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—Mary Doak, University of San Diego

Church as Field Hospital

Toward an Ecclesiology of Sanctuary

Erin Brigham



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Introduction

Context

Are we not a sanctuary city?" a woman shouted into a microphone, evoking enthusiastic applause from the crowd of nearly three hundred people. Colorful banners and signs brought from congregations around the city adorned the walls of the parish hall of this Catholic church in San Francisco's Mission District. A group of pastors, priests, and rabbis in religious attire stood shoulder to shoulder as residents of the majority-Latinx neighborhood told their stories to city officials and demanded that they live up to the city's sanctuary commitment. Individual stories reinforced a common narrative—San Francisco is their home, and they are being pushed out because of the soaring cost of living. Although sanctuary was evoked, it was not primarily about the nation's exclusionary immigration policies—it was about housing and economic inequality. The speaker, a Latina in her sixties, talked about raising a family in San Francisco and the struggles she has experienced as her neighborhood has undergone rapid change in the past decade.

Faith in Action, a faith-based community organizing network, called the rally to push city officials to create more affordable housing. The recent construction of Casa Adelante, with 100 percent of the building's ninety units dedicated to affordable housing for seniors, seemed like a win for housing advocates. However, the rent was calculated by the income of residents in an area marked by rapid gentrification, amounting to over \$3000 a month. UC Berkeley's Urban

Displacement Program found that the median income of the Mission District has changed significantly in the past two decades, rising from \$46,749 in 1990 to \$76,762 in 2013. This has coincided with a decrease of Latinx residents (44 percent–38 percent) and an increase in white residents (36 percent–43 percent).¹ Many San Franciscans like to celebrate our municipal sanctuary status as an expression of the city's progressive values. But today, sanctuary was evoked to resist another form of exclusion—a housing crisis pushing residents, particularly low-income people of color, out of the city or onto the streets.

Sanctuary is not commonly associated with inclusive housing in the way these activists have employed the concept. More frequently, sanctuary is associated with the convergence of faith-based and secular political movements that counter exclusionary immigration policies and enforcement methods. This book examines these expressions of sanctuary among other manifestations from a theological perspective, exploring sanctuary as *a way of being church*. To understand sanctuary from an ecclesiological perspective, I include sanctuary practices among immigrants as well as the unhoused. Studying churches that invite unhoused people to sleep in their worship space provides a context to explore the historical connection between sanctuary and sacred space, a connection that has been redefined by some contemporary expressions of sanctuary that emphasize public advocacy over space-sharing. Practices of sanctuary among the unhoused not only reveal the interconnectedness of inequality, homelessness, and exclusionary immigration policies, they embody a particular theology that has practical implications on what it means to declare and enact sanctuary.

Today, more than seventy US cities and eleven states have declared sanctuary, characterized by a refusal to employ local police to enforce

1. Sydney Cespedes, Mitchell Crispell, Christina Blackston, Jonathan Plowman, and Edward Graves, "Community Organizing and Resistance in SF's Mission District: Case Study on Gentrification and Displacement Pressures in the Mission District of San Francisco, CA," Center for Community Innovation, University of California, Berkeley (June 2015), at <https://www.urbandisplacement.org/case-studies/ucb#section-46>, accessed on July 23, 2020.

federal immigration policy.² Actual policies and practices between sanctuary cities vary, but the most basic idea is that when an immigrant is detained by the police, they will not automatically be held by a detainer, a request from the US Department of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to hold the person for the purposes of immigration enforcement. From a legal perspective, the primary rationale behind sanctuary is pragmatic, according to Bill Ong Hing, an expert in immigration law and sanctuary policies. Sanctuary policies promote public safety by encouraging entire communities, regardless of immigration status, to trust local police.³ Beyond legal and pragmatic arguments, sanctuary is often motivated by explicit values of inclusion, diversity, equity, hospitality, solidarity, and social justice. Yet, as ethicist Gary Slater has pointed out, the baseline definition of a sanctuary city as a space of noncooperation with federal immigration enforcement is ethically open-ended. It does not guarantee safety of migrants or the conditions for their flourishing. As the San Francisco housing activists illustrate concretely, Slater points out, “many sanctuary cities can in fact be stratified, unequal, and isolated spaces, with little accommodation for their undocumented populations beyond tolerance of their basic physical presence.”⁴

In the United States today, over one thousand faith communities, sometimes in tandem with local ordinances, have declared sanctuary. As is the case with municipal sanctuary, these declarations have various meanings but coalesce around the commitment to “protect and stand

2. The nonpartisan think tank Center for Immigration Studies, which favors “less immigration” but considers itself “pro-immigrant,” publishes a list of sanctuary cities, counties, and states at <https://cis.org/Map-Sanctuary-Cities-Counties-and-States> (updated August 2020).

3. Bill O. Hing, “Immigration Sanctuary Policies: Constitutional and Representative of Good Policing and Good Public Policy,” *UC Irvine Law Review* 2 (2012): 247–311, at 249. Hing outlines the constitutionality of sanctuary cities by emphasizing the public safety rationale as a legitimate expression of local autonomy from federal interference.

4. Gary Slater, “From Strangers to Neighbors: Toward an Ethics of Sanctuary Cities,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 7, no. 2 (2018): 57–85, at 60.

with immigrants facing deportation.⁵ The Oakland-based Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity describes four features of faith-driven sanctuary today: advocacy, accompaniment, freedom campaigns, and congregational housing.⁶

In my research with Catholic and Protestant sanctuary congregations in San Francisco, I found the practice of congregational housing to be a less common feature of sanctuary in comparison to the practices of public advocacy and accompaniment. At first glance, it seems like sanctuary has lost its historical connection to space. Yet there are approaches to sanctuary that emphasize space-sharing, challenging a neoliberal approach to private property that dominates cities like San Francisco.⁷ In addition to the aforementioned housing activists appealing to San Francisco's sanctuary identity, there are congregations in San Francisco who practice "urban sanctuary," inviting unhoused neighbors to sleep in the worship space. This approach to sanctuary among the unhoused does not replace sanctuary among immigrants. Sanctuary as advocacy, accompaniment, and resistance to unjust deportations and detention of migrants represents an urgent task for religious and secular entities. However, when sanctuary is considered within the framework of Christian theology, there is a radical call to solidarity with the marginalized that involves an ethical discernment around private property.

This book explores sanctuary as a way of being church, informed by concrete ecclesial practices in conversation with historical and con-

5. Sanctuary coalitions across the United States have partnered to create a repository of resources and map of sanctuary congregations at <https://www.sanctuarynotdeportation.org/>.

6. Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity at <https://www.im4humanintegrity.org/>.

7. I am using the term neoliberalism to refer to policies that favor the free market over governmental intervention. Features of neoliberalism include deregulation of national and international environmental and labor standards and reduction in welfare programs. These policies are informed by and reinforce a view of the person as autonomous and self-interested. For perspectives on neoliberalism, see *Social Justice and Neoliberalism: Global Perspectives*, ed. Adrian Smith, Alison Stenning, and Katie Willis (London: Zed Books, 2008).

structive ecclesiologies. Specifically, I present sanctuary as a tangible expression of Pope Francis’s emerging ecclesiology that envisions the church as a field hospital. This ecclesiology connects the prophetic witness of the church with embodied practices of solidarity. A field hospital is porous and mobile to meet people where they are. Yet a field hospital functions as a space set apart: a physical space for the most vulnerable. Although Francis does not evoke the word sanctuary, his social teaching insists that we must not only denounce structural exclusion but that the church must be a space—metaphorically and literally—where those who have been excluded find a home. The pope has welcomed refugee families to stay at the Vatican and challenged all churches of Europe to follow his example. He also transformed Vatican property into a home for the unhoused. Through these practices, Francis challenges the church to embody solidarity with the marginalized, to go out to the peripheries of society and allow the oppressed to transform the church into a “poor church for the poor.”

Solidarity with the marginalized is at the heart of espoused theologies of sanctuary. Congregations promise to accompany migrants vulnerable to deportation and to stand with them through public witness and advocacy against what they perceive to be unjust immigration policies. The context of San Francisco is, in many ways, helpful toward building solidarity through sanctuary. It is a sanctuary city with progressive immigration courts,⁸ multicultural communities, and a history of activism. On the other hand, it is increasingly difficult for the nonwealthy to live in the city. The economic inequality that characterizes California, in general, is concentrated in this urban center.⁹

8. TRAC, a nonpartisan, nonprofit data research center at Syracuse University, compares denial rates of asylum cases across cities. Based on data between 2014–2019, San Francisco has a 30 percent denial rate, while Houston judges, on average, deny 92 percent of asylum cases. TRAC, “Asylum Denial Rates by Immigration Court and Judge” available at <https://trac.syr.edu/immigration/reports/590>, accessed on Oct. 14, 2020.

9. Statewide the disparity between the top 10 percent and bottom 10 percent of earners was \$262,000 versus \$21,000 respectively in 2018. The Bay Area represents the greatest regional disparity in California (\$384,000 versus \$32,000). Public Policy Institute of California (January 2020), at <https://www.ppic.org/publication/income-inequality-in-california/>.

Despite tenants' rights such as rent control, the housing market shifts to favor the wealthy. Despite the history of antiestablishment, slow-growth activism, many argue the city has catered to the interests of large corporations, pointing to the 2011 Twitter tax exemption as evidence.¹⁰

In this context, the most prophetic practices of sanctuary are those that resist the logic of neoliberalism—demonstrating the limitations of private property by sharing space with the person left vulnerable by an unjust economy, criminal justice system, and immigration policies. These disruptive practices of sanctuary go beyond the pragmatic approach of noninterference, offering a more robust vision of the common good that celebrates human interdependence. Throughout history, sanctuary has been constructed by a combination of ethical and pragmatic, religious and political, motivations. A brief overview of the research presents sanctuary as a negotiation of space and power based on cultural and religious assumptions about sacred space and the relationship between the church and politics.

Understanding Sanctuary

Much of the research on sanctuary has been by historians and anthropologists, who have demonstrated that some form of sanctuary exists in most religions and cultures.¹¹ Linda Rabben argues that sanctuary is a basic expression of “reciprocal altruism,” shared not only across cultures but also with some primates.¹² In complex societies, sanctuary exists within tensions around inclusion and exclusion—who is defined as other and who is offered refuge—within cultural, economic, and po-

10. In 2011 the San Francisco Board of Supervisors passed the Mid-Market/Tenderloin Tax Incentive, which exempted companies moving into the mid-market area from payroll tax for new employees for six years. The connection between such policies and economic exclusion will be made in chapter 1.

11. Linda Rabben, *Sanctuary and Asylum: A Social and Political History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016); Philip Marfleet, “Understanding ‘Sanctuary’: Faith and Traditions of Asylum,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 24, no. 3 (September 2011): 440–55.

12. Rabben, *Sanctuary and Asylum*, 29.

litical structures that change over time. Several scholars have examined historical practices of sanctuary in order to understand and, in some cases, defend its contemporary expressions.¹³

Because the roots of sanctuary in the Hebrew Bible and early Christian practices have been particularly influential on contemporary religious and secular expressions of sanctuary in Europe and North America, I focus on this trajectory.¹⁴ The Hebrew Bible identifies six cities of refuge, where an innocent person convicted of murder can seek refuge and avoid the penalty of death (Num 35:15). Scholars have noted the significance of this practice within the context of a blood vengeance system, wherein family members were obligated to avenge the death of kin by killing the aggressor. The practice of asylum or refuge among the Israelites and other ancient Near East cultures preserved this social practice by distinguishing between intentional and unintentional killing.¹⁵ Cities of refuge were not only set aside to protect innocent Israelites but also the “resident alien,” who is the subject of several biblical texts mandating mercy toward the stranger.¹⁶

Central to the practice of sanctuary was the designation of the sacred as something set apart. All cities of refuge identified in the Bible are Levite cities, highlighting the significance of the priest in signifying the holiness of the space. The person seeking refuge had to remain in the city until the death of the high priest, suggesting a theology of atonement connected to the practice.¹⁷ An earlier and less developed practice of sanctuary in the Hebrew Bible was connected specifically to the holy space of the altar. The book of Exodus describes a person

13. Ignatius Bau, *This Ground Is Holy: Church Sanctuary and Central American Refugees* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985); William Ryan, “The Historical Case for the Right of Sanctuary,” *Journal of Church and State* 29, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 209–32; Rabben, *Sanctuary and Asylum*.

14. Bau, *This Ground Is Holy*.

15. David Ewert, “Avenger of Blood,” in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

16. Chad Thomas Beck, “Sanctuary for Immigrants and Refugees in Our Legal and Ethical Wilderness,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 72, no. 2 (2018): 132–45.

