple and Amazon, competing in markets and seeking new products. But it's much less so for persons seeking a good life, and communities of faith seeking the communion of the Holy Spirit through the crucified Christ felt as the *shalom* of God the Father.

Even if the congregation follows the consultant's advice and reaches for a new missional, parish-based, or movement strategy that spurs them toward change, pushing them to a new speed, a new unavoidable demand to increase

16. Thomas G. Bandy, *Strategic Thinking: How to Sustain Effective Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2017), 103.

17. "Becoming friends of time" is to quote the title of John Swinton's award-winning book *Becoming Friends of Time: Disability, Timefulness, and Gentle Discipleship* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017). Swinton's work is a stunning example of the difference between transformation and change, and how being ministered to by and ministering with those with disabilities can free us from modernity's traps. It is no coincidence that when Henri Nouwen joined L'Arche, he did so because he was depressed and exhausted from the speed of academic life. In being ministered to by disabled people, Nouwen found not so much a slowdown as a resonance, a gift of transformation, and therefore a new relationship to time, experiencing it as full. The world now moved at the speed of a conversation—it spoke to Nouwen, beautifully and paradoxically through a man unable to speak at all. See Henri Nouwen, *Adam: God's Beloved* (New York: Orbis Books, 2012).

18. Suttle, *Shrink: Faithful Ministry in a Church-Growth Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 59.

that speed is thrust upon the congregation.¹⁹ The excitement of reaching a speed that allows for change quickly reveals that exponential amounts of energy will be required in order to keep going. It is more than daunting to realize that change requires change requires change. Ehrenberg says poignantly, “Depression appeared not as a pathology of unhappiness but more as a pathology of change.”²⁰

Revvng the engine to get up to speed to meet every new change over every new horizon produces the fumes of depression. These fumes gather as you realize that the tanks are too low to continue at this speed (let alone to meet the demand necessitated by speeding up further). Or, instead of a slow gathering of fumes, depression arrives like a brick wall: speeding faster and faster, you derail and crash.

It’s no coincidence that the founders of megachurches, the ultimate example of a congregation and its leader who meet the ever-increasing speed of change, are so susceptible to affairs, money laundering, and all sorts of other brick-wall crashes that precede (or are produced by) their depression. The indiscretion is the only way out. Burnout is a depression imposed by the inability to keep pace.²¹

To show how this is happening to American congregations, we’ll need to examine modernity at a large scale. Congregations are never hermetically sealed; the people in them are affected by many relationships and institutions. Their sense of the good is shaped by the culture, and so too the congregation’s sense. As we proceed, I will keep stepping back to look at the larger culture (and how it shapes our individual and corporate sense of the self). This stepping back will help us grasp the great challenge congregations face and the specific situation in which congregations now find themselves. In the chapters that follow, we’ll look at broad cultural realities, zooming out from the congregation. Then we’ll zoom in and look specifically at the church and how speed sickness is infecting congregations today.

19. Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird push hard for pastors to accelerate by growing not just a church but a whole movement of churches. This is acceleration on steroids. Of course, the authors’ drive for multiplication is taken from a certain reading of the Great Commission, but it doesn’t account for the fact that Jesus wasn’t speaking in modernity. “[The apostolic leader is] an initiator who plants churches that in turn plant more churches. . . . The person with apostolic gifting doesn’t just want to plant an individual church and be its pastor. That person wants to plant a movement.” *Viral Churches: Helping Church Planters Become Movement Makers* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 18. At the end of the book, they state boldly, “This book can be summarized in two words: multiply everything” (201).

20. Ehrenberg, *Weariness of the Self*, 12.

21. “Burnout—the word implies that our energy is gone. We cannot summon the energy to do what needs to be done.” William Willimon, *Clergy and Laity Burnout* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 21.

I've personally seen speed sickness at my seminary. We had gone through a financial crisis in 2012. We entered a faculty meeting believing everything was green lights and growth. Twenty-five minutes later we learned that we were actually millions of dollars in the hole. Every meeting after that was worse, the negative millions increasing. Soon administrators were let go as faculty, staff, and students watched, shell-shocked. Over the next few months, more than a little hysteria could be spotted in all sorts of odd behavior. But after a while, something else set in, particularly among the faculty: depression.

The seminary we had known was gone, and many of us grieved its passing. But what moved us as a whole into depression was the lack of energy to envision something new. The board and new administration looked to the faculty, telling us that we needed to create the seminary's new identity, to forge our new way of being. But the thought of creating a new identity through new actions in this fast-paced environment, with everything else also shifting at a faster pace (denominational structures, financial models, prospective students' desires, donor commitments, and more), caused us to shut down.

When the crisis hit, the administration and board told us to get to work, speed up, reach a new pace, grow, advance. We were told that embracing this change with speed could be the best thing for us. But not having the energy to get to speed instead produced a depression that lasted for years, and in some sense is still with us.

We didn't want to shut down. No one wants, or even chooses, to be depressed. No one desires to do nothing. But we stopped fighting, our ailment coming out less and less as hysteria or madness. The thought of the task of change itself, and the experience that our actions couldn't promise change anyhow, produced despondency. We didn't know what to do, but worse (what really produced the depression) was that we didn't know *who to be*. We suffered *la fatigue d'être séminaire*, the fatigue of being a seminary.

But, honestly, who could be fatigued if they had \$1.6 billion?!