17. Bau, *This Ground Is Holy*, 125–26.

fleeing vengeance running to the altar to avoid retribution.¹⁸ In his historical overview of sanctuary, Ignatius Bau argues that these two types of biblical sanctuary—one delineated by the holiness of the altar and the communitarian form associated with a city of refuge—are both influential in subsequent developments of sanctuary in the Jewish and Christian traditions.¹⁹

The earliest documented practices of sanctuary in the Christian tradition are laid out in the Theodosian Code of 392 CE, after Christianity gained favor in the Roman Empire under Constantine's authority. Initially, the interior space of the church was to be a place of refuge for certain people accused of crimes. Christian sanctuary, from its onset, relied on assumptions about who was eligible and who was to be excluded.²⁰ People were excluded based on the nature of the crime, with debtors and embezzlers exempt from sanctuary. People were also excluded based on their relationship to the church, with Jews, heretics, and apostates considered ineligible for sanctuary. The power to exclude is one of the ways sanctuary became a tool to elevate the authority of the church, specifically of the bishop. Sanctuary developed during this period and in 450 CE, the exterior courtyard of the church as well as the bishop's house were considered spaces of refuge. Sanctuary further advanced the authority of the church by reinforcing the delineation of sacred from the profane. Bau argues that keeping sanctuary-seekers in the courtyard of the church, near the holy but without access to the holiest of places, reinforced the power of sacred space.²¹

Focusing on the tension between sacred and profane, Bau traces the development of sanctuary from early Christian practices to the highly institutionalized medieval practice as a move away from the authority of the church space to the authority of the bishop. The power of the bishop was reinforced by Pope Leo I (440–61 CE), who decreed

18. Jonathan Burnside, "Exodus and Asylum: Uncovering the Relationship between Biblical Law and Narrative," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 34, no. 3 (Mar 2010): 243–66.

19. Bau, *This Ground Is Holy*.

20. Bau, *This Ground Is Holy*, 131; and Rabben, *Sanctuary and Asylum*, 39–42.

21. Bau, *This Ground Is Holy*, 131.

that church authorities must review sanctuary cases.²² The medieval practices of sanctuary in particular highlight the dynamic negotiation of ecclesial and political authority. The power of sanctuary relied on the holiness of church space and reinforced the authority of the church hierarchy. While this served the political interests of the king by maintaining peace and order, it also elevated the church, a competing authority.

Gradually, church sanctuary was placed under juridical authority of the kings of England, with several restrictions that consolidated their secular authority, while leveraging the authority of the church. English king Ethelbert of Kent used his authority to establish strict punishment for those who violated the peace of the church or *fyrb* in 597 CE.²³ During this period, a number of churches, abbeys, and cloisters were elevated as sanctuaries, making sanctuary more widespread and political. Abuses of sanctuary abounded as these spaces were sought increasingly by people fleeing from debt collectors.²⁴ When monarchies added restrictions on sanctuary, the Catholic Church pushed back with the threat of excommunication.²⁵

Although sanctuary was officially abolished by English law in 1624 and eliminated in canon law in 1983,²⁶ it persisted because of its cultural power. Modern expressions of sanctuary in North America rely on cultural and religious sensibility more than legal authority. Sanctuary was first evoked in North America to defend conscientious objectors to the Vietnam War.²⁷ Protestant Minister William Sloane Coffin Jr. drew an explicit connection to church sanctuary in the past to argue for

22. Bau, *This Ground Is Holy*, 131; and Rabben, *Sanctuary and Asylum*, 40.

23. Ryan, "The Historical Case for the Right of Sanctuary," 217.

24. Bau, *This Ground Is Holy*, 150.

25. Hilary Cunningham, *God and Caesar at the Rio Grande: Sanctuary and the Politics of Religion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 81.

26. Cunningham, *God and Caesar*, 81–82.

27. Cunningham, *God and Caesar*. While the language of sanctuary to describe civil disobedience in North America was first evoked in this context, it is important to highlight how the Underground Railroad provided sanctuary and protection to African Americans fleeing slavery in the South. Later expressions of sanctuary would evoke the Underground Railroad to describe and legitimate their own civil disobedience.

sanctuary for conscientious objectors in 1966: “Now if in the Middle Ages churches could offer sanctuary to the most common of criminals, could they not today do the same for the most conscientious among us?”²⁸ Churches became public sanctuaries for people resisting the draft; however, this did not stop police and military authorities from entering churches and prosecuting conscientious objectors seeking refuge.²⁹

The most prominent sanctuary movement in North America was in response to the large number of Salvadoran and Guatemalan asylum seekers who fled to the United States during their country’s civil wars.³⁰ Central American asylum seekers were routinely denied asylum, with the Reagan administration arguing that they migrated for economic reasons, not human rights violations.³¹ Faith communities organized to protect, defend, and advocate for the rights of migrants under the banner of sanctuary. Sanctuary practices varied according to location, with the primary sanctuary coalitions emerging on the US-Mexico border, especially Tucson, as well as Chicago and the San Francisco Bay Area.

Tucson-based sanctuary emerged as a humanitarian response to migrants making the dangerous border-crossing in the Sonoran Desert. Jim Corbett, a Quaker rancher, and John Fife, a Presbyterian minister, began organizing a network of sanctuary volunteers who guided asylum seekers across the border to take refuge in their churches and homes. Fife compared this work to the protection of refugees in Nazi Germany and the protection of slaves through the Underground Railroad. Sanctuary in this context was perceived as a faith-driven response

28. Rev. William Coffrey Sloane, Jr., quoted in Barbara L. Bezdek, “Religious Outlaws: Narratives of Legality and the Politics of Citizen Interpretation,” *Tennessee Law Review* 62 (1995): 899–996, at 934.

29. Bezdek, “Religious Outlaws.”

30. Between 1979 and 1986, over one million Central Americans entered the United States (Edelberto Torres-Rivera, Report on the Condition of Central American Refugees and Migrants [Washington, DC: Center for Immigration and Refugee Assistance, Georgetown University, July 1985]. Quoted in Hilary Cunningham, “Sanctuary and Sovereignty: Church and State Along the US-Mexico Border,” *Journal of Church and State* 40, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 371–86, at 374.

31. Cunningham, “Sanctuary and Sovereignty,” 375.

to a higher moral law, which in this case opposed state law. Fife, quoting Corbett, writes, “We can serve the Kingdom, or we can serve the kingdoms of this world—but we cannot do both.”³²

Alison Cunningham’s research on Tucson-based sanctuary examines sanctuary as a dynamic negotiation of church and state power. Sanctuary workers in this context articulated their practices in terms of acts of conscience, practicing Christianity in this case entailed defying unjust laws. The federal government asserted its authority over sanctuary volunteers through Operation Sojourner, an FBI and INS operation in 1983 which involved an investigation of Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson. As a result of Operation Sojourner, sixteen sanctuary volunteers were indicted by a federal court, facing numerous charges related to “harboring and transporting illegal aliens.”³³ During the sanctuary trial, the defense evoked the First Amendment, defending the autonomy of the church from state oversight and the church’s right to practice sanctuary as an expression of their faith.³⁴ This case revealed how sanctuary both defied the privatization of religion by connecting faith to political activism but also how it relied on a nonlegally binding cultural sensibility that regarded sacred spaces as something set apart.

As the sanctuary movement grew in Arizona, shaped particularly by its proximity to the US-Mexico border, sanctuary coalitions emerged in Chicago and the San Francisco Bay Area. Robin Lorentzen points to different approaches in Tucson and Chicago, claiming that Tucson was focused on immediate humanitarian service, while Chicago was building a national political network. The Chicago sanctuary coalition emphasized public advocacy through public witness and civil disobedience. Chicago-based sanctuary was led primarily by women,

32. Jim Corbett, quoted in John Fife, “From the Sanctuary Movement to No More Deaths: The Challenge to Communities of Faith,” in *Religious and Ethical Perspectives on Global Migration*, ed. Charles Strain (Landham: Lexington, 2014), 259.

33. Kristina Campbell, “Operation Sojourner: The Government Infiltration of the Sanctuary Movement in the 1980s and Its Legacy on the Modern Central American Refugee Crisis,” *University of St. Thomas Law Journal* 13, no. 3 (2016): 474–507.

34. Cunningham, *God and Caesar*.

particularly Catholic sisters, which Lorentzen regards as significant. Despite the media attention given to male sanctuary leaders, particularly Corbett and Fife, Lorentzen claims that women had a central role in the “caretaking” work of sanctuary. This included humanitarian caretaking—hosting asylum seekers and providing accompaniment, as well as political caretaking—forging the network of volunteers and coordinating public witness.³⁵ Emphasizing public advocacy, some of the Chicago sanctuary workers were critical of “paternalistic” sanctuary practices that focused on direct service and protection of migrants. Lorentzen analyzes this through the lens of gender, noting that the women leaders, particularly Catholic sisters, interpreted the theologically mandated preferential option for the poor and oppressed to include liberation of women.³⁶

Sanctuary emerged in the Bay Area around six congregations reading Scripture together in light of liberation theology and violence against church leaders in El Salvador. The killing of archbishop Oscar Romero in 1980 became a focal point for understanding transnational solidarity among these churches. Focusing on this context, anthropologist Susan Bibler Coutin understands sanctuary primarily as a form of religious civil disobedience. Coutin argues that the religious narratives such as welcoming the stranger, along with public prayer rituals, reinforced the moral authority, justice orientation, and interfaith dimension of sanctuary.³⁷ Migrant testimony was incorporated into public witness and religious services with a dual purpose of consciousness-raising and conversion toward the poor. The themes of liberation theology, particularly solidarity with the poor and marginalized, were at the center of Christian sanctuary. This theology, which emphasized orthopraxis (right action) over orthodoxy (right

35. Robin Lorentzen, *Women in the Sanctuary Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

36. The way the Catholic sisters framed the feminist goals of liberation theology, however, did not always resonate with the migrants they sought to empower (Lorentzen, *Women in the Sanctuary Movement*).

37. Susan Bibler Coutin, *The Culture of Protest: Religious Activism and the U.S. Sanctuary Movement* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), chapter 10.

teaching) fueled religious activism and transnational solidarity with the poor. Coutin argues that solidarity was a driving principle of the sanctuary movement but that the emphasis on religious conversion which relied on a “quasi-sacred status” of migrants reinforced their “otherness” among mostly white, upper-middle-class North Americans. She notes that sanctuary participants themselves were critical of paternalistic and potentially exploitative dimensions of sanctuary as they sought to build transnational solidarity.³⁸

In the Bay Area, nineteen congregations had declared sanctuary by 1989. Many of them followed a process of discernment that involved learning about the realities of asylum seekers and the impact of US foreign policy toward Central America in conversation with theological and ethical reflection.³⁹ Practically speaking, by declaring sanctuary, congregations promised to protect, defend, and advocate for migrants. Faith communities provided an ethical framework for city officials to consider sanctuary as a municipal ordinance.⁴⁰ San Francisco officially became a sanctuary city in 1985, joining other municipalities in the refusal to leverage local law enforcement in federal immigration enforcement measures. Municipal and congregational sanctuary raised consciousness about the injustices in the Central American civil wars and of the United States’ relationship to El Salvador. This intensified around the 1989 murder of six Jesuits, along with their housekeeper and her daughter at the University of Central America by a US-trained soldier.⁴¹ This reexamination of US foreign policy resulted in the Immigration Act of 1990, which created Temporary Protected Status

38. Coutin, *Culture of Protest*, 183–87.

39. Peter Mancina, “The Birth of a Sanctuary-City: A History of Governmental Sanctuary in San Francisco,” in *Sanctuary Practices in International Perspectives: Migration, Citizenship, and Social Movements*, ed. Randy Lippert and Sean Rehagg (London: Routledge, 2013), 209.

40. Mancina, “The Birth of a Sanctuary-City.”

41. Hector Perla Jr. and Susan Bibler Coutin, “Legacies and Origins of the 1980s US–Central American Sanctuary Movement,” in Lippert and Rehagg, *Sanctuary Practices*, 73–91, at 82.

(TPS) for certain groups whose homeland is unsafe due to conflict, natural disaster, or other extraordinary conditions.⁴²

TPS did not end deportations of Central American migrants fearful of returning home because of widespread violence. Deportations increased significantly from 2000–2010.⁴³ These have been the focus of the New Sanctuary Movement. The New Sanctuary Movement launched in 2007 in response to increased deportations and attempts to pass the Sensenbrenner Bill (2005) that would make assisting undocumented migrants a felony act. High profile sanctuary cases focused on migrants taking refuge in churches to avoid deportation, which often meant family separation. These include Elvira Arellano, who took refuge in a Chicago church in 2006, and Jeanette Vizguerra, who similarly sought refuge in a Denver church. Although these cases increased the visibility of sanctuary, church spaces are not off-limits for ICE activity any more than schools, hospitals, or courthouses. In a 2011 memo, ICE described its policy of restraining from surveillance or enforcement in these “sensitive areas,” but this practice is not codified in law.⁴⁴

Physical sanctuary is one of the less common dimensions of the New Sanctuary Movement. In her ethnographic study of sanctuary as a multifaceted social movement, Grace Yukich notes that sanctuary is a moniker within a host of interfaith strategies to stop deportations and promote just immigration policy.⁴⁵ The New Sanctuary Movement gained more visibility after the inauguration of President Donald

42. Perla and Coutin, “The US-Central American Sanctuary Movement.”

43. The Pew Research Center reports 188,000 removals in 2000 and 395,000 in 2009. See the Pew Research Center, “As Deportations Rise to Record Levels, Most Latinos Oppose Obama’s Policy,” December 2011, at <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2011/12/28/as-deportations-rise-to-record-levels-most-latinos-oppose-obamas-policy/>.

44. John Morton, Memorandum to Field Office Directors, Special Agents in Charge, and Chief Counsel, “Enforcement Actions at or Focused on Sensitive Locations,” October 24, 2011, at <https://www.ice.gov/doclib/ero-outreach/pdf/10029.2-policy.pdf>.

45. Grace Yukich, *One Family under God: Immigration Politics and Progressive Religion in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Trump in 2017. Trump, who ran on an anti-immigration platform, immediately began issuing executive orders aimed to strengthen border security and curb migration from Muslim-majority countries.⁴⁶ Churches and synagogues began issuing public declarations of sanctuary while sanctuary cities also grew in number. Yukich observes dual aims in faith-based sanctuary practice today. In addition to the goal of justice for immigrants, sanctuary serves as a way for religious congregations to reform and assert their religious identities as interfaith and progressive.⁴⁷

Recent studies of sanctuary cities have included analyses of power and have offered critical approaches to sanctuary. Randy Lippert and Peter Mancina analyze how sanctuary cities represent a different form of governmentality that challenges notions of citizenship (Mancina) and compensates for the declining welfare state under advanced liberalism (Lippert).⁴⁸ Focusing on sanctuary practices in Canada, Lippert points to sanctuary “instances” as opposed to a cohesive movement. Jennifer Ridgley has examined sanctuary not only from the perspective of state power but through abolitionist-oriented grassroots movements that challenge the criminalization of migration and power of the state to arrest, detain, and deport.⁴⁹ Ridgley, along with Naomi Paik, is critical

46. See executive orders “Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements,” “Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States,” and “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States,” issued on January 25 and March 6, 2017 (Exec. Order 13,767; Exec. Order 13,768; and Exec. Order 13,780). For a critical analysis, see Naomi Paik, “Abolitionist Futures and the US Sanctuary Movement,” *Race and Class* 59, no. 2 (2017): 3–25.

47. Yukich, *One Family under God*.

48. Randy K. Lippert, *Sanctuary, Sovereignty, Sacrifice: Canadian Sanctuary Incidents, Power, and Law* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005); and Peter Mancina, *In the Spirit of Sanctuary: Sanctuary-City Policy Advocacy and the Production of Sanctuary-Power in San Francisco, California* (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 2016).

49. Jennifer Ridgley, *Cities of Refuge: Citizenship, Legality, and Exception in U.S. Sanctuary Cities* (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2010). See also Fiona Jeffries and Jennifer Ridgley, “Building the Sanctuary City from the Ground Up: Abolitionist Solidarity and Transformative Reform,” *Citizenship Studies* 24, no. 4 (2020): 548–67.

of rhetoric that reinforces the ideal immigrant within a familial and capitalist framework; that is, the hardworking person providing for their family. They advocate for a more radical form of sanctuary that disrupts the pattern of racialized criminalization and profit-driven mass incarceration.⁵⁰ This critique is particularly relevant in the United States, but by focusing on sanctuary practices in Canada (Ridgley and Lippert) and the United Kingdom and Europe (Rabben), scholars demonstrate that sanctuary exists beyond its particular form in US politics.⁵¹

This brief historical overview, by no means exhaustive, is meant to illustrate the diverse expressions of sanctuary, while also situating this particular study of sanctuary, which is shaped by Christian theology and practice, in San Francisco. Throughout history, sanctuary has involved a negotiation of space around ecclesiological questions. Concretely, practices of sanctuary have been shaped by theological understandings of sacred space, as well as how sacred space is distinguished from nonsacred space. Practicing sanctuary therefore reinforces ecclesial borders while simultaneously opening those boundaries for some, though not all, people. Most research on sanctuary, faith-based and secular, comes from anthropology and political science. This book focuses on the ecclesiology of sanctuary—how it expresses and gives rise to a particular way of being church. It goes beyond examining sanctuary from the perspective of church-state relations to ask—what is the theological understanding of the church in the context of sanctuary?

Research Questions

An Ecclesiological Focus

My interest in sanctuary began in 2017, when my church made a public declaration of our commitment to accompany and advocate for immigrants. I began attending know your rights trainings in the worship space, listening to stories of our undocumented neighbors living in

50. Paik, "Abolitionist Futures."

51. Lippert, *Sanctuary and Sovereignty*.

Chapter 2

Sanctuary as Prophetic Witness

At a busy intersection of San Francisco's Mission District, an interfaith group of nearly fifty people gathered to observe Ash Wednesday with a ritual of repentance. Standing around a small bonfire at a popular commuter train station, faith leaders took turns naming and burning collective sins of our nation—homophobia, xenophobia, racism. The ritual spoke to the Christian theological conviction that humanity has gone astray and that we need to seek forgiveness and reorient ourselves toward God. However, this traditional religious practice did not take place in a church but rather a public square in a largely secular city.

The ritual marked two moments in time—one guided by the liturgical calendar of the Christian faith and the other situated in the political history of the United States. This day in March was the first Ash Wednesday following the inauguration of President Donald Trump. Trump, who ran on an anti-immigrant platform, had already issued a series of executive orders aimed at heightening border security and limiting immigration from certain countries.¹ This mobilized faith

1. Donald Trump issued three controversial executive orders in January and March 2017 related to immigration: "Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United

communities like St. John the Evangelist to issue a public declaration of sanctuary.

In addition to the timing of the ritual, the space holds significance. Carrying signs indicating solidarity with immigrants and resistance to xenophobia, the interfaith group processed from the train station to St. John the Evangelist. Walking through the Mission District, a predominantly Latinx neighborhood undergoing rapid gentrification, we are met with curious stares, waves, and smiles of support. When we arrive at the door of St. John the Evangelist, intentionally painted red to signal their affinity with the historical practice of sanctuary, a media crew gathers around the pastor while he reads a public declaration of sanctuary.

The public quality of the statement is significant for many people involved in the New Sanctuary Movement. St. John's had been practicing sanctuary for several years. They were involved in the sanctuary movement of the 1980s and have continued this commitment in partnership with a local nonprofit, the Central American Resource Center (CARECEN), providing accompaniment and advocacy for immigrants and the Latinx community of San Francisco. St. John's sanctuary commitment extends beyond justice for immigrants. The church sees itself as a sanctuary to the LGBTQ community, especially when they were ostracized during the AIDS crisis of the 1980s. And St. John's is one of two congregations in San Francisco to partner with the Gubbio Project, a nonprofit organization that creates sanctuary for unhoused people by welcoming them to sleep in worship spaces. By choosing this particular time and space to issue a public declaration of sanctuary, St. John's is asserting their religious identity in the public sphere.

This chapter addresses two questions that emerge among San Francisco sanctuary congregations like St. John the Evangelist, who are participating in and shaping the New Sanctuary Movement. First,

States" (January 25, 2017); "Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements" (January 25, 2017); and "Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States" (March 6, 2017), at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions>.

should the church engage in politics? While the majority of sanctuary leaders I interviewed represented congregations that were supportive of practicing sanctuary, some tensions emerged over the public declaration. The debates surrounding the decision to declare sanctuary reveal theological differences related to the nature of the church and the church's relationships to society and politics. Highlighting conceptions of the public sphere that challenge the liberal tradition, I consider sanctuary to be an alternative public space for a reconceptualization of ecclesial and political identity.

The second question this chapter will address is, *how* should the church engage in politics? In other words, can particular faith claims carry relevance outside the tradition that generated them? Can faith communities dialogue with a wider public without losing the critical, prophetic dimension of their claims? These challenges reflect key debates in public theology, and sanctuary movements provide an important context to reflect on these debates. Public declarations of sanctuary both draw upon and disrupt liberal political theory, inviting us to consider the nature of religious claims beyond rigid conceptions of public reason. Sanctuary demonstrates that the rational translation of religious claims is not sufficient for prophetic action. Following feminist critical theorists who have challenged the idea that there is a single, inclusive public sphere governed by reason, I will highlight how sanctuary leaders have used performance, testimony, and narrative to articulate a political theology.

I draw upon the political theologies of William Cavanaugh and Johann Baptist Metz in conversation with Pope Francis to construct an ecclesiology of prophetic witness in the face of neoliberalism and related structural injustices. Prophetic witness is a central feature of Francis's field hospital church. His vision of the church flows from the conviction that "An authentic faith—which is never comfortable or completely personal—always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it."² He envisions a church that goes forth into the world and

2. EG, 183.

witnesses to the transformative joy of the Gospel, rejecting the privatization of faith while also recognizing the legitimacy of a pluralistic public sphere.

Cavanaugh and Metz approach the relationship between the church and politics differently, resulting in helpful mutual criticisms in their ecclesiologies. Cavanaugh, who argues for a form of Christian anarchism in the tradition of Stanley Hauerwas, regards the church as an alternative political body, marked by political practices in contrast to the practices of the state. Metz accepts the distinction between church and politics but argues that the church must exercise a sociopolitical function as a bearer of dangerous memory of those who suffer and are vindicated by God in history. They both articulate political theology as the antidote to the excessive privatization of religion and the church's modern acquiescence to the Enlightenment model of human progress (Metz) and the excesses of neoliberal capitalism (Cavanaugh).

Sanctuary as prophetic witness goes beyond the translation of faith to continually disrupt the limitations in the sanctuary movement itself. Through symbolic and liturgical political practices, some churches not only enter a neutral public sphere, they contest the assumed duality of public/private, religious/secular. The critical dimension of sanctuary aims not only to transform the politics of the state but also to transform the identity and practices of the church. Interviews and observations reveal two dynamics—an outward movement that resists the privatization of religion and an inward movement in which churches reread their own histories in light of their sanctuary commitment.

Sanctuary and Public Theology

Religion in the Public Sphere

When I began interviewing participants in the San Francisco sanctuary movement, I anticipated the greatest barrier to participating in sanctuary to be the fear of breaking the law. This fear was not absent; however, talking to people whose congregations were divided on the practice of sanctuary revealed another concern. Organizers and leaders

around sanctuary identified as a barrier the fear that the congregation would be seen as too political. Behind this concern is a particular theology of the church, assumptions that frame the relationship between the church and the world, more specifically, the church and the public sphere. These assumptions, often implicit, reflect cultural beliefs about the relationship between religion and the state.

A widespread feature of US church-state culture reflects a liberal philosophical tradition that differentiates the public sphere of political engagement from the private sphere of religious belief. The roots of this tradition go back to the seventeenth century when religious wars threatened the stability of Western Europe. Modern liberal political theory responds to the potential divisiveness of religion in a pluralistic context by elevating reasonable discourse as the mode for negotiating common interests. Representing this view, John Rawls has argued that the comprehensive doctrines offered by religion cannot achieve the kind of overlapping consensus necessary for a pluralistic society to pursue the common good. In his earlier work, Rawls argued that religious citizens must bracket their faith claims to deliberate on public interests. He later conceded that religious claims had a place in public deliberation only if they could also be justified by generally accessible, reasonable arguments.³

Like Rawls, Jürgen Habermas embraces the premise that religious claims must be translated into rational arguments as the proper mode for public discourse. Habermas further accepts the possibility that the religious person does not have to bracket the convictions of faith prior to entering public debate. What Habermas adds to Rawls's view is that the process of translation is a mutual responsibility of religious and nonreligious citizens. Although Habermas does not regard religious claims as such to be generalizable, he recognizes their unique value in society. Therefore, the nonreligious counterpart should approach

3. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

religious claims with an openness and willingness to participate in the translation process.⁴

Jeffrey Stout challenges the premise that religious claims must be translated by questioning some of the foundational assumptions of the liberal tradition. First, he points out that the liberal nation-state is not neutral but guided by a set of values and beliefs, including the assumption that tolerance involves bracketing off one's particular religious beliefs in public discourse. Against Richard Rorty's accusation that religion is a conversation stopper, he differentiates between religious claims, expressed in a variety of ways, and faith claims, which tend not to offer justifications for their commitments.⁵ He also notes that nonreligious people make claims on the basis of faith that could equally be described as conversation stoppers. Second, he argues that religious pluralism, like any pluralism, should not be treated like a threat to unity. He rejects Rawls's assumption that translating religious principles into rational arguments is a sign of respect, arguing that "Real respect for others takes seriously the distinctive point of view each other occupies. It is respect for individuality, for difference."⁶ Stout's theory follows his observation of the power of faith-based organizing, particularly in multifaith coalitions, to enact social change.⁷

The Limits of Translation

On one hand, the sanctuary movement represents the kind of exchange Habermas seems to be inviting. Sanctuary is a site of translation, where faith-based action is expressed in secular values and reasonable political norms. Sanctuary as a concept functions meaningfully in religious and

4. See Jürgen Habermas, *Religion and Rationality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002); Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008); Jürgen Habermas, *An Awareness of What is Missing*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010).

5. Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

6. Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 73.

7. Jeffrey Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized Grassroots: Democracy in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

nonreligious settings and fosters collaboration among faith communities and secular entities advocating for immigrants. A local example proves the significance of faith communities in ushering in a broader sanctuary commitment reflected in municipal practice and cultural attitudes. Peter Mancina details the crucial role of faith communities in motivating city officials toward a pro-immigrant stance and eventually to enact a sanctuary ordinance in San Francisco. Faith leaders provided an ethical rationale for sanctuary that was both rooted in the particularities of their tradition and articulated to correspond to the espoused progressive values of the city.⁸ So the biblical mandate to love one's neighbor was translated into a San Franciscan ethos that celebrates diversity and strives toward inclusion.

On a broader scope, Latin American liberation theology⁹ informed the US sanctuary movement in the 1980s, leading to transnational solidarity that provided the basis for a critique of the US government. This faith-driven solidarity eventually contributed to the US government providing Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Central American refugees. In her study of the 1980s sanctuary movement, Susan Bibler Coutin documents the impact of liberation theology, noting that it

8. Peter Mancina, "The Birth of a Sanctuary-City: A History of Governmental Sanctuary in San Francisco" in *Sanctuary Practices in International Perspectives: Migration, Citizenship, and Social Movements*, ed. Randy Lippert and Sean Rehagg (London: Routledge, 2013).

9. Interpreting the Christian faith from the perspective of the poor and oppressed, liberation theology emerged on multiple levels of the church in Latin America during the late 1960s through '80s. It was developed by Christian base communities whose reading of Scripture was accompanied by consciousness-raising of structural injustices, theologically identified as social sins. It was articulated by academically trained theologians who drew upon Marxist tools for social analysis coupled with the preferential option for the poor as the guiding hermeneutic to the Christian faith. And it was endorsed by Latin American bishops such as Oscar Romero and Episcopal Conference of Latin America (CELAM) gathered at Medellin (1968) and Puebla (1979), representing a shift away from the church's historical alliance with the politically and economically powerful. For an overview of key voices and themes in liberation theology, see *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, ed. Christopher Rowland (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

provided a theological mandate for solidarity with Central American refugees and migrants. She names a “quasi-sacred reality of the Central American poor” that drew North American sanctuary workers into relationship with them. This experience of solidarity provided the basis to critique the United States’ political and economic relationship to Central America.¹⁰

On the other hand, the history of sanctuary points out the limitations of translation. Gary Slater points out that while definitions of sanctuary vary among municipalities to some degree, the “baseline” approach to sanctuary means noncooperation with federal immigration authorities. This does not necessarily evoke the kind of solidarity rooted in liberation theology. He suggests that sanctuary creates an ethically neutral space that should be filled by sanctuary activists:

The upshot of the legal/ethical distinction with respect to sanctuary cities is that of an ethically negative space at the local level, one that can be filled with various forms of religious life in light of turning strangers into neighbors. An ethics of sanctuary cities can build on this necessary but insufficient set of policies to articulate a more robust vision for the fulfillment of sanctuary’s potential.¹¹

The sanctuary practice of noninterference may be a reasonable baseline for municipal expressions. However, it fails to capture the theological dimensions of sanctuary as a prophetic practice of hospitality that disrupts the very notion of private property by welcoming the refugee, unhoused, or persecuted person into a shared space. The emphasis on tolerance and noninterference follows a liberal conception of human rights but fails to embody the positive notion of human rights enshrined in Catholic social thought. Pope Francis observes a disconnect between countries who claim universal human rights but

10. Susan Bibler Coutin, *The Culture of Protest: Religious Activism and the U.S. Sanctuary Movement* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 59.

11. Gary Slater, “From Strangers to Neighbors: Toward an Ethics of Sanctuary Cities,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 7, no. 2 (2018): 57–85, at 60.

do not provide the conditions for everyone to realize their rights. He connects the unequal recognition of rights to “reductive anthropological visions” which prioritizes profits over people.¹² Immigration policy informed by Catholic social thought must go beyond granting migrants a measure of civic rights to ensure their full participation in the common good through access to basic needs, such as housing, as well as access to the means of full integral development as persons in community.

Some argue that the current sanctuary movement, both in its religious and nonreligious expressions, fails to go far enough in dismantling structures that oppress not only immigrants but other groups—that is, people who are unhoused, impoverished, or incarcerated. Naomi Paik argues that the current sanctuary movement relies on liberal frameworks that legitimize the power of the state, rendering the movement ultimately ineffective. By failing to address the systemic criminalization of communities of color and corresponding neoliberal interests made concrete in the privatization of prisons, the sanctuary movement fails to promote the kind of solidarity and inclusion it proclaims. Paik is particularly critical of the power religious congregations have exerted in deciding who gets sanctuary and who is excluded.¹³ By separating immigrants into categories marked by those deserving of sanctuary and those who are not, Yukich argues that sanctuary participants play a role in fueling the rhetoric of good versus bad immigrant.¹⁴ Paik argues that “the future of the sanctuary movement must fight for all oppressed peoples” and finds the most compelling expressions of sanctuary to be ones that recognize intersecting forms of oppression and resist the neoliberal interests that benefit from them.¹⁵

12. FT, 22.

13. Naomi Paik, “Abolitionist Futures and the US Sanctuary Movement,” *Race and Class* 59, no. 2 (October 2017): 3–25, at 14.

14. Grace Yukich, “Constructing the Model Immigrant: Movement Strategy and Immigrant Deservingness in the New Sanctuary Movement,” *Social Problems* 60, no. 3 (2013): 302–20.

15. Paik, “Abolitionist Futures,” 18. One example of this is the Freedom Cities Movement, which takes an explicitly intersectional approach to community safety.

Interfaith coalitions that support sanctuary in San Francisco provide a mechanism for self-critique and are addressing some of Paik's concerns. For example, the Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity (IM4HI), one of the primary coalitions for faith-based immigration advocacy, has explicitly connected their campaign to end mass incarceration and systemic racism through criminalization into their sanctuary stance. The work of IM4HI provides a faith-based rationale for sanctuary congregations to embrace immigrants who fall outside of the national and municipal discourse around who deserves compassion.¹⁶

The work of IM4HI demonstrates that faith communities have a key role in ushering in a prophetic form of sanctuary that disrupts power structures that benefit the interests of few. To harness the resources of faith, however, progressive religious groups must overcome the internal and external perception that tolerance and explicit religious claims are incompatible. Echoing Stout, the problem is not secularization or religious pluralism. It has more to do with the false assumption that tolerance or respect requires bracketing religious particularity. The liberal notion of the public sphere and rational discourse fail to account for the unique value of religious claims. Some post-Habermasian critical theorists provide a more adequate account that will later help us analyze the way faith communities articulate and enact a theology of sanctuary.

They recognize that police violence against Black people is interconnected to state-sanctioned violence against immigrants and advocate for safety for all marginalized people. Sanctuary represents one aspect of Freedom Cities' larger aim toward liberation from oppressive power exercised by corporations and the state. See <https://freedomcities.org/>.

16. The Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity describes its vision: "Working at the intersection of spirituality and social movements, we mobilize congregations to take a stand on issues of social justice like immigration and mass incarceration, and we engage people of faith to develop their own leadership so they can stand up against racism, discrimination, and the political challenges of the day. We bring a faith voice to social movement coalitions, providing a compassionate religious perspective amidst the clamor of angry political actors." See <https://www.im4humanintegrity.org>.

Rethinking the Public Voice of Religion

In her analysis of the sanctuary movement, Alicia Steinmetz suggests that the liberal conception of public reason fails to see the nature and meaning of religious claims in the movement. She argues that even the strictest Rawlsian account would include the religious rationale for sanctuary but that the limited notion of public reason obscures the kind of contribution religion made to the movement.¹⁷ Within the context of postmodernity, which has challenged the ideal of reason as a universalizing mode of discourse, there is an opportunity to explore the unique value of religion in movements like sanctuary.

Feminist thinkers have pushed Habermasian critical theory in ways that are particularly helpful for developing a critical understanding of faith-based sanctuary. Breaking down the traditionally gendered separation of private versus public interests, feminist critical theory has challenged the notion that there is a single public sphere to which everyone has access. Exposing the ways in which historically marginalized groups have strategically navigated through exclusion to assert their interests as political concerns, feminists have illuminated alternative forms of public debate, ones that more adequately speak to the nature of religious discourse.

Habermas defines the public sphere as a place to negotiate shared interests through free speech and rational discourse. This concept is based on the premise of inclusive participation, which is fundamental to a successful democracy. Although he recognizes historical exclusions, Habermas maintains that the ideal of accessibility for everyone has functioned as a regulatory principle to promote inclusion.¹⁸ Nancy Fraser points out the ways that historical exclusions have also functioned in society. She argues that groups subjugated by gender, race,

17. Alicia Steinmetz, "Sanctuary and the Limits of Public Reason: A Deweyan Corrective," *Politics and Religion* 11, no. 3 (2018): 498–521.

18. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

and class have created alternative publics, sometimes overlapping, sometimes competing, with the dominant public sphere.¹⁹

Iris Marion Young similarly problematizes the idea of inclusion. She theorizes two forms of exclusion from political participation. External exclusion is overt and includes unjust voter registration procedures or big lobby groups that exercise political power through financial power. Internal exclusion occurs among people who are formally included in the democratic process but marginalized or not taken seriously because of racism, sexism, or classism. Internal exclusion tends to limit the kinds of arguments that are regarded as appropriate for political engagement. Against the dominant definition of reasonable arguments, Young argues that there are multiple, legitimate ways to engage in public discourse, including greeting, rhetoric, and narrative.²⁰ Her discussion of narrative is particularly relevant to this context, given the role of storytelling in sanctuary. According to Young, storytelling can give voice to those who have been systematically excluded from public discourse, making visible their suffering. It can forge understanding across differences and facilitate political engagement among local affinities. It can communicate values and meaning as well as lead to the construction of new knowledge.²¹ Maria Pia Lara has pointed out the role of narrative in creating counter-publics for subjugated groups to exercise political agency.²²

In what follows, I examine how sanctuary congregations employ these strategies, particularly performance and narrative, to articulate a public theology. The theology represents an outward movement of political engagement and an inward movement of theological identity, blurring the distinction between the two. I will analyze these movements with three ecclesiological perspectives—those of William

19. Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* no. 25/26 (1990): 56–80.

20. Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), chapter 4.

21. Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 70–77.

22. Maria Pia Lara, *Moral Textures: Feminist Narratives in the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

Cavanagh, Johann Baptist Metz, and Pope Francis. While these thinkers represent different approaches to political theology, they highlight important aspects of sanctuary both as a set of political practices and as a hermeneutic for reading the Christian narrative.

“We Had to Do Something”— Sanctuary and Political Identity

After the election of Trump, everybody, including me, . . . were just reeling, and I’m really upset and determined to respond. It felt like a call as church to put what we say we believe into action more than ever. Like it was just a real wake-up call on so many levels. . . . We were becoming more aware about the state of our immigration laws and becoming more aware about what happens around detention and deportation. . . . We had to do something.²³

When I asked members of sanctuary congregations about their motivation to make a public declaration of sanctuary, by far the most prevalent answer was political. Represented in the quote above, most leaders cited the 2016 election of Donald Trump as the impetus for declaring sanctuary. Many of these churches had been involved in immigration advocacy prior to 2016 but either did not use the word sanctuary to describe their practices or they did not feel compelled to make a public declaration. The political moment drew them into the public sphere, to declare sanctuary as a public witness to their identity and progressive values as Christians.

In her ethnographic work on the New Sanctuary Movement (NSM), Grace Yukich observes how faith communities negotiate their public identity through sanctuary. She describes the NSM as a multi-targeted social movement, aimed not only at immigration reform but also seeking to transform public perception of religion. Beyond their explicit political agenda, “It was also a group of mostly progressive

23. Interview with a sanctuary participant on August 21, 2018.

